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# Hypertext in Spain: Interview with Susana Pajares Tosca

By Roberto Simanowski


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## Abstract

Susana Pajares Tosca is the editor of the first spanish hyperfiction journal and is writing her doctoral thesis on "Hypertext and Literature" at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid. She has been a visiting scholar at Brown University and at Oxford University, where she did research on hypertext. She is Co-Chair of the HT 00 Conference Reading Section and a member of the Program Committee. Roberto Simanowski talked with her about the state of the art and research of hypertext in Spain, about the pedagogical potential of hypertext, about the "hype-excitement" regarding the freeing of readers by multilinear linkage, and about parameters to classify a digital work of art.

**dd:** Susana, you are the founder and editor of the Spanish online journal  "[Hipertulia](#)". Could you please tell us, what is the purpose of this journal and how has it been received by academic and non-academic audiences in Spain?

**ST:** Hipertulia is a forum where Spanish speaking people interested in hypertext and digital literature can read articles and hypertexts's reviews, and also find links to related publications in other languages. We encourage participation in all languages, provided that any contribution has a Spanish translation.

It is so far the only publication of its kind in Spanish, and the public has been very responsive, sending encouraging emails and visiting the site. This is largely due to the fact that "Hipertulia" is part of a literary journal called  "[Especulo](#)", which has won many prizes and is a landmark in digital journals in Spanish, and surely one of the most popular and prestigious. The many visitors (academic and non-academic) of "Especulo" drop by "Hipertulia" and are intrigued by its contents.

**dd:** How is this journal financed? Do you get money for ads, do you take money from your audience or do you get a little help from "Especulo" or other sponsors?

**ST:** We don't have financing of any kind. Joaquín María Aguirre, the founder and editor of *Especulo*, conceived of the whole project with an educational purpose in mind within the University framework. So we use the University server, accept no banners or advertising of any kind, and give our free time up to the cause... The authors of the articles and reviews don't get paid either, and all collaborate willingly in the free sharing of information. This of course reflects on the "amateur" quality of *Hipertulia*, if I had more time I would update it much more frequently and would put more work into it.

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**dd:** What is the state of art of Hypertext in Spain?

**ST:** Nearly nonexistent. I have had many difficulties to find hypertexts in Spanish (to review or talk about), as you can see on the site, where most part of the material refers to works in English. In fact, I haven't been able to inaugurate one of the sections, "Creación" (Creative work), as no reader has yet submitted a hypertext in Spanish...

**dd:** What is the reason for the lack of artistic approach to the net? Is the access to the net too expensive? Is there too much sun in Spain as one would like to spend one's time in front of a computer?

**ST:** Well, Spain is one of the EU countries where the access to the Internet is slower and more expensive, there are also less computers per capita than in the rest of Europe, and I don't even want to compare things here with the USA. Computers are also less integrated at all levels of education than in other countries. But it is to be hoped that things will change in the near future.

**dd:** Considered this lack of aesthetic experiments with digital media, how do the Universities of Spain reflect the development on the net? Is there governmental support for research and development of curricula in the field of hypertext, as Espen Aarseth has reported about Norway?

**ST:** Things are slowly taking off, but it's still mostly a matter of personal initiative, of some enthusiastic professor putting her course material up on the web... The Spanish University system is mostly public (although there are several private Universities), and the necessity for specific digital training has yet to be seen by the authorities. It doesn't help either that we don't have enough computers for all our students to have free regular access to electronic materials.

The curricula are fairly conservative, although there are some exceptions in small private Universities. The Complutense University, where I work, is the largest in the country, and Humanities Computing hasn't yet found a niche of its own in its structure. We don't have a specific department, but there are some subjects that include hypertext and digital publishing in their programs, like "Literary

communication technologies", a subject taught by my department that considers the development of literature from orality to the digital age.

**dd:** What about international and interdisciplinary cooperation of Spanish research on digital literature?

**ST:** Well, it's again a matter of individual initiative. I have made many friends and have started multiple fruitful collaborations with a number of foreign researchers working in different disciplines, but it is not particularly encouraged by the academic authorities. Travel funds and cooperation projects are scarce.

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**dd:** The title of your doctoral thesis is "Hypertext and Literature: James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*." What exactly is this work about? What were the initial results of your research?

**ST:** The thesis examines current hypertextual theory and practise, to find out if (and how) it can be used to develop educational material beyond hypertext's mere storage capacity. Joyce's work is the chosen example or workfield for my ideas. It has yet to be concluded, but I can already say that the examined material shows that hypertext is not being exploited to its full potential in Humanities Computing.

**dd:** The pedagogical potential of hypertext is considered more and more in discussions about digital media. For example, there are attempts to use it within a constructive pedagogy. Could you talk a little more, please, about how you employ the classical printed Joyce text in an educational setting?

**ST:** When planning out this thesis I always tried to think of the added value that hypertext could bring to the study of the classical printed texts. There are so many good editions with brilliant annotation, and so many contextual guides to find your way around Joyce's work (biographical, mythological, Dublin-plans...) that I didn't want to repeat the same sort of thing. I thought that using the text in another way, for example, building a hypertext with certain themes or important "paths" through the printed text, would show the students something new. This is mainly based on my belief that it is the experience of traversing the hypertext what makes it different from print texts, the perception of processes is something print literature can't give.

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**dd:** Linkage in hypertext was, at least in the early days, supposed to free up readers' association. Now, more and more people are adopting pre-cooked links in hypertext in order to limit readers' associations, because they stress certain points of association or intertextuality. Doesn't this privilege the *author's* associations, imposing them upon the reader?

**ST:** There has been a lot of theoretical disorientation and too much hype-excitement in our field. When hypertext appeared, some literary critics treated it as the embodiment of certain theories that had "destroyed" the classical humanities in the seventies and eighties, like deconstruction. But this has shown itself to be a one way street with no real practical applications. If you take the actual hypertexts, the author hasn't disappeared at all, it is in fact more present than ever, because she has to predict all the ways the reader can follow, controlling many reading paths at once. The reader can choose from a (forcefully limited) number of options prepared by the author, but this is not the same as freedom, and certainly not the same as reader's association as classical reception theory defines it.

**dd:** You are a Co-Chair of the HT00 Reading Section, where Hyperfiction-Writers perform their works in front of the conference audience. What kind of works do you expect? What kind would you like to have?

**ST:** We (Diane Greco and I) have received many submissions from authors interested in presenting their work at the conference. There are all kinds of works: fiction, poetry, and even non-fiction. We are looking for something new, something that is representative of current artistic trends that hasn't been already published or is terribly well known. We want to bring new and original voices to the attention of our public, who will surely be very demanding.

**dd:** What does it mean to be new and representative of current artistic trends? More interactive, more hypertextual, more collaborative, more intermedial?

**ST:** Oh, it's probably just a rhetoric way of saying we'll do what we like! No, seriously, we don't want to show the same thing that everyone knows about already, not another "Afternoon" or "Victory Garden" (much as I love this two works). We want to show what new things can be done with this tool we talk so much about in the conferences. Any of the options you suggest would be welcome...

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**dd:** If one looks at the broad field of digital literature, one has to distinguish between several ways of employing the medium to create something more than just digitalised text. I myself see at least four different types: MUDs, hypertext, collaborative writings, hypermedia. These, of course, are ideal types, hybrids can also be found. How do you distinguish what happens in terms of literature on the net? Where do you see the strenghts and the weakness of digital literature? Which type, if indeed there is one, do you expect to be the future of digital literature?

**ST:** I suppose I also think in categories when working with digital literature. First of all I don't consider literature that has been written to be printed but also has an electronic version (like a digital edition of a classic). Then there are different parameters to classify a digital work of art (and degrees within them): one/some/many author(s), open/closed reader's interaction, one/some languages

(text, image...), etc. I rather like Espen Aarseth's classification as he explains it in Cybertext. I think the future will go towards the blurring of boundaries, and we will see new types and genres (all hybrids) that we cannot imagine today. I would personally like to see an increase of the audience's participation in the artistic process, with much more people having the opportunity to author something than in the traditional media.

**dd:** Thank you very much for the interview and good luck with your work, with the HT00 Reading Section and most of all with your online journal.