Mediality and Audiovisual Translation

Henry Jones

Introduction

The significance of the relationship between humans and technology is illustrated perhaps nowhere more strikingly than in the prelude to Stanley Kubrick's iconic film *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). Having discovered in a thrilling 'eureka' moment the radically transformative potential of using an animal bone as a weapon, both for hunting prey and for defending the social group from predators and competitors, the prehistoric ape-man on which the first twenty-five minutes of the drama have focused jubilantly tosses his newfound tool high into the air (Ambrose 2001: 1748). The camera tracks its ascent as it twists and turns before morphing, in a perfectly timed jump-cut, into a 21st-century spaceship gliding serenely in orbit above the Earth below. What Kubrick's scene seeks to show is that it is our use of technology that has made us who we are today, that has enabled us to become not simply the dominant species on the planet, but the only species to have left our home planet and to have set foot on another world.

Indeed, while the long-established myth holding our genus *homo* to be the only tool-makers and -users in the animal kingdom has now been dispelled, research in palaeoanthropology has made it increasingly clear that technology is inarguably more central to our evolutionary development than for any other creature on the planet (Ambrose 2001: 1748). As specialists in this field have demonstrated, the increase in brain capacity, population size and geographical range that has defined *homo sapiens* can be linked directly to a series of specific technological advances made by our prehistoric ancestors (*ibid*.). For example, the production and use of even the most basic tools such as hand-axes, clothing and containers have been shown to represent the single most important factor in having enabled humans to 'wrong foot' the biological principles of 'the survival of the fittest' — principles, that is, which would ordinarily lead to the extinction of a physically frail and vulnerable species such as our own (Taylor 2010). As Cronin (2013: 10) summarizes, technology is 'fundamental to a sense of what it is to be human', and the tools we use are not merely an 'extrinsic' outcome of our development but 'intrinsic' to our very existence, capable of shaping us just as much as we shape them.

Importantly, however, it is not just primitive, primordial technologies that can be said to hold a particular determining influence in the development of human society and culture. Rather, the significance of this relationship has been shown to extend across the ages to any of the tools humans employ for whatever purpose. Most notably for our purposes here, this includes the 'media tools' we use for the storage and transmission of thoughts and ideas (Littau 2011), from the most fundamental (e.g. spoken language) to the most advanced computer-based tools of the twenty-first

century, able to archive vast quantities of data and send it thousands of miles at the click of a mouse. In this chapter, our focus is on audiovisual translation as an act of communication which is necessarily mediated by such tools and consequently shaped by the particular characteristics (or 'mediality') that define each media form.

While ever since the pioneering work of Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan in the 1950s and 1960s discussion of media and mediality has featured prominently in research based in a number of disciplines from across the Humanities, within translation studies this issue has only very recently begun to attract any serious attention. Little mention is made for instance in James S. Holmes' (1972/2000: 178) famous 'map' of the discipline and, as Michael Cronin (2013: 25) notes, the notion of medium has traditionally been construed simply as 'a kind of classificatory aid, a way of expressing how contents are differently transmitted.' This poses problems for a chapter seeking to give a short overview of the 'state of the art' in this area of study because 'Mediality and Audiovisual Translation' does not refer to a distinct and well-established domain with a long history of research or a widely accepted set of methodologies, questions and objectives. Rather, it is the case that a small but growing number of translation scholars have come, over the last few years, to reflect on this issue from a range of different perspectives to serve a variety of aims and interests.

That is not to say that the question of media and mediality does not warrant extensive investigation from within this academic discipline. In fact, it can be argued that quite the opposite is true. As Karin Littau (2011: 261) has recently suggested, understanding the role that different media have played and continue to play in the history of translation in all its forms is now more important than ever before: amid the turbulent socio-cultural and political upheavals of the current so-called 'digital renaissance' (Jenkins 2001), it is of paramount importance for (audiovisual) translation studies to come to terms with the media environment in which translators are situated, and the ways in which the rapid transformations that are currently occurring in the world of technology are affecting translation practice.

This chapter aims therefore to help promote a greater awareness of mediality in audiovisual translation studies and to demonstrate its rich potential as a productive angle of enquiry with which to proceed within this field. It will start with a discussion of Marshall McLuhan's influential work on media as environments and the ways in which these shape our experience of the world. The explanatory power of his philosophy of technology will be illustrated with a pertinent example drawn from Karen Littau's more recent work on media-induced transformations in reading, writing and translation practices. The following section (The Pitfalls of Technological Determinism) will then deal with the criticisms that have been made with respect to this line of thought and the importance of placing (media) tool use in its social context will be emphasized. Finally, the second half of this chapter (Mediality and Audiovisual Translation) will demonstrate how these ideas can and have been applied specifically with regards to the study of audiovisual translation, tracing the changes in the technological environment over time as a means of shedding light on the gradual shift towards a 'democratization' of this activity.

The medium is the message

While scholars had naturally been aware of the fact that, throughout history, different civilizations in different parts of the world had made use of different media tools, until the 1950s and '60s it had largely been assumed (with a few notable exceptions — Friedrich Nietzsche and Ernst Kapp, for instance) that these communication technologies were essentially neutral instruments (Tremblay 2012: 571). Broadly speaking, hand-written papyrus scrolls, mass-printed books and live television were considered passive conduits for the transmission of information and/or inert containers for its storage. It was thought that they had little influence over social and cultural practice, and as a result that they were more or less interchangeable, 'suitable for all purposes and in all circumstances' (Tremblay 2012: 571). As Gaëtan Tremblay (2012: 563) notes for example, with the advent of the television in the 1950s, 'researchers had only been interested in specific effects of different types of messages (for the purposes of propaganda or advertising), and public debate about the media was obsessed with the morality of the programs that were broadcast'.

Particularly influential in questioning this assumption was Canadian theorist Marshall McLuhan. In a book entitled *Understanding Media* (McLuhan 1964: 19), he famously declared that the prevailing fixation with the content of media was the 'numb stance of a technological idiot.' Instead, he sought to prove that 'the medium is the message', that it is the media technology by which that content is stored and/or transmitted that has the most significant consequences for society and culture, and that truly deserves our attention (McLuhan 1964: 7). With respect to the television therefore, the relative morality of the programmes being broadcast, McLuhan (1964: 20) argued, paled into insignificance when compared with the broader implications of the arrival of this new technology into sitting-rooms the world over. As Cronin (2013: 22) summarizes, 'the ability to beam images from around the globe into people's private homes within hours and eventually within microseconds of the events actually happening was infinitely more important in its effect (the creation of imagined global communities of spectatorship) than what was actually shown in the images.' Like all new media forms, television was proving itself as a powerful agent of change, affecting all aspects of how we experience the world, interact with each other and use our physical senses (Gordon 2010: 107).

Drawing on the work of his compatriot and mentor Harold Innis (1950/1972), McLuhan's most important contribution then as a 'pioneer' of media and communication studies was to suggest that media technologies should instead be thought of in terms of the 'environments' they engender (Tremblay 2012: 562). As McLuhan explained, these environments are not 'passive wrappings' but 'active processes' that impose their own pervasive structure by means of their distinctive set of 'groundrules' (McLuhan and Fiore 1967/1996: 68). Understood in this sense, media technologies not only have the power to 'shape and control the scale and form of human association and action' (McLuhan 1964: 9). Because they each have their own 'intrinsic technological logic' (Winthrop-Young and Wutz 1999: xiv), their own unique array of possibilities and constraints, any change in the technological landscape of a civilization will also necessarily engender significant 'personal, political, economic,

aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical and social consequences' (McLuhan and Fiore 1967/1996: 26).

McLuhan provides several examples to support this argument, but his philosophy of technology is perhaps most convincingly illustrated in Karin Littau's (2006, 2011) more recent work on the history of reading and the ways in which advances in media technology have impacted upon the production, consumption and indeed translation of written texts. In considering the effect of the invention of wood-based paper pulp in the mid-nineteenth century in Western Europe on the 'translation ethos' of the time, for example, Littau (2006: 21; 2011) explains that, prior to this invention, books were generally printed on a kind of paper made from recycled linen or cotton rags. Although higher quality and more durable, this 'rag paper' and the books into which it was made remained relatively expensive. The development of a wood-fibre-based product in the 1860s provided a much more abundant raw material which meant that books — and secular literature in particular — could be mass-produced on an unprecedented scale and sold to the public at a fraction of the price. As a direct consequence, Littau (2006) asserts that reading practices underwent a 'revolutionary shift' in European society: before, when books were expensive and comparatively rare, most families might have owned only one volume (invariably the Bible); now, with the rapid expansion of the market, an ever broader readership was able to buy and consume literature, meaning more people could read not only for moral and religious instruction, but for pleasure and leisure too. Indeed, with the invention of pulp, the novel soon emerged 'as the period's most popular form of escape from the drudgeries of everyday life' (Littau 2006: 19). Most significant however is the fact that not only were Europeans now reading *more*, but that they were also reading *differently*. Because books were suddenly so much cheaper and more readily available, they came to be considered no longer 'as artefacts to be preserved', but as 'affordable products' to be consumed rapidly and then discarded (Littau 2006: 21). Therefore, readers increasingly read 'many a novel superficially, rather than re-reading the Word in depth' (Littau 2006: 20).

This change from what Littau (2006: 19), following Rolf Engelsing (1974), terms 'intensive' reading practices to 'extensive' ones caused major transformations in the way in which literature was translated. On the one hand, printing on pulp paper increased the demand for translation, with works that had proved popular abroad often being translated 'with great speed' to feed the insatiable appetite of the home culture (Littau 2011: 245). Furthermore, because these translations were aimed at a wider and no longer necessarily highly educated audience, they tended to favour fluency-creating strategies. Foreign culture-specific references, loyalty to the source-language word order or, in short, anything that might prevent the reader from being able to 'fly through three or four pages and never stumble once [...] [as if] on a smooth-planed board', would consequently tend to be excised from the translated text and replaced by immediately intelligible and readable language (Littau 2011: 275). Indeed, as Lawrence Venuti (1995) has argued at length, this 'domesticating' translation strategy has never since ceased to dominate, at least in the English-speaking world.

The pitfalls of technological determinism

When following this line of thought, it is important to be aware of a number of the criticisms that have been launched at such media-focused analysis. In a now famous attack on McLuhan's philosophy of technology as an agent of socio-cultural change, the cultural theorist Raymond Williams (1974/1990) argued that this 'technological determinism' represented in itself a dangerous misrepresentation of the relationship between human beings and their tools. If the medium is the message, if technological change is the determining factor or 'cause' of social change, Williams (1974/1990: 127) argued that 'all other causes, all that men ordinarily see as history, are at once reduced to effects.' Indeed, as Gaëtan Tremblay (2012: 565) notes, when McLuhan discusses for example the homogenization of human culture in the age of globalization and the development of (to use the McLuhan's much used phrase) the 'Global Village', social-economic factors such as the expansion of mass culture and of the capitalist system are made to seem of little relevance. Instead, for the Canadian theorist, this homogenization 'is basically the product of print culture made possible by the invention of the printing press' (Tremblay 2012: 565).

What is more, if the effect of the medium is the same 'whoever controls or uses it, and whatever apparent content he may try to insert', Williams (1974/1990: 128) writes, 'then we can forget ordinary political and cultural argument and let the technology run itself.' In other words, not only would McLuhan's technological determinism seem to limit the possibility of individual free will, but it would seem to excuse the uneven distribution of wealth and the gaping social inequalities that characterize the modern world, making them seem the inevitable product of a certain technological environment. As such, 'it is hardly surprising that this conclusion has been welcomed by the 'media-men' of the existing institutions' (Williams 1974/1990: 128).

In sum, it is important to recognize that 'in each stage, [...] a technology is always, in a full sense, social' (Williams 1981: 227). Media and their use are necessarily embedded in a network of complex and variable social relations (Williams 1981: 227). The tools we use cannot be 'abstracted' from society and their use must always be placed within its socio-cultural context. Or, as Mark Deuze (2006: 65; emphasis added) neatly puts it, we must examine technology starting from the assumption 'that humans and machines are *implicated in one another*, rather than one influencing or directing the other.' To return to the example given by Littau (2006, 2011), while there can be no doubt that the invention and proliferation of wood pulp-based paper and the consequent explosion of the book market was certainly instrumental to the dramatic change in reading habits and translation practices that occurred during the second half of the nineteenth century, it must also be recognized that the development and effects of this new technology went hand in hand with the social changes of the period (Littau 2006: 19). Indeed, it cannot be overlooked that this technological advance did not simply spring 'out of thin air', and that the need to produce cheaper, more widely accessible books came as a result of social demand. Specifically, we must note that the expansion of the capitalist system in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had given rise to a new and ever more dominant middle class. As Littau (2006: 19) describes, this rapidly growing section of society was experiencing a much clearer

demarcation between work and free time, higher levels of education (and of literacy) and labour was increasingly divided within the family between the roles of the male 'breadwinner' and his housewife. Many more members of European society (and women in particular) therefore had the time, ability and desire to read, and the economic potential of this burgeoning market created a powerful incentive for technological change.

Mediality and audiovisual translation

Having outlined the theoretical foundations on which this area of study is based, we can now turn to focus on how an understanding of mediality can inform research into audiovisual translation. To do so, this second half of the chapter will use a media-based perspective to explore and explain the gradual shift away from a once-dominant top-down industry-controlled mode of audiovisual translation practice towards today's more open and 'participatory' field (Pérez-González 2014: 233). It will argue that while technological change is by no means the sole factor influencing this development, we can only achieve a full understanding of the ongoing 'democratization' (Pérez-González 2014: 233) of the audiovisual translation marketplace by taking into consideration the changing affordances of the different technologies involved. This section seeks to trace the shifting contours of the technological landscape in which audio-visual translation activity has been situated, examining the specific constraints and possibilities opened up by each new environment, from film and television to the networked digital technologies of the twenty-first century.

Film

An oft-cited anecdote regarding the impact of early cinema on contemporary audiences concerns the Lumière brothers' (1895) short film *L'arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* ('The arrival of a train into La Ciotat station'). Faced with the on-screen approach of a large railway engine, the story goes that many members of the audience were filled with 'fear, terror, even panic' (Karasek 1994, cited in Loiperdinger 2004: 90) and leaped from their chairs, convinced that the train 'could plunge off the screen and onto them' (Loiperdinger 2004: 90). Although the exact details of this tale are almost certainly the result of journalistic rumour-mongering and exaggeration, its persistence as one of the 'founding myths' of the cinema demonstrates the extent to which this popular legend about the power of the medium is to a certain extent almost believable.

Indeed, there can be no doubt that, for contemporary spectators, film presented a vastly more immersive and 'realistic' experience than anything they had known before (McLuhan 1964: 314). As Marshall McLuhan (1964: 314) notes in his chapter on 'The Movies', this was because — even during the so-called 'silent era' of early cinema — film had the capacity to store and convey a far greater quantity and quality of information than any of its precursors. Compared with the printed page, painted magic lantern slides or even photography, here was a recording technology *par excellence,* a medium whose 'high-definition' moving images could take just an instant to present, for example, 'a scene of landscape with figures that would require several

pages of prose to describe' (McLuhan 1964: 314). It is easy to imagine that, on encountering this revolutionary new media form for the first time, viewers might have been so entranced with the bewitchingly lifelike pictures being projected onto the screen that they could lose themselves in its illusion, forget their 'conscious self', and react instinctually and 'bodily' to its content (Littau 2006: 50).

It is worth noting then that, as Charles Musser's (1991) insightful account of the early cinema makes clear, it was primarily this almost hallucinatory characteristic of film as an exhilarating new technology that initially accounted for its rapid rise in popularity and unprecedented success as a medium of mass entertainment. 'Audiences [...] were tremendously impressed by [the] animated photographs projected on the screen,' writes Musser (1991: 63-4), citing a critic of the time who, after watching Robert Paul's film *Rough Sea at Dover,* declared '[t]he thing was altogether so realistic and the reproduction so absolutely accurate, that it fairly astounded the beholder. It was the closest copy of nature any work of man has ever yet achieved.' It was the 'magical' nature of this new technology that the general public flocked in their thousands to experience, turning film production into a 'big business' industry and film products into often hugely profitable consumer commodities (Musser 1991:45). As the cinema rapidly expanded and became increasingly commercialized, and given the dominance of the industrial, 'mass-culture' logic of the capitalist societies from which film technology emerged, it was perhaps unsurprising that this media form came to be governed by a distinctly linear, 'top-down' model of production and distribution. We must, in other words, acknowledge that the socio-economic context in which the movie industry developed was a significant force in promoting the centralization of work processes within the production companies and the emergence of industry-controlled patterns of distribution and translation for film products.

Nevertheless, we can also argue that it is equally important to recognize the ways in which the particular characteristics of the cinema technology simultaneously favoured the development and initial entrenchment of this elite-controlled model. Indeed, we should note to begin with that, despite the widespread enthusiasm for this new media form amongst the general public, it was not just anyone that could engage in the production and distribution of motion pictures. This was, as Musser's (1991) book highlights, a highly technical mode of communication in which participation not only required a certain level of expert knowledge and training, but also a significant financial investment, given that many of the raw materials and pieces of specialist equipment were both in themselves far from cheap and aggressively protected by strict patent laws. In the United States, for instance, Thomas Edison employed a team of lawyers to ensure the virtual monopoly he enjoyed over the film-making technologies he had developed was upheld in the patent courts, and in doing so effectively put many of his primary competitors out of business (Musser 1991: 12). For many years, no-one in the US was able to create motion pictures without first paying Edison a hefty licence fee. This allowed the businessman-inventor to hold absolute power over much of the fledgling film industry and to maximize his individual profits by safeguarding the scarcity, and thus economic value, of the film products his studios were producing. Most ordinary citizens, by contrast, had little opportunity to intervene in and contribute to the course and content of the film-making process, instituting a rigidly

structured and highly defined 'break' between the film producers and their audiences (Thompson 1995: 29).

The nature of the media technology meant that every aspect of the reception of film products too was largely determined according to this 'top-down' model. This was principally because, for most members of society, movies could only be viewed in certain public spaces — in cinemas, theatres and other specially-adapted venues — and at specific pre-determined times set outside of their direct control: without the financial or technological capacity to access the filmic texts on their own terms, audiences could not for instance choose to watch a film that had been produced and distributed a few years previously or which was not being shown in cinemas in their own town, country or language. As Thompson (1995: 25) notes, they could of course still attempt to influence the market decisions of the movie industry — either by writing letters expressing their opinions and desires, or simply by 'voting with their feet' and demonstrating their likes and dislikes through their purchasing power — but the fact remains that this was nevertheless a 'fundamentally asymmetrical' relationship in which consumers were forced to assume a comparatively passive role.

The inaccessibility of motion picture texts and technologies to the average spectator, combined with the fact that celluloid film was costly and technically difficult to manipulate (Ivarsson 2004), also meant that translation practices were essentially the sole preserve of professional translators employed and directly controlled by the production and distribution companies (Kayahara 2005). This was true both for the so-called 'intertitle' slides that were inserted between scenes from around 1903 onwards in order to facilitate the viewer's comprehension of the ever more complex on-screen action (Nornes 2007: 95), and for the interlingual subtitles and dubbed voice-tracks which would later be used to translate the spoken dialogue of the 'talkies' (Pérez-González 2014: 43). In the media environment of film, therefore, the views and desires of the audience with respect to translation were subordinated to the commercial interests of the movie industry. Translations would generally only be commissioned for films and overseas markets that were deemed economically viable (Kayahara 2005), and translation strategies would often be adopted which either — in the case of intertitles — pared these down to a bare minimum, shortening the films and saving the producers money, or heavily 'domesticated' the source text so that it might be as immediately comprehensible and unobtrusive to the target spectator as possible (Nornes 2007: 100). The film-makers' concerns with producing easily accessible, broad appeal products which, by maintaining an 'efficient, purposeful and uninterrupted flow of narrative information' (Berliner 1999: 6), would require little 'filling in' or subjective interpretation in order to deliver their affective charge thus took precedence over providing the audience access to the cultural richness and depth of meaning present in the source film (Mowitt 2004: 398, Sinha 2004: 175).

Television

From a certain perspective, it could be argued that the arrival of television in the 1950s did little to change this state of affairs in terms of the producer-consumer relationship. After all, the production of audiovisual content was still very much controlled by the

media corporations, and distribution and translation too remained processes over which ordinary citizens could have very little influence. If we consider the impact of television from a more indirect point of view however, it becomes clear that the invention of this new media technology engendered a number of subtle changes to the media landscape, changes with regards to which it is important to be aware when considering more recent developments.

For a start, television brought the consumption of audiovisual media products into the domestic sphere of the home and family life. Whereas previously, as noted above, motion pictures could only be accessed in the public space of the cinema or theatre, people were now able to view such content in the privacy of their own living rooms. Initially, of course, this was a technology that only the wealthier sections of society could afford, but the costs involved were soon sufficiently lowered that watching television could gradually become part of the ordinary routines of most individuals and families across the developed world (Thompson 1995: 40). In this way — by allowing the images to be beamed directly into people's homes — not only did this new technology greatly expand the general public's exposure to and consumption of audiovisual material, with programmes (eventually, if not initially) being broadcast almost every hour of every day, but it also dramatically altered the way in which audiences engaged with the audiovisual text. Put simply, viewing a movie in the cinema was (and still is) an event: we *go to watch a film*, that is, we take time outside of our normal schedules, travel to a specific location, queue up, buy a ticket and give the product our whole and undivided attention, sitting in silence in a darkened room with the screen filling our field of vision, absorbing the images 'in psychological solitude like the silent book reader' (McLuhan 1964: 318). Television encourages an altogether different mode of viewing activity: integrated within the practical context of the domestic setting, it has much less to do with notions of spectacle and occasion, and becomes more associated with the basic activities of normal everyday life. Television meant therefore that audiovisual content could be watched in an increasingly flexible, consumer-determined manner. As Thompson (1995: 40) notes, it could even be viewed 'casually', i.e. accorded only our intermittent consideration, perhaps while we carry out other day-to-day actions, such as cooking, cleaning or socializing.

In sum, television 'set the stage' in many ways for the shift which would later become much more prominent, beginning with the emergence of home video technologies and continuing in the digital era, towards greater consumer control over the processes involved in audiovisual text production, distribution, consumption and indeed translation. It began to erode the position of absolute power that the film producers had once held in determining the reception of their products, giving audiences more choice in deciding how they engaged with this form of media content. What is more, by expanding the quantity of audiovisual texts on offer and greatly facilitating spectators' access to them, television also rendered the consumption of this audiovisual material a routine everyday activity, creating habitual viewing practices and paving the way for the astonishing ubiquity of audiovisual content that has come to characterize the modern age.

Home video technology

The defining feature of VHS (Video Home System) and VCR (Video Cassette Recording) technologies was that, for the first time in the history of audiovisual media, they provided the average consumer with the possibility of obtaining their own individual 'copy' of the film or television series (Hills and Sexton 2015: 2). This was an important step forward in that it endowed viewers with a much greater degree of freedom over what they watched and when: with the ability to purchase or rent an official VHS cassette version, or record media content directly from a live television broadcast via VCR, the general public were no longer subordinated to the 'temporal order' imposed by the broadcasting organizations, cinemas or distribution companies (Thompson 1995: 40). Rather, they could create personal archives of their favourite films and shows, and access such content whenever they wished as part of the ordinary routines of their lives (Hills and Sexton 2015: 2).

In this media context, as Matt Hills and Jamie Sexton (2015: 2) note, the notion of a 'national' or 'mass' audience quickly began to lose relevance as the audiovisual market place became more and more fragmented: with a far larger pool of audiovisual products suddenly on offer to the consumer at any one moment, the viewing public was no longer necessarily watching the same things at the same time. Individuals had much freer rein to explore the audiovisual landscape on their own terms, to view only content that interested them most. Moreover, they now had the capacity, if they wished, to 'pore' over it — watch and re-watch using the pause, fast-forward and rewind functions of their video player — to gain a much deeper knowledge or 'mastery' of the television series or film in question (Hills and Sexton 2015: 2). This 'fandom' was further fuelled by the fact that VHS technology also allowed producers to begin to include additional 'extras' — such as 'bloopers', deleted scenes, 'making of' documentaries or actor interviews — at the beginning or end of the main feature. By watching this paratextual content, interested consumers could thus learn more about the processes of production as well as gain a deeper understanding of the story world of the film product being presented. In this way, VHS technologies opened the way for the creation of smaller-scale, more proactive consumer groups and networks that Xiaochang Li (2009: 9, cited in Pérez-González 2014: 73) terms 'audienceships'. Importantly, these informal networks were brought together much less on the basis of such top-down categories as nationality or market demographic, but more on the basis of their own shared enthusiasm for or interest in a certain genre or type of audiovisual content (Hills and Sexton 2015: 2).

Through advances in VHS and VCR technology, and the development of such fan groups, consumers were also able to begin to establish alternative, more 'horizontal' patterns of distribution (Hills and Sexton 2015: 2). Unlike the highly linear model engendered within the environment of film and television, with the arrival of the videocassette, consumers were now able to obtain, copy and share content between themselves, circulating official or 'bootlegged' versions of television shows and films through dynamic, peer-to-peer structures which had much less to do with the rigid, top-down influence of the state and media industries. Indeed, Hill and Sexton (2015: 2-3) discuss the emergence of the so-called 'video nasty' phenomenon in 1970s Britain as

an example of such groups: as the film scholars explain, home video technologies gave rebellious, countercultural individuals the capacity to obtain, duplicate and circulate copies of these obscenely violent (hence 'nasty') horror films through informal cult cinema networks, despite their being officially banned by the government and media institutions of the time.

Within this technological environment, the language barrier did however remain a significant obstacle to the expansion and impact of such alternative distribution networks (Cubisson 2005: 48). After all, as with film, VHS and VCR technologies were still analogue media forms whose content was not easily manipulated or annotated (Thompson 1995). Thus, when it came to the circulation of foreign-language texts such as, for instance, Japanese *anime* cartoons, the vast majority of non-Japanese-speaking fans were still essentially dependent on the professional industry-controlled translations of the major distribution companies (Pérez-González 2007: 69). The 'top-down' logic of the media industry continued to govern many aspects of their consumer activity, limiting the number of shows available to feed their growing appetite, and allowing them access only to the highly domesticated 'mass-appeal' target-language versions that the profit-focused corporations released onto the market (Cubisson 2005: 51). Indeed, while a select few consumer groups, having become dissatisfied with commercial modes and strategies for translation, did manage to begin to engage in the subtitling of *anime* in the early 1980s, they were able to do so only by exploiting commercial computer-based editing software — i.e. technologies which were then both expensive and not yet readily accessible to most ordinary citizens (Ivarsson 2004, Newitz 1994). What is more, their operations remained relatively small in scale, given that distribution within the network still required the subtitling team to actively duplicate and send physical tapes via the postal system. As we will see in the next section, it was not until the late 1990s and early 2000s, when digital technologies became more widespread and affordable on the mass market, and the Internet developed into an accessible tool for ordinary citizens, that fan-led translation activity would truly be able to rival mainstream practices.

Digital technologies and the Web 2.0

To understand what it is about the nature of digital technologies that sets them apart from their analogue precursors and that can account for their transformative potential, it is useful to start by considering these new media tools as essentially 'translation technologies' (Cronin 2013: 105), able to 'translate' and transform any media object into the universal language of mathematics, into a 'standardised series of digital numbers' (Kittler 1996: 1). This most basic principle of 'numerical representation' has two major implications for our purposes here. First, it renders digital media content intensely 'spreadable' (Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013: 3). By translating a photograph, film or piece of music into a string of numbers, we convert it into a dematerialized form of abstract information. Unlike an analogue photograph, film or musical recording, this pure mathematical data is ultimately separable from its physical 'hardware' and, for this reason, can be both infinitely reproduced and more or less instantaneously transmitted between any number of nodes within a network (Schiwy, Fornazzari and Antebi 2011: 2). In this way, digital technologies have enabled

the development of the Internet, the 'network of networks' that now provides the possibility to anyone with a connection of exchanging digitized content with potentially billions of other users worldwide.

The second implication of numerical representation is that, again unlike analogue media objects, digitized materials are necessarily 'modular' or 'fractal' in their structure (Manovich 2001: 51). That is to say, because they are represented by numbers, computer-mediated productions can be approached as a collection of 'discrete samples' or 'bits' of quantified information which, even when assembled into larger-scale objects, 'maintain their separate identity' (Manovich 2001: 51). This modularity means that digital content is inherently 'variable' as each constituent part can be individually handled without affecting the integrity of the whole (Manovich 2001: 56). Thus, '[a] new media object is not something fixed once and for all', Manovich (2001: 56) writes, 'but can exist in different, potentially infinite, versions.' In comparison with 'old' media, digital content almost invites customization and manipulation, given that these processes are now neither difficult nor expensive. Indeed, many of the most time-consuming aspects involved can to a large extent be automated, realized at the click of a button by the algorithms programmed into the relatively cheap and easy-to-use personal computers and editing software that have flooded onto the consumer market from the late 1990s onwards (Manovich 2001: 49).

The advent of digital media has gone hand in hand with the so-called 'rise of the volunteer' (Pym 2011: 5), with the massive increase in the participation of non-professional, untrained individuals in the production and circulation of media products (Chouliaraki 2010: 227). Of course, as Mark Deuze (2006: 66) rightly insists, we must not lose sight of the fact that the growing desire among ordinary citizens to become more engaged in the meaning-making processes of modern society — as active agents rather than simply passive consumers — also has its roots in a more general sea-change in socio-political attitudes towards the established structures of the state, the media and democracy. But it is nevertheless the case that the technological developments of the last sixty years or so — beginning with television and VHS — have played a significant role in enabling and encouraging this shift, and that the arrival of these new digital tools has finally succeeded in all but removing many of the obstacles that once prevented the average viewer from producing or appropriating, manipulating and then circulating audio-visual material for themselves (Pérez-González 2014: 240). Indeed, in today's media environment, the previously steadfast distinction between producers and consumers has become increasingly blurred, as those who were once excluded from the processes of media production and distribution now have the means to become co-producers (or 'prosumers' as they are known) of content themselves and share this worldwide.

It is no coincidence then that translation too in this context has become 'no longer a special task left for special people' (Pym 2011: 5). In other words, thanks at least in part to these new technologies, it is no longer the sole preserve of paid, highly trained professionals, but an activity in which many individuals from a range of professional and socio-cultural backgrounds, armed with just a modicum of technical know-how, can and do engage (Pérez-González 2014: 233). Consequently, recent years have seen a

huge proliferation in highly motivated fan cultures and other 'communities of interest' (Pérez-González 2007) who, by organizing themselves into collaborative work structures, produce and circulate subtitles or even dubbed voice-tracks to a wide array of different audio-visual texts. These groups include, for instance, the modern-day 'descendants' of the VHS-era *anime* clubs who, by means of the Internet and transnational peer-to-peer ('p2p') file sharing platforms such as *BitTorrent*, are now able not only to access a far greater selection of original Japanese source texts, freed from the profitability constraints of the mainstream distribution channels, but also to allow their own translated versions to be downloaded and consumed by millions of fellow fans across the globe.

Finally, the arrival of digital technologies has coincided with an unprecedented wave of (often prosumer-led) innovation, with new modes of audiovisual translation emerging into the field which harness the unique affordances of today's media tools to develop more 'visually harmonious' and 'interactive' experiences for viewers (Pérez-González 2014). For instance, having become frustrated with the narrow limitations of the industry-approved 'ground rules' for translation, a number of subtitling teams have embraced the modularity and variability of digital content to experiment with the colour, size, direction, font and shape of their titles, sometimes even using animation effects or dynamic writing in an attempt to increase the affective impact on the viewer (Pérez-González 2007: 77; 2014: 204). Perhaps even more strikingly, as Laurie Cubisson (2005) and Melek Ortabasi (2006) have both discussed, translators are increasingly willing and able in this media environment to explore the possibility of inserting 'hyperlink capsules' or 'optional pop-ups' into their target texts, rather than presenting translated films in an exclusively linear fashion. By clicking on these links or pressing the 'enter' button on their remote control, viewers (or users, as we might better call them in this context) are able to pause the progression of the narrative to access additional, extra-diegetic information about the historical, cultural and social 'intertextualities' of the source film (Ortabasi 2006: 288). As Cubisson (2005: 51) argues, not only do these extra features thus give the viewer much more control over their interaction with the translation, allowing them to choose the level of depth with which they engage with the source culture, but they also allow subtitlers to better 'compensate for the cultural barriers between fans from one nation and a text from another.' In other words, whereas previously the industry-imposed restrictions on the number of characters permitted in a subtitle meant that many of the non-verbal semiotic cues present in the source text were left untranslated (with the translator having to concentrate primarily on condensing the source dialogue into the target language), these 'pop-ups' allow for the development of a 'thicker' form of translation which better takes into account the multimodal nature of the cinematic text (Ortabasi 2006: 287).

Summary

Due to the space constraints of this chapter, the account provided above has necessarily been a rather simplified outline of what is in fact an intensely complex and geographically variegated reality. For example, not only has it glossed over some of the more subtle, and at times contradictory, changes in the media environment, but it has

also focused exclusively on the history of audiovisual media production and translation in Europe and North America, and has thus done little to correct a significant bias towards the Western world that exists in the academic English-language literature on this subject. Nevertheless, it is hoped that by presenting some of the most influential and transformative technological shifts in this part of the world from across the ages, this chapter has demonstrated the extent to which a greater awareness and appreciation of mediality is able to provide invaluable insights with regards to the study of audiovisual translation practice. It has shown for instance how the media environment of film limited the extent to which ordinary citizens could participate in the meaning-making processes associated with the production of audiovisual texts (including translation), and set out the ways in which successive technological advances have gradually empowered individuals in an ongoing process of democratization. Consequently, it remains just to conclude that while the medium might not be the (only) message, it is certainly one that we cannot afford to ignore.

Further reading

Cronin, M. (2013) *Translation in the Digital Age*, London & New York: Routledge | *Cronin's insightful book explores the consequences of the proliferation of computer-based media for the world of translation. Of particular interest are the sections on the interaction between language and technology, on amateur translation and on the rise of 'indicative' or 'gist' translation in the network age.*

Deuze, M. (2006) 'Participation, Remediation, Bricolage: Considering Principal Components of Digital Culture', *The Information Society* 22: 63-75 | *Defining culture as the 'shared norms, values, practices and expectations of a group of people' (2006: 63), Deuze's paper investigates the principal components of the emerging 'digital culture' that has come to dominate the developed world. Arguing that these components have their roots in the offline world and to a large extent predate the invention of new media technologies, he emphasizes the need to situate the influence of technology in its socio-cultural context.*

Littau, K. (2011) 'First Steps towards a Media History of Translation', *Translation Studies* 4(3): 261-281. *Although this paper does not deal specifically with audiovisual translation, Littau provides fascinating insights into the ways in which changes in the media environment have shaped translation practice. Taking a historical approach, she examines the dominant 'translation ethos' at different stages in Western history, from the oral culture of the Ancient Greeks to the digital culture of the modern age, and demonstrates how an awareness of mediality is essential to any study of human society and culture.*

Manovich, L. (2001) *The Language of New Media*, Cambridge, MA & London, UK: MIT Press | *Manovich's much cited book has become a key text in the study of the new digital media age. In a clear and persuasive style, he explores the properties of computer-based technology and explains how these can account for the radical socio-cultural transformations of the modern day.*

McLuhan, M. (1964) *Understanding Media*, London & New York: Routledge | *Although widely criticized at the time of publication, this work is now recognized as representing the first true exploration of the effects of media change on society. While his 'mosaic' style can be off-putting to many readers, the book is filled with*

ground-breaking perceptions which have changed the way we think about technology forever.

Related topics

subtitling, dubbing, pragmatics, sociolinguistics and linguistic variation, narratology

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