

# Culture

**Culture will be the key element for  
all future revolutions of thought and knowledge**

The culture of a society is the reflection of the peoples' will, which is built into its territory, stemming from its history, and based on a time and space.

Culture is the invisible thread which ties together the human beings who live in a society. Examples include the interrelationships between territory, language and the cultures in China, in Germany or in Italy.

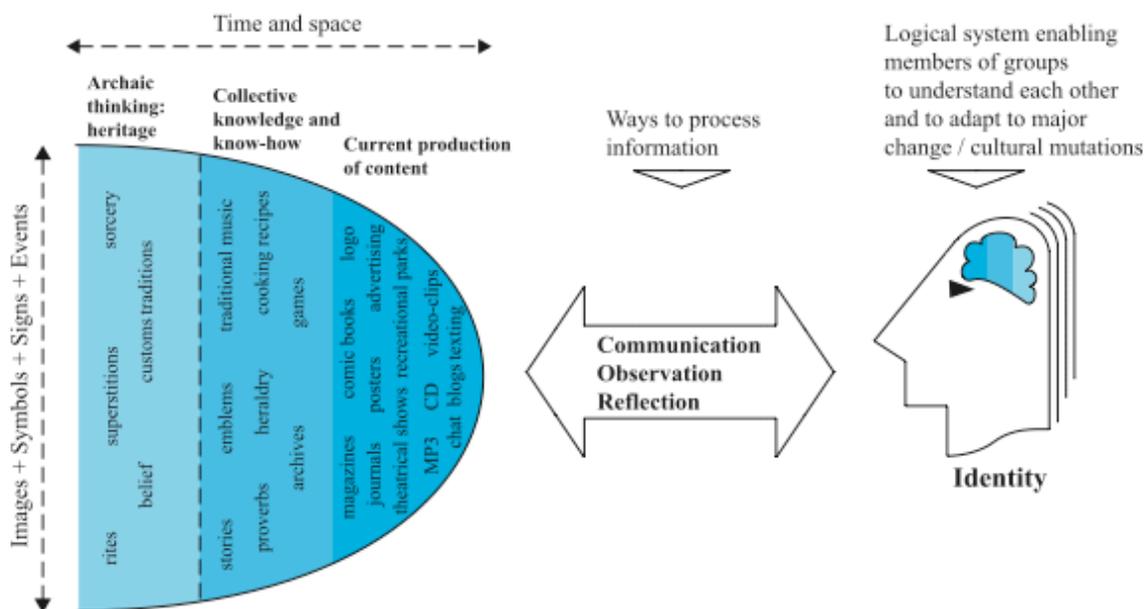
When the dimensions and experience of time and space change, the culture begins to undergo a process of modification :

- *time* : currently the Internet seems to be creating an instantaneous culture, built from interconnected immediacy of peoples' thoughts, ideas and expression;
- *space* : cyberspace gives the illusion of an ethereal world which is layered over the borders of the countries we inhabit.

If our space and time seems so unravelled at present, it's probably because we haven't yet understood or tamed them sufficiently.

In addition, if we review the document *Are You Ready For The 21<sup>st</sup> Century ?*, we can see that certain technological and economic activities create new concepts which in turn begin to have impact on a society's culture : *customization, niche, narrowcasting, interest group, social network, bottom-up, peer-to-peer, web 2.0, blogs, Google Maps*, etc.

Those people whose work enriches the culture of a society (*creators, artists, writers, media designers, facilitators, change agents, professors, singers, journalists, filmmakers, poets*, etc.) are **consciousness workers**. For a country, its culture is its « soul »; it's the manner in which it cultivates intelligence and competence.



### ***Postindustrial 12 : The mechanisms of culture*** *(Read this schema from left to right)*

*Because it's a living system, a society is constantly undergoing mutation. To adapt to numerous changes, a society uses its language and its culture to process the information which gives it its feel, its milieu.*

*Culture is the engine of social coherence. It resides in the collective memory of groups and reveals its identity (see above, at right). It allows us to understand our reality, and therefore modify it. For a society, its culture becomes the image that the society creates for itself. This combination of knowledge and know-how (at left, above) becomes the heritage by which the actors both understand themselves and become empowered. And because culture is built upon a system of values which belong to that society, there is by logical definition no one society which is superior to others.*

*Culture is developed by the accumulation and knitting together of a large number of signals, images and symbols (on the left, above) which serve to give sense to the information emerging from the chaos of all the human interaction in the areas of politics, economics, environmentalism, etc.*

*The culture shared between the members of a group is the key to its ongoing development. It is that sharing which enables the changes in behaviour necessary to adapt to major mutations ([postindustrial 8](#)). Ever since the emergence of the current series of parallel crises we are now witnessing, we have begun to hear, here and there: « we must change the culture of our institutions ». Soon, we will hear added to that call « .. and the culture of citizens and consumers ».*

## **The Modifications Yet to Come ?**

*Here are several questions about how things may yet evolve*

### **• The components of time and space**

Space is comprised of the rivers, mountains and forests which leave a profound imprint on our clothes, what we eat, how we spend our leisure time, etc ... in short, how we live.

*But what will happen in cyberspace ?*

With respect to the concept of time, it manifests itself through the use of archaic symbols (the signs of the Zodiac, for example), codes created by previous generations (road maps for how to move around, etc.) and also through more recent mediated shared content (the endlessly circulating remixed and mashed-up content on the Web, etc.) (see the left side of the schema)

*What will happen when the compression of time creates an over-abundance of information without any real link-supplied context ?*

Reading signs, signals and symbols is happening more and more on screens of all sorts (*laptop, smart phone, electronic kiosks, screens in public places, etc.*), to the point where various authors are now speaking about a dematerialization of culture.

*What will happen when human beings live in time and space that is fractured by digital technologies ?*

### **• Cultural learning**

The three principal theatres in which culture is learned and shared are :

- the education system (for all) ;
- the television (mostly for older people) ;
- the Internet (for younger generations).

*What will happen in a society when more than two-thirds of citizens are on line using the Internet and one-third participate in the creation and sharing of content, as in the USA (in the USA, one major response was the recent shift from Bush to Obama).*

- **The official culture**

In all societies, we recognize an « official culture » which is produced by « artists », typically from the domain of Arts and Letters. This culture is based upon recognition by a large number of spectators, readers or listeners ; the creators are thus officially compensated by medals, prizes or grants.

*What will happen when the economic imperatives of media consortiums lead them to impose their « artists » on a society ?*

- **The industrialization of culture**

The marketers of the new economy are trying to convert virtually all cultural objects into merchandise in the name of that economic imperative of planning (of future profits), translated into a dictatorship of clicks. The marketers want to impose their culture on the entire planet in the name of this economic ideology.

By using the Internet to industrialize this culture, it becomes a means of both economic and political control. Pushed by the new economy and new technologies of communication, in an important sense American culture is becoming imitated everywhere.

*Today, to what degree are various non-American cultures threatened by acculturation towards homogeneity with American culture ?*

*How many times will the USA resist the concept of cultural diversity advanced by UNESCO ?*

- **The globalization of culture**

Because of an average three hours of television-watching per day, the multiplication of international travel, and access to luxury products from anywhere and everywhere, we're seeing amongst the affluent classes the emergence of an unitary homogenous culture. This widely-shared and homogenous culture is becoming, for this middle class, its common point of reference.

*What will happen when 500 million affluent citizens, particularly in emerging countries, imagine that this easy, rich lifestyle, held up for admiration by a foreign television, is the only lifestyle that suits them ?*

### • **The interweaving of culture**

Because of globalization, the older distribution networks (television, cinema, radio, etc.) and the digital networks (the Web, etc.) are exercising more and more pressure on all the world's cultures. The world's societies are involved in a process whereby the growing influence of globalization is bringing them to a point where they are all confronted with an interweaving imposed by globalization (more accurately, by the large media conglomerates).

*Can « local cultures » have a future in the context of this current globalization ?*

*What will happen when this logic takes the form of a standardization which many people on other continents consider to be americanization ?*

### • **Digital culture**

We know and understand the influence television has had on writing (*novels, magazines, etc.*), on the creation of images (*cinema, advertising, etc.*) and sound (*music, theatre performances, etc.*). What will be the impact of Internet 2 ten years from now ? At the beginning of the last century the media of images (*cinema, photography and television*) had borrowed their style from print media, which had existed for four hundred years; today, we can think that the current styles will lead to new ways of creative expression occasioned by current and future media capabilities.

*What will be the new styles of writing for media that young internavts will impose, taking into account that they will be a demographic majority in just a few years ?*

*What will be a society's cultural coherence when 60% of the elders inform themselves primarily through newspapers and 60% or more of young people do so via the Web ?*

*Is it normal that an idea or an event does not exist unless it appears on a television or computer screen ?*

### • **The challenges to participation**

With Internet 2, we are being shaken out of complacency by the transition from the predominance of email-based

communications towards a larger and wider participation of average folk in the creation of consumable content.

*Where have the terms social networking and social computing come from ... which in turn reveal the emergence of trust networks that are based on a mutual and reciprocal level of trust between participants ?*

*How can we better understand the key role cultural context plays as it becomes the cement that holds together the behaviours of participation in a given milieu ?*

*How can the political elite continue to control its image when it will be more and more confronted by the bloggers and citizen journalists active on the Web ?*

### • **Social networks and their sub-cultures**

A on-line social network is not a space, like a mall, where anyone can post their CV, details of their activities or photos, in order to augment their personal list of friends (this is known as *ego-casting*). It's also not a space where passively we can watch a multitude of video clips, as in a juke box, at the same time as millions of other spectators (this is known as *pointcasting*).

In order to function effectively, a social network needs several key elements: common interest, a desire or the need to exchange ideas, one or more leaders, etc. (this is known as *narrowcasting*). This presumes participation and exchanges between those who are interested in developing common content.

Exemples of tools of *participating culture* of the *homo zappiens* :

- communication : SMS, MSN, chat, téléphonie mobile ;
- writing : MySpace, MyLanguage ;
- auto-editing : Lulu;
- sharing images : flickr ;
- multi tasking : zapping ;
- non-linear approach : Comcept Mapping ;
- virtuel reality : Virtual Identities, Avatar, ;
- exchanges : Blogger, WorldPress, FaceBook, Twitter, Delicious...

At the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, citizens are developing culture in layers which is composed in large part of a principal cultural identity to which is added various regional or specialized sub-cultures (civic or social support groups, clubs, associations,

cooperatives, etc.). By becoming the meeting place for several sub-cultures, the citizen becomes more and more multi-cultural, the various cultures furnishing the citizen with the material she or he borrows to construct a personality. It's the demultiplication of these sub-cultures, through narrow-casting and customization, which explains the recent appearance of so many variants of social networks.

*What happens when the citizen lives with multiple allegiances in different time-and-space configurations ?*

*And how many sub-cultures can someone use at one time ?*

*If different identities can come into conflict, how will this situation be managed ?*