

## What is the Future for Smaller Societies at a Time of Globalization?

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Every society on the planet is facing a tremendous challenge in dealing with the future of culture. Pessimistic and optimistic views conflict with one another as researchers try to see what type of culture will emerge in the twenty-first century. Are we living in a new technological and economic context which will favour more than ever the expression of cultural diversity and difference? Or are we caught in a process of cultural homogenization generated by transnational cultural industries, which marginalize the diverse local or national cultures born out of a different tradition, history and geography? This question is not new; one can trace its beginnings to the philosophical debates of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, where the opposing forces were those preaching on the one hand for a universalist conception of culture derived from the Enlightenment and embraced by the French Revolution, and on the other for a territorialized conception of culture, promoted by German philosophers such as Herder, and taken over by the romantic movement, as a reaction against the disembodied universalism of the Enlightenment.

This opposition between universalist and particularist culture had essentially been a debate of ideas, even if it did have an impact on the asserting of nationalities in the nineteenth century. The Second Industrial Revolution, which was born at the end of the nineteenth century and which opened the door to mass

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production, using electricity as a new source of energy in place of steam, has had a major impact on the production and distribution of culture, making possible the cultural industries of the twentieth century, including mass culture. Cinema, recorded sound and radio were part of the avant-garde of a new culture with the ability to cross national borders and become internationalized. Fears of the Americanization of culture began to appear in various countries, from the 1930s on; they indicate the emergence of a new reality.

If the relationship between universality and the specificities of culture is not a new discourse, how does one explain the fact that this debate has become so widespread since the 1990s? What does the notion of cultural diversity, which is being widely debated here and elsewhere on the planet, mean? These questions raise others; it is important to begin a process of surveying a complex field that is full of contradictions. One has to be accurate if one intends to clarify things when talking about culture and its handing down in the context of the globalization of culture.

## 1. ABOUT THE CONCEPT OF CULTURE: SOME CLARIFICATIONS

Everyone knows that the term culture can be used to designate different aspects of reality, even if those aspects are intermingled. Since the end of the nineteenth century, anthropologists, following Tylor (1871), have led us to see culture as a set of ways of thinking, feeling and behaving, which make it possible for individuals and collectivities to define their relationship to the world. This perspective, which implies that there are a multitude of cultures, is marked with continuity and is closely linked to tradition or history. These traditional cultures can be described by the way people live. Modern societies have marginalized the place of tradition in favour of multiple interpretations of events, whose meaning is no longer derived from religious or cosmologic visions. According to Fernand Dumont (1994), our societies will henceforth interpret the world, its history and its future in the light of actual uncertainties. It is easy to understand, then, that culture, seen through an ambiguous relationship to the world, sets the problem of the identity of individuals, of communities and of societies, as being about one's relationship to others. In a world of deep changes, culture deals more than ever with the question of the meaning of existence. This inclusive definition of culture, which integrates the notion of identity, goes further than the notion of *ways of living* adopted by some sociologists and anthropologists in their study of contemporary material culture. That

inclusive definition was used to define culture in *The White Paper on Cultural Development*, released by the Québec government in 1978.

Another definition of culture refers to arts and letters. This was the definition used by the Massey-Lévesque Commission in its 1951 Report (Canada, 1951). For a long time literary and artistic practices were considered the domain of cultured elites or the bourgeoisie. But since the 1960s, cultural policies put forward by several states, including France, Canada and Québec, have favoured a democratic approach to culture, supported by vast programmes of infrastructure development such as museums, libraries and interpretive and cultural centres. Other factors of an economic or social nature have also favoured access to culture, such as the advent of mass consumption, the rise in years of schooling, and the professionalization of cultural trades. Along with the multiplication of the number of creators in arts and literature during the second half of the twentieth century, several surveys have demonstrated that the constellation of cultural consumption was widening (Donnat, 1994; Baillargeon, Ed., 1986; Québec, 1997). This concomitant evolution of creators and public, fostered by the cultural policies of various governments, have encouraged the consolidation of that side of culture referred to by some as institutional.

A third facet of culture is mass culture, born out of industrialization; it gave birth to a widely circulated press, popular books and magazines, cinema, a record industry, and radio and television. As suggested by its name, mass culture was meant from the outset to reach as many people as possible, [but opposite to popular culture coming from tradition and investigated by anthropologists, to be profit-earning, at least in liberal democracies,<sup>1</sup> even if tied with other objectives, like promoting cultural expression of individuals or asserting community or national identities, with the help of communication policies of States. As suggested by its name, mass culture was meant from the outset to reach as many people as possible. But unlike culture linked with tradition, even state-mandated mass culture that promotes individual expression, community or national identity must turn a profit, at least in liberal democracies. It is well known that Canada has a long tradition of intervention and control in a specific sector of mass culture: that of telecommunications.

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<sup>1</sup> During the twentieth century, totalitarian regimes of the left and the right have used the mass media for political propaganda.

## 2. THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW ECONOMIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL CONTEXT

Technological and economic changes since the 1990s have deeply upset the dynamics of the three types of culture mentioned above; this happened in such a way that they are more intermingled than ever. Generally speaking, culture has become a sort of locomotive of the new economy, which puts the emphasis on knowledge and creativity. Not only have new jobs in the cultural sector in Canada have increased more rapidly than the overall creation of jobs (Luffman, 2000), but there are new sectors, which were not regarded until recently as part of arts and letters and are now taken into account, sectors such as clothing, gastronomy, leisure, tourism, etc.

This widening of the cultural economy is directly linked to the question of cultural industries, a subject much discussed since the end of the 1970s, although this term was first used by the philosopher Theodor W. Adorno of the Frankfurt School in 1947 (Warnier, 1999; Lachance *et al.*, 1984). From that point of view, culture has become a *commodity* to be marketed. Initially restricted to mass culture, this economic approach to culture as having the market in mind has been stretched to include institutional culture. “Only if one is triumphant in the market place can one have access to cultural glory,” writes French journalist Ignacio Ramonet, who sees in that a radically new phenomenon (quoted in Brunet, 2001). The success of stars of song and screen is measured primarily in terms of income generated for the industry rather than from the intrinsic quality of the content. This phenomenon is spreading through all the cultural domains. As a result, we find a three-tiered structure of distribution of cultural production: a so-called international production imbued with strategies brought into play by the American multinationals, and taken over by big European or Japanese consortiums; a national production, financially supported by the cultural policies of the state and by national media, even though there may only be a very small audience outside a country’s borders – national feature films, for example; and, finally, regional cultural production, which does not succeed in catching the attention of the national media and cultural institutions of large metropolitan areas, but which endow with life local and regional communities, and are often used as a stepping stone for future national or international stars.

The marketing of culture has also an impact on cultural aspects of identity. Several cultural events coming out of tradition are taken over for leisure or tourism purposes. As an example, the record industry offers us collections of folkloric music from Africa, Latin America and Asia; Europeans can devote them-

selves to traditional activities in First Nations reserves of Canada; the historic heritage of ancient Egypt or of Florence is sold as a cultural product by tourist agencies. The rules of the liberal economy are invading culture at all levels. And, it is not because a cultural production is national rather than international that it makes it more “noble,” or that it tends to escape the profit earning logic.

Two views are clashing as to the meaning of this globalization of culture, which seems to gain speed because of the new technologies of information and communication. The first, as well critical as pessimistic, sees in the merchandization which is invading different dimensions of culture an irreducible evolution towards a standardized and impoverished culture, dominated by the American cultural industries. What is not in this dominating stream is relegated to marginality. Opposite to it, optimists are considering that the idea of a unique and globalizing culture is utopia and derives from a wrong reading of the situation. For the latter, the oligopolies of the world of cultural industries are not all American; one can find the same phenomenon now in Europe and elsewhere in the world. Multiplying supply would contribute to favour cultural diversity and to render universal cultural expressions from motly origins. “The horizon, for generations to come, wrote Jean-Marie Messier (2001), chief executive of the European group Vivendi Universal, will not be the one of hyperdomination of the USA, nor the one of the French cultural exception, but that of accepted and respected difference of cultures.” If that optimistic way of seeing cultural diversity may triumph, one can suspect it will not be because of the profit earning logic, but because of the implementation of world wide cultural policies, that are for now in their very infancy.

So we are here at the core of a fundamental stake, as far as the future of cultures of smaller societies in a context of globalization is concerned. Facing the uncertainties of the future and the lack of perspective as for those competing ideologies regarding the globalization of culture, one must be careful. Instead of trying to guess what the future will be, which is a way that has always given hazardous results, why not trying to invest the great cultural stakes smaller societies are facing; this would help orientating research and reflection in universities, in government agencies and in the civil society (Harvey, 2002).

### **3. SOME STAKES FOR THE FUTURE**

Among the stakes which are emerging for the future, three are, in my opinion, much worth to pay atten-

tion to: how to situate handing down of culture vis-à-vis cultural innovation; the dialectics of local and global; and the role of cultural policies.

### 3.1 HANDING DOWN OF CULTURE AND CULTURAL INNOVATION

In societies preceding modernity, tradition had a central role in the process of handing down of culture between generations. From the time when the relatively coherent visions of the world which were animating those cultures of tradition were shaken down by the philosophical current of modernity and the succeeding revolutions born of technology, industrialization and urbanization, innovation, associated with the ideology of progress, has become a substitute to tradition. But this did not mean a complete breaking off with the past. It is very difficult to conceive a national or a community culture without some anchoring in history and a given original location.

Even in modern societies where the idea of rupture with the past has been an incentive for creation, as it has been the case with the avant garde in arts, concern for handing down of culture has always been present in institutions. The main mediating channels for handing down have been up to now family, school, associations and a mottle of cultural institutions like museums and public libraries.

The faster and faster movement of change initiated by the new technologies of information and communication, and the requirements of the new economy have summoned those actors of handing down of culture. It is then paradoxical to see in our advanced industrial societies the place left to memory and history. On the one hand, historical information is more prolific than ever for the public at large, thanks to a multitude of popular publications, specialized television channels and information available on Internet or CDroms; without mentioning the existence of numerous interpretation centres meant for schoolchildren or tourists, or else popular festivals with commemoration purposes. On the other hand, new ideologies valorizing innovation as the driving force of culture have a propensity to consider irrelevant the recourse to the past. Henceforth, there is the danger that history becomes a mere cultural commodity, that the individuals build up an “à la carte” memory, following the surrounding fashions. Will the handing down of humanist, community or national culture generate the same interest in the new generations, those who have access to all the cultures of the world in the same time as well as to a global mass culture? In sum, how selection will be carried out? Using what guideline?

In any case, it is obvious that the traditional agents for handing down of culture are not alone any more. To the school and the family, we have to add up now medias, publicity and a good deal of groups of adherence that are to be found in urban milieus and the new society of networks. How the new generations are going to appropriate the cultural heritage of their society? One is bound to believe that the handing down of culture will not be suspended, but that it may take new paths which will not be only vertical, between generations, but also horizontal inside the generations themselves, through the combined support of new technologies of communication and information and of the intensification of intercultural exchanges between nationalities and States.

### **3.2 THE DIALECTICS OF LOCAL AND GLOBAL**

If the process of handing down of culture has become problematical and uncertain, the territorial anchoring of culture is at stake. It has been amply talked about the network society initiated by the new technologies, and also about the recent trends to globalization of exchanges; they would accelerate the deterritorialization of culture and, henceforth, its delocation. This is a highly important question for the future of smaller societies and the upholding of their cultural autonomy.

It is possible that the phenomenon of globalization has been up to now exaggerated, as it is above all financial, and has a concern mainly with business milieus. Certain signs of uniformity attached to a minority of individuals travelling the world over and visiting the same airports and the same chains of hotels are not to be generalized. The cultural hinterland of the societies of the planet is far from showing a picture of uniformity, quite the contrary. The tourist who dares adventuring aside the beaten tracks can bear witness of it. Of course, it can be said that television, Internet and other means of communication can allow people of different parts of the world to be in touch with images and messages that may change their representations of the world and their ways of doing things. It should then be taken into account the fact that the Third World countries are not all having access to the same tools of communication as the wealthy countries. In 2000, 60 % of the users of Internet were living in North America and in Western Europe, and 24 % in Asia-Oceania (mainly Japan and Australia), compared to 6 % in Latin America, 6 % in Eastern Europe and 4 % in Africa and Middle East (Miège, 2001).

Whatever the way we look at it, it must be remembered that the relationship between globality and locality is not a one way process; the local, regional or national communities are not passive when facing

the informations and the cultural models coming from authorities of globalization, whether they are American or from somewhere else. There is such a thing as the phenomenon of reappropriating and reinterpreting the cultural world fluxes at the local, regional or national level, through the filter of diverse traditions and cultural diversities (Tomlinson, 1999).

This new ability of cultural reappropriation and autonomy, in the context of globalization, has not been yet very well examined by researchers, as it would need a multitude of field work, is a sign of hope for the future. It is obvious that this ability can be very different between societies and social surroundings. We can support that a distinction should be drawn between penurious societies which will resist the cultural globalization in taking refuge in marginality opposed to the main streams, and the wealthy societies which will have at their disposal certain tools to develop their ability for cultural creation and its spreading internationally. The case of English Canada and Québec, whose some of their new literary and artistic creations are benefiting a foreign diffusion, are examples of smaller societies with human, technical and financial resources needed for such a diffusion, in spite of the neighbourhood with the American giant.

### **3.3 THE ROLE OF CULTURAL POLICIES**

During the second half of the twentieth century, cultural policies have had a growing importance in the Nation States. The relevance of those policies which, in the same time give privilege to the accessibility to general culture and to the protection of national productions, is now questioned under the rationality of freeing international trade, as culture has become also an industry, as the neoliberal supporters proclaim. It seems that it must be looked more closely at different dimensions of those policies, as they are not all directly linked to the actual economic dispute. I shall base my reflections on the cases of Canada and Québec. I am more familiar with them than with others.

In Canada, one can find a diversity of cultural policies, not only because of the size of this country, its history, its cultural diversity, but also because of the relationship between these policies and their relationships with the dimensions of culture mentioned above, that is identity culture, instituted culture and mass culture. The three levels of government have put up their cultural policies: the federal government, the provinces and municipalities. It is for the time being almost impossible of having an overall picture of those policies, as they are so numerous and often water tight; this gives an idea of the amplitude of the field they cover. A first reconnoitring of the field shows five main categories of cultural policies: 1. poli-

cies devoted to the promoting of identity, 2. policies supporting literary and artistic creation, 3. policies supporting cultural industries, 4. policies trying to have a control over telecommunications and 5. policies of cultural leisure activities. Can be integrated with cultural policies, policies of touristic development which have more and more a cultural flavour, and foreign policies which are henceforth including an angle of cultural diplomacy whose purpose is to make known abroad our cultural productions.

In Canada, policies related to the promoting of identity are referring to the anthropological and inclusive definition of culture; they are based on the valorization of identity patrimonies of the First Nations, of ethnocultural communities and of Francophone minorities, but above all those specific communities, the Canadian and Québec cultural policies are inspired by what we convene to call *nation building*.

On the other hand, policies supporting literary and artistic creation are looked at with less controversy and with, generally speaking, unanimity in their respective spheres, especially when there are increases in budgets, whatever the level of government. But those supportive policies are not directed only towards isolated artists such as painters, they can be also for groups or enterprises as in the case of cinema. This is why policies supporting creation and policies supporting cultural industries intermingle. This is the case of *Cirque du Soleil*, born out of a regrouping of artists originating from the Charlevoix region, east of Québec, which has become an international cultural enterprise; this is an example of how interdependent now can be a small scale sector of creation emanating from a locality and cultural industries.

Those policies devoted to supporting cinema, book, song, public television and other national cultural industries are the ones more in danger of being challenged in the future, under headings like free trade, “unfair competition,” rather than the ones meant for theatrical companies playing on local or regional scenes. Can one see in the implicit support of the Canadian and Québec governments for the building up of large national multimedia groups a sort of replacement solution for the future? One can be doubtful about that as those private firms, in spite of their declarations on the diversity of cultural supply they intend to pursue, are driven by the economic rationality, which is far from the search for meaning, which is the essential of a real cultural process. And this is without saying about the possibility that those firms, Canadian, French or else, could be taken over by foreign interests. That those firms are trying themselves to penetrate the American market and to find allies over there through acquisitions or mergers shows that their interests are not national any more.

When looking at the policies of telecommunications which are supposed to guaranty a minimal Canadian content, we can see they are less and less efficient and realistic, when technology of satellites and Internet makes it possible for consumers to overrun the control measures. We should look more closely to the channels used for the handing down of culture — be them traditional or new —, which may orientate the individual choices. But this would mean that the actual cultural policies — in particular those of the federal government — should climb down from their pedestal and examine what is going on at the ground level. This ground can be found at the local and regional levels, where are unfolded policies of public services touching cultural leisure activities and accessibility to culture. Public libraries, leisure centres, local cultural festivals and the other local cultural institutions, including schools, could supply revealing indications on what sorts of cultural activities can be found within the civil society, and on the future degree of cultural autonomy of communities in the new context of globalization. Canada is made, apart from the Québec specificity, of a mosaic of cultural regions that have been largely underestimated in favour of a disembodied *nation building*.

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We are back to the initial question: what future for smaller cultures at the time of globalization? The fact for smaller societies to have lived under the shadow of powerful countries or empires is a constant phenomenon throughout history. We could pile up examples where smaller societies succeeded expressing their own vision of the world in reappropriating their history and in filtering or in amalgamating foreign influences. The original character of the present situation is not to cope with a powerful neighbour geographically well identified, as in the past (Vietnam and China, Bulgaria and Russia, Belgium and France, Canada and Québec and the United States of America), but to wrestle with economic forces which operate at the level of the world or of a continent, and whose activities may render common place cultural expression, as well identity's esthetics, to the sole profit of mass consumption culture, regardless the refined marketing techniques used for multiplying crenels or targeted publics. We have to distinguish between cultural diversity, the only way for maintaining humanism at the core of culture, and diversity of cultural supply, which is nothing else but a profit seeking strategy. If cultural diversity and its legitimacy are not taken into account in the process of globalization of exchanges, it may lead to an explosive situation, especially when considering the relationships between the West and the Third World.

The future is going to be a fearsome challenge for smaller cultures — this includes the whole of Canada

in spite its geographical dimension. They cannot rest only on cultural policies coming from the second half of the twentieth century. A time of reflection is necessary. This could benefit from the lights of research: the one interested in cultural practices of individuals and communities, also the one made of comparative analyses between regions of the same country or between smaller societies at different steps of economic and cultural development. This reflection should come out with the sketch of a new cultural democracy, world wide, in weaving, in a first row, networks of alliances between smaller cultures pursuing similar objectives. From that point of view, smaller cultures of wealthy countries have a duty helping the smaller cultures of poorer countries, taking into account the great civilizations which gave birth to each of them.

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