



**XIème FORUM DES MINISTRES DE LA CULTURE
ET DES HAUTS FONCTIONNAIRES
CHARGES DE POLITIQUE CULTURELLE
DE L'AMERIQUE LATINE ET DE LA CARAIBE**

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Impact of the New Technologies on Information and Communications on Culture (NTIC).

EXPOSE OF THE FONDATION MABOUYA

- 1) Meeting between different cultures can be disastrous if they had not been carefully prepared, even mortal. We, the people attending this forum, are the products of such meetings. In fact, long ago, way back in 1492, on the occasion of the beginning of what is called today globalization, the Taïno, Maya, Aztec civilizations experienced what can be called a series of unprepared critical meetings which led to end some of them. During half of the next millenium a hybrid cultural milieu came to light progressively and founded its identify on this forced marriage. All this is part of the past. To look back at this point is important from many points of view, but sterile if not compared with what we are now confronted with and which shapes our world and above all this world that we will bequeath to our children and grand-children.
- 2) To serutinize the horizon, to navigate and more often to decide in cases of uncertainty, we need to have landmarks and road signs, tools which will allow us to position ourselves in this universe full of complexity which is our cultural Caribbean - Latino American milieu. We need in fact to understand the path that have led us where we are so as to be able to guide our future itineraries.
- 3) To do that, I would like to rely on the following quote from Edgar Morin extracted from the book entitled "*La methode, volume 1* "The nature of Nature": "The complexity imposes itself like the impossibility to simplify, it emerges where the complex unity produces its emergencies, where are lost distinctions, clarity, where disorders and uncertainties disrupt phenomenons.... The main

core of complexity lays in the association of what was considered as antagonisms at the heart of the organized phenomenon.

- 4) Because of the historical background of its constitution our cultural milieu is issued from a paradigm of complexity. As such, let us try to pinpoint some of the antagonisms/(contradictions) which characterized it. They are: an individual opposed to society, unity versus diversity, dependency versus autonomy, openness versus exclusion, invariability versus change, modernism versus archaic systems.
- 5) An individual and a society are two poles around which are constituted the historical and cultural environment of our region. The history of the emergence of modern Caribbean and Latin American states is that of an itinerary leading to the negation of individuals (Indians or Blacks at the beginning, then, city peasants and poor people) as human beings towards the constitution - often by the means of violence of societies pretending to be free, just in time to fall again under the domination of dictators or "Caudillos" wearing or not wearing uniforms, who were too quickly replacing the father / boss/colonist settler.

It is only very recently that there existed the will to constitute transnational entities capable to counterbalance the other organized blocks and territories of other regions.

- 6) Unity and diversity constitute another one of the bipolar elements for organizing this region located at the crossroads of rivalries / competitions from external or internal powers. This is the characteristic feature of this universe of ethnic and cultural interbreeding which creates likeness between an inhabitant of Santa Lucia and an inhabitant of Haiti, between a clear complexion mixed-blood of Martinique with a mulatto of Rio de Janeiro. It is in this milieu environment that exist scores of expressions in each of the spoken languages to say that one is not all black, nor one hundred percent white nor yet of Indian descent. It is also two poles elements, factors of organization, of what it has been agreed upon to call "construction of free exchange zones, for goods and one day perhaps for persons. Construction which rests on an inheritance. That is viewed as being common and would have as an objective to constitute a mold cast in which the inhabitants would be shaped, inhabitants from a mosaic of States which constitute the region. Each one must its find path between these two insurmountable poles.

- 7) Dependency and autonomy constitute perhaps the real foundation poles of these cultures of our region which were eager at the outset and up to this today be at the same time oneself and the foreign occupant, Haitian and French, Latino-American and Spanish or even English, Caribbean and British. These desires to be foreign reveals the relations toward the trade movements paced by the coming and going of ships carrying away a lot of sweat and returning with lots of goods, a lot of bananas or coffee for a few motor vehicles. Our criteria of appreciation have been also shaped between these two poles. It was necessary that other people should recognize our paintings, our "*vêve*" drawings, to make us stop destroying them and accept to display them in our homes or in our offices.
- 8) I will not give a detailed description of the other two-poles elements that contribute to form the structure of the culture of our geographic region but I bet you to keep them in mind for they will serve us as the points of reference to measure impacts of the new information and communication technologies (NTIC) on our cultures. In fact, we must try to follow at the various levels of culture (material, social, ideological, artistic) the NTIC impacts.
- 9) The revolutions in the field of communications have been in the history of humanity at the center of upheavals, of important mutations. It is admitted that the invention of printing by Guttenberg has been a determining factor in the European Enlightenment movement and allowed a greater dissemination of knowledge which up to now had to rely on people copying by hand. In more recent times, inventions such as the telephone, the radio, or still television, have also been the accelerating factors in the fields of economics, culture and education to cite only a few of them.
- 10) Today, thanks to the progress made in Computer science (and microchips), to the increase of the power of the electronic chips, to the extension of the telephone networks, an unprecedented movement of convergence of these various means and the apparition of new supports shape the new horizons which are the multimedia, the teleconference, the electronic mail. Although the old means of communication will continue for yet many decades to exist and to be used, the NTIC, because of their potentialities of dissemination of knowledge at very low cost, will at the same time constitute a new state for the political authorities and offer an unprecedented opportunity for cultural expression and dissemination of culture.

11) What are the main transformations that we should envisage in our region? We can cite them according to four levels and the different bipolarities that we mentioned earlier. First of all, at the physical level, the technicals apparels, indispensable tools for these new technologies (cellular telephones, microchips, computers, CD-ROM, DVD.....) should be because of the continued lowering of costs and recycling possibilities of used materials be made available to the greatest number of homes, following on this occasion what occurred for the transistor radio and television. However, taking into account the production sites of these physical objects, the dependency side of the two-poles term dependency / autonomy should continue to dominate the relation. It exists, however, buckles leading to important reversals that we will see later on; the main obstacle putting a brake on dissemination is to be found in the double blindness of the government authorities and the established monopolies maintaining artificially the price of manufactured goods by the means of a continued sophistication of the products (the so called built in obsolescence) as can be observed on the market of cameras and videos.

The second level at which one can detect an impact made by these new instrumental means is the social level. The new possibilities of communication and of circulation of information annihilate distances and create new social milieus among which some are entirely virtual: institutions such as university, school, work site adopt new shapes and profiles which have no longer anything to do with the physical sites of people who monitor them. Offices, schools have the possibility to be virtual while allowing for the necessary interactions between people.

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13) If I can have, in a reliable and unlimited manner, access to Internet at Yaoundé, I prefer to work in my own country even for a salary three times lower than that of European researchers », recently stated a researcher from Cameroon who just presented his thesis in France. This point of view outlines one of the Internet's challenges for the South: it is question here of a real

possibility to limit the brain drain. Internet can radically transform working conditions of the researchers. For the first time, in the poorer countries, the technologically least developed countries, it would be possible to have access to all the wealth of the information research centers and the most advanced universities of the North. Internet has intrinsically the possibility for the South to have access to the sources of information under the same conditions than the North.

14)Multimedias are for the cultural world a very important transformation tool which does not only relate to media professionals, and government public services, but also to creators and users ; bibliotheconomists, but also to readers and writers ; the museums, but also the artists. This movement is illustrated in a thousand of ways : on line edit; utilization of the network by cultural enterprises and establishments, by the internauts who want to express themselves and create; training of the public in these technologies of information which are cultural technologies, and finally development of the subject matters. It allows to communicate, to acquire knowledge, to express oneself and to create. By introducing interactive multimedia technologies, the libraries, public places by their very initial advocacy, become new spaces for the acquisition of technical, cultural or scientific knowledge, but also privileged sites for development promotion of the CD Rom's titles and production of then-own titles.

15) Prodigious elimination of distance and neutralization of the physical distance. This expose was finalized in Washington, reviewed in Paris and forwarded to Port-au-Prince to my partners for the final lay-out and the preparation of the support materials. The example of the Garifuna society of Central America and the Caribbean offers an example of transformation of the social milieu which is taking place under our eyes, for all those who make the effort to navigate on the Web. In fact, a Garifuna nation is being born in a dynamic fashion. At the ideological level, the almost instantaneous access to information allows not to escape from censorship and interdictions. As soon as the TIEN-AN-MEN events occurred fax services played a primary role in breaking the circles of silence which served as shelters to so many repressive authorities. Nearer to us, the Star report was made available throughout the world in a few seconds. Was not Internet born from the needs of communication of the scientific community working in the midst of universities scattered throughout various spots on the Earth planet. It is at that level that buckles of all the bipolar term are reversed as mentionned earlier. In fact, if the physical level strengthens the dependency aspects, at the ideological level, the

autonomy pole finds itself potentially reinforced for, we find ourselves both at the production stage about our own knowledge and about scientific knowledge abroad. In the education fields, for example the teacher is not the only source of information. In what relates to intellectual production, a Cuban brain, from as a brain Martinique has the same potential of competency than the Swedish or Japanese brain. Production of soft works is one of the fields into which are in a position of equality and in competition with Indians, Pakistanese, Californians. One could also describe the reversals in the buckles of other bipolar concepts.

- 16) The artistic level constitutes perhaps the field in which we would have had the greatest comparative advantage and for which we could benefit the most from the impact of NTIC in the field of culture. In fact, modern technologies and future technologies will allow us to guarantee an individual and collective presence at all levels: regional, national and local on individualized formats (CD ROM) or mass access (Sites Web, TV). From now on artists (painters, musicians) from various countries have their own Web Site on which one can see or hear their production. Recently was conducted an experience of dance show from WEB B. Dancers from many towns were filmed simultaneously and the viewer could reconstitute on his screen a unique sequence by associating the images originating from the places that he had chosen.
- 17) These utilizations described above belong to the field of the individual and individual consumption. Other more important trails for the States or the organized groups exist also. It is the case for virtual museums as well at the level of one municipality than at the level of one country. Avoiding the extremely high price of construction and physical maintenance, it would be possible to, in reasonable time spans build museums of art and of popular traditional artifacts from the Caribbean, for example, by numerization of images in three dimensions, it is possible to have things to be displayed and shown to all our countries, and to others the cultural richness that we have accumulated during the past centuries and here. I launch the idea to implement through a partnership with various groups working on the NTIC, such a museum.
- 18) This idea of museum will allow us to raise a connex problem, that is that of the laws on intellectual right and the right of ownership of images. As we are talking, a vast production market continues to grow and the sale of images. To ensure the presentation, that we have seen at the beginning, we have bought images. Our countries have the capacity to participate to this market otherwise, we will find ourselves buying once again our own images. Our countries have

the capacity to participate to this market. Otherwise, we will find ourselves buying once again our own images.

19) Thus, the NTIC can serve to develop and disseminate universal knowledge, they promote also multicultural expression. This is the mean to collect the cultural memory of our regions and to return to our countries the knowledge which is of interest and concern to them. The new technologies can contribute to this by offering great capacities of dissemination of knowledge for a minimal investment. They offer us the possibility to encourage creation of indigenous products which are our own while making local know-how and culture one of the basic incentives of our development. They allow us, finally, and above all, to develop an egalitarian exchange and sharing relation with the world, instead of remaining mere onlookers in a global village where we would be confined in a role of passive receiving agent.

20) As all the facts of society, the new technologies on information and communication force us to ask the question: "What to do? ". As for all the facts of society, three attitudes are possible:

- 1) like the ostrich burry our head in the sand while saying that we will end up by seeing what is going to happen
 - 2) act as the fireman once the fire has broken out or
 - 3) formulate intelligent policies taking into account our environment complexity.
- We might as much say right away that the two first attitudes are irresponsible ones.

I would not like to and without recalling some proposals that will allow the countries of our region to be actively present in these spaces that are being defined.

Proposal 1: To create, as much at the national level as at the supranational level, new coalitions of agents capable of intervening at various levels mentioned above. These coalitions must rely on concrete projects such as, for example, the virtual museum of arts and folk traditions of the Caribbean described above.

Proposal 2: To bet firmly and resolutely on our main assets; our youth and our cultural dynamism. This presupposes the implementation of training facilities and production accessible to young people. These facilities will comprise schools, but also other facilities such as youth centers and/or some technological development centers.

Proposal 3: To liberate productive forces thanks to intelligent and flexible regulations means and increase financing facilities.

Proposal 4: Accept that the field of culture is a field of exception which cannot follow the same marketing procedures followed for other physical goods. And organize the defense of such a position in international meetings.