Communications/excommunications: an interview with Armand Mattelart

Conducted by COSTAS M. CONSTANTINOU

This interview was conducted over the Internet between February and April 2006. Armand Mattelart is Emeritus Professor of Information and Communication Sciences at the University of Paris VIII. From 1962 to 1973 he was Professor of Sociology of Population and Communication at the Catholic University of Chile, Santiago, and United Nations expert in social development. During the Popular Unity period (1970–73), he worked with the Government of President Salvador Allende until the military coup of September 1973, when he was expelled from Chile. Between 1975 and 1982, he taught at the University of Paris VII and Paris VIII, and, between 1983 and 1997, as founding member of the Communications Department at the University of Rennes 2 (Haute-Bretagne). He has carried out numerous research and teaching missions in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. His research interests include communication theory and history, media studies and international communication. He has authored and co-authored numerous books, translated into many languages, including: *Advertising International: The Privatization of Public Space* (1991); *Mapping World Communication: War, Progress, Culture* (1994), *The Invention of Communication* (1996), *Networking the World 1794–2000* (2000), *The Information Society: An Introduction* (2003), and, with Michèle Mattelart, *Rethinking Media Theory: Signposts and New Directions* (1992); *The Carnival of Images: Brazilian Television Fiction* (1990) and *Theories of Communication: A Short Introduction* (1998). His most recent book, published in French, is: *La Globalisation de la Surveillance: Aux Origines de l'Ordre Sécuritaire* (September 2007).

Q: You suggest in *The Invention of Communication* the need to study communication beyond the so-called media modality, and specifically from the perspective of 'the multiple circuits of exchange and circulation of goods, people, and messages'. What does it mean to approach global communication from this perspective?

A: This is a big question. It intermingles with all the other questions you put to me. At this stage of our interview, I will therefore just recall the genesis of my approach.

In the preface of the English edition of *The Invention of Communication*, I summarised my starting point: that is, a genealogical vision of the story of communication. I quote from the text: 'Communication studies in this century's end pivot around a notion of communication confined to the area of the mass media. This particular meaning of the term is only the most recent in a long evolution, during which "communication" has known many other denotations and other supports. The media-centric perspective causes us to forget that the history of communication possesses a trunk that existed long before the appearance of modern mass media. The media tropism engenders a reductive vision of the history of communication. Worse, it provokes a historical amnesia that prevents us from discerning where the truly

important stakes lie in the current and rapid transformation of our contemporary mode of communication. It is this rejection of history that explains why the debates on contemporary communication are so meagre, so banal, and so mired in dualistic visions and impossible dilemmas, in which one is obliged, for example, to make exclusive choices between opposite poles, privileging now free will, now social determinations; now the local, now the global; now the individual, now the collective; now abstraction, now lived experience; now culture, now nature. Here is the origin, no doubt, of a real incapacity to uncover subtle articulations and to treat these different levels, as dimensions of processes and as phenomena that, after all, cannot cohere.'

My heuristic approach was going against the contemporary logics of the 'topicality race', which sets up the media as 'demiurge, *deus ex machina*, and scapegoat'. But also, it countered the turn following the development of corporate or organisational communication, that was taking place in the interdisciplinary sub-field I belong to academically, that is, the sciences of information and communication. As I write in the introduction: 'Our other concern has been to swim against the tide of a pragmatism influenced by the development of expertise and administrative research that since the 1980s has not ceased extending its hold on ways of perceiving and speaking about communication. Forms of thought and practices of communication inspired by managerial ideology have invested the most diverse institutions and social actors'. In the second half of the 1980s, I had the opportunity to test this phenomenon as the subject of my research was the *avant-garde* of discourse producers which accompanied the neoliberal project of neoliberal globalisation: that is, the transnational networks of advertising, their strategies of mega-merging, and the pressures from their professional organisations to impose their doctrine of auto-regulation. This is precisely when advertising agencies metamorphose into agencies of communication. They become global in terms of geographical range and expansion of skills.

Nowadays, the cult of the present continues to mark communication studies. Oblivion regarding the multi-century-old character of the movement towards world integration is recurrent. The focus on global spatiality leads to short-term vision. It is as if the globalisation process could be explained within a period that does not exceed a quarter-century. This tendency, which is obviously not limited to the field of communication, preoccupies historians. They even coined the term *presentism* to designate this new regime of historicity, which conveys the contemporary experience of a perpetual present. I could also add that it expresses an attitude of resignation towards the existing order of things. The current imperative is being reinforced by the cult of information in the mathematical sense of the term as well as the cult of culture or pan-culturalism.

The cult of information does not care two hoots about culture and memory. Only the tube or the canal matters. The production of meaning is not part of the engineer's agenda. This technical determinism explains why the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) can be promoted to host a summit on the future of our societies, and why the World Trade Organisation (WTO) can list culture in the services column and claim a prerogative over it. Why as well, quite early on, in the 1950s, the theme of post-industrial society soon changed into that of information society, and was associated with the thesis of the end of ideologies, the end of anti-establishment intellectuals and this to the benefit of the inevitable rise of the

'positive' decision-making oriented intellectuals. All these axioms are inscribed in the charter of a contemporary capitalism, which has pepped up the vision of the one-dimensional diffusion of innovation and knowledge as strategic change.

As for the cult of culture, it induces dealing on a cultural mode with problems that one does not want to tackle in political terms (or that one is not interested in considering as such). As Michel de Certeau puts it: 'In the pan-culturalist language, ''culture'' becomes something neutral: the ''cultural''. This is the symptom of the existence of a pocket where all the problems left over by a society not knowing how to deal with them flow back. They are kept there, isolated from their structural links, because of the emergence of new powers and of the changes due to social conflicts.' The dissociation of politics from culture has been completed when the discourse on identities overtook the discourse of the principle of equality as the primary goal of political action; this discourse legitimated the figure of the universal over the last two centuries.

This exile of politics interplays with a double process related to managerial and cognitive capitalism, also named 'world-integrated capitalism'. On the one hand, this interplay involves the redeployment of class relations. It gives the dominant elite a consciousness of totality, at least at the level of wills and behaviour. To the others, that is, cultural producers (writers, artists, researchers, and other intellectual workers), because they cannot make up their mind to seize the phenomena at this abstract and general level in order to draw lessons, what is left is managing, at a local level, the consequences of an overall strategic orientation resulting from integration processes. On the other hand, the interplay urges the enhancing of human activities which were, until then, left on the margins of marketable reason. Capturing the sources of creation is required in order to implement and network immaterial resources.

To open up the cultural field, to replace it within the structural links it has with power stakes and the historical changes resulting from social conflicts, this is what matters when seeking to submit the production of culture and knowledge to the demand of making it accessible to everybody, in a world divided by inequalities of class, gender and ethnicity.

Q: You lived in Chile from 1962 until the military coup in 1973. During this period you co-authored what has become a classic in media and cultural studies, namely *How to Read Donald Duck*, which exposed the imperialist subtext of the Disney cartoons. How far did this period impact on your wider thinking about communication?

A: It is a crucial period in the genealogy of my thinking on the workings of communication and culture. My academic and political interest for this field of study was born and matured in Chile.

Let me first explain that I did not immediately start to work on communication. I was employed at the School of Sociology, which had just been established at the Catholic University of Chile, as a demographer – a specialisation that I acquired at the Sorbonne after obtaining a doctorate in law at the University of Louvain. I arrived in Santiago in September 1962 to inaugurate a course on population theories and demographic policies and, at the same time, to participate in a research programme in this field. During the 1960s, the topic of birth control policies assumed a rather particular geostrategic importance. Preoccupied by the 'demographic explosion' that would, according to the experts, reduce to nothing all efforts towards

economic development, the Population Council established in the 1950s, the Ford and Rockefeller foundations and the United States Development Agency (USAID), considered the formulation of national family-planning policies as a priority for their assistance and cooperation plans in Latin America, and in the rest of the Third World. 'Less than five dollars invested in birth control are equivalent to a hundred dollars invested in economic development', said President Johnson at the United Nations' General Assembly in 1965. The way out of the sub-continent's 'under-development' constituted for Washington a primary goal. What was at stake was no less than countering the model of social change symbolised by the Cuban revolution (1959). The demographic policies were one component of the propositions made by the 'Alliance for Progress'. The point was to 'prevent misery from welcoming communism'. The notion of underdevelopment is a recurrent theme in US diplomacy since President Truman first used it in 1947, and expressed the main lines of its crusade against the communist system.

I was very quickly confronted on the ground with the reality effects produced by the postulates of diffusionist sociology. The theory of development as unilinear modernisation legitimated a strategy of diffusion of anti-conceptive methods according to the principles of marketing: vertical modes addressing women from urban and rural popular classes, which were the key target group. What appalled me was the oversight of society and culture, a plain illustration of which was the duplication, in a complex anthropological reality, of a strategic model of persuasion that had been designed to spread 'innovations' – for instance in the USA of the 1930s, when farmers were led to adopt modern chemicals, methods and machines.

From this first experience, I have learnt three things. First, the search for an alternative to market studies inspired from the diffusionist approach led me to carry out, with my companion, Michèle Mattelart, an ethnographic study on the conditions and image of Chilean women from popular, urban and rural areas, so as to understand their relationship to social change. In this study, we naturally paid special attention to the exposure of these women to mass media.

Second, my geopolitical sense developed by carefully examining the discourses of the World Bank, the USAID, the foundations and the Population Council as well as the debates taking place at the United Nations over the strategies proposed to defuse 'the demographic time-bomb'. Incidentally, this gave me the desire to read the *Essay on the Principle of Population* by Malthus, from an ideological perspective.

Third, through my research on problems of population, I was initiated into interdisciplinary work, mainly because the demographic approach requires several perspectives: law, statistics, anthropology, geography, history, economics, sociology, political science. This intellectual investment was most useful to me soon after, when I came across another interdisciplinary field, the sciences of information and communication. This is what I am getting at.

The second moment dates back to 1967. This is when I shifted, in my research, towards media issues. One year before the outbreak of the student rebellion in France in May 1968, students occupied the headquarters of the Catholic University of Chile and called for a reform of educational programmes as well as of the way the institution was governed. They demanded to be given a say about its management and orientation. This protest in favour of the democratisation of the university was symbolic, mostly because this particular university, compared to the other universities in Santiago, had an elitist image. And it is true that most of the students who were

protesting against the university establishment came from bourgeois family back-grounds. This explains the virulent reaction against the student movement from the newspaper *El Mercurio*, the main newspaper of the Chilean establishment, founded in 1827 just after the independence and which boasted of being *The Times* of Latin America. The more tangible result of the student uprising was the creation of several research centres that adopted a critical approach. Among them was the *Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Nacional*. Within this Centre, the research team I directed carried out its first study about the media, at the student movement's request. The programme included: the structures of power and the media, their dependence on foreign capital, the discursive strategy of *El Mercurio* concerning the university crisis of 1967, the analysis of women's and fans' magazines, published by the same group of which the newspaper was part.

What I got out of this second phase: First, I discovered structuralism, semiology, the problematics of ideology. But also the controversies around the debated status of culture in Marxist theory, which at that time dominated the references in that domain. Getting involved in media studies signified a complete epistemological turn for me. A turn in my political commitment as well, since, from that time on, I took up the cause of the students' struggles whose movement was becoming more radical.

Second, I was able to assess the virtues but also the limits of structural methods as analytical tools for the media. The first-generation semiology lacked the ability to extract itself from the principle of immanence, from the imprisonment in corpuses considered as unique dispensers of meaning. It failed to interrogate the mechanisms of power, which seemed to me unthinkable in Chile. A cross-disciplinary approach had to combine the discursive analysis with the political economy of communication and culture, which was still at its embryonic stage at that time.

The third phase of the definition of my research problematics merges with the collective experience embodied by the three years of the Popular Unity (from November 1970 till 11 September 1973). The problem of the media was posed differently than in the previous period. It was not just a matter of studying structures, reading from an ideological perspective, and dissecting the messages of the hegemonic culture. We also had to respond to the question: 'What has to be done? With the media'. Not only with those media, a small minority, that the government of the Popular Unity inherited, but also with those the popular sectors wanted to create. The need to construct alternatives was on the agenda in a totally new context for a government that claimed to be part of 'the Chilean way to socialism'. President Salvador Allende deserves credit as he never prevented the media belonging to the opposition forces or big press agencies as well as the transnational cultural industries from freely expressing their point of view. All the way through the three years of his presidency, the forces of opposition did not hesitate to make the most of this freedom while developing repeated press campaigns against the government's reform pro-gramme. These campaigns were relayed abroad by the press agencies UPI and AP, and often financed by United States intelligence agencies, as proved after the military coup by the *Hearings* of the US Senate. The import of comic books and magazines of all kinds from Spanish-speaking press groups installed in the United States increased. On several occasions, their contents were caught red-handed, clearly inciting sedition. Even Walt Disney's comics were mobilised to 'hunt the tyrant'! In this situation of acute social crisis, focusing on the interests of groups and social

classes, the characters of Walt Disney were losing their innocence. The model of society, the values of *the American way of life* that Disney's characters served in an implicit way as supporters and spokespersons in times of social peace, came to defend themselves and bare their teeth.

For the forces of change, the ideological and cultural issue became central. The mechanistic approaches, which regarded ideology and culture as a by-product of the infrastructure, of the economic basis, manifestly showed their limits. What was important was to take into account a mass culture that had become everyday culture, to work with the gap between political consciousness and desire, consciousness and taste, consciousness and pleasure. There were tensions between the subjective experience of media users and the reading that the political leader or the intellectual would give of the users' alienation. When the series *Mission Impossible* or the last *Telenovela* were shown on television, even partisans of the Popular Unity government would watch them, instead of attending a political meeting.

In that particular context, Ariel Dorfman and I published at the end of 1971 *Para Leer al Pato Donald* (*How to Read Donald Duck*). This book can be read, as you recall it, as a classic of cultural and media studies – which it has indeed become over time. But it should also be read in the light of the memory of its production. From this point of view, let us remember that it is also a 'Manifesto', based on a cultural product and icon symbolising a particular vision of the world, a way of life against which Chile fought in the name of 'another possible world', thereby trying to arouse in a historically-situated reality, a debate on the lack of problematisation of the cultural issue by a significant part of left-wing forces.

For many, the question of changing media was summarised in 'changing journalists and owners'. I remember that at the same time, in a book entitled *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1972), Jean Baudrillard addressed the same reproach to the French left. Bertolt Brecht's text on the theory of radio, written in 1932, is one of the few texts from that period which helped me to think through the question of the social appropriation of the media. This is because, it encouraged breaking with the vertical transmitter-receiver relationship – a relationship of the same nature as the one established between traditional parties and militants – and prompted me to imagine a new human right, the communication right, based on access, participation and dialogic process. This idea has became 'audible' in international debates only since we entered this new century.

Two recurrent problematics were born from this experience, which was tragically brought to an end by the military coup. (1) Questioning the reasons why and explaining how media and cultural issues remained an invisible matter in the thought of the workers' movement for such a long time. Why the movement had an instrumental vision of it. Why the imaginary of *agitprop*, of propaganda and manipulation was so vivid. All these questions take us back to the shortcomings in thinking about the productions of subjectivity, that is to say, of knowledge, culture, sensitivity, sociality, everyday life. Most of those questions are still topical issues among the new social movements which struggle against the neoliberal project of globalisation. (2) Questioning the transnationalisation processes within information, communication and cultural industries and networks. The experience of Chile (surrounded by a real 'ideological cordon sanitaire', in Allende's own words, whose details were widely set out after the coup d'état through the *Hearings* of the American Senate), showed me the strategic importance of the global dimension of the

communication system and convinced me how necessary it was to rethink the asymmetrical relationships upon which it was founded.

Apart from *How to Read Donald Duck*, two books published in English by Harvester Press accounted for the last period of my life experience in Chile: *Multinational Corporations and the Control of Culture* (1979) and *Mass Media, Ideologies and the Revolutionary Movement: Chile* (1970–73), published the following year, readdresses some texts produced and discussed collectively during the three years of the Popular Unity. An interview was also published in 1976, by the BFI in *Chilean Cinema*, edited by Michael Chanan. Moreover, in the mid-1980s, I went back, with Michèle Mattelart, over our experience in the last chapter of *Rethinking Media Theory: Signposts and New Directions* (1992). This really proves how our Chilean experience is a recurrent axis in our theoretical course.

Q: Are there any thinkers that especially influenced your work? If so, how?

A: A number of authors helped me to construct an alternative mental representation of communication. Let me mention some of them.

At the end of the 1960s, *Mythologies* (1957) by Roland Barthes clearly accompanied me through my migration from the field of demographic studies to the one of media and culture. In fact, *How to Read Donald Duck* can be read as an extension of *Mythologies*. When I read it, I discovered what ideology was like in everyday life. The angle was quite different from what I was used to through the works of the founding or refounding 'Fathers of Marxism'. It is not by chance that the original title of *Para Leer el Pato Donald* (literally *Reading Donald Duck*) was mischievously taking on the title of the work of the philosopher Louis Althusser, *Para Leer el Capital* (*Reading the Capital*)! Barthes slammed the French colonial empire for being powerless to 'imagine the other', unless in its image or resemblance. 'Facing a stranger', he wrote, 'the Order knows only two behaviours, which are both mutilations: either to recognise him as a puppet or to defuse him as a pure reflection of the Occident. In any case, the main thing is to take his history away from him . . . the myth standardizes through the strongest appropriation factor, i.e. the abduction of identity.' Franz Fanon, a native of Martinique and Algerian by adoption wrote two books (*Les Damnés de la Terre* (1961) – The Wretched of the Earth – and *Peaux Noires: Masques Blancs* (1954) – Black Skins, White Masks) which closely analysed and helped in understanding this phenomenon in the 1950s.

In this sense, *How to Read Donald Duck* decodes another kind of ethnocentrism, the one produced by a new imperial pole: the United States. Remember the chapter 'From the Noble Savage to the Third World'. The representation of the 'childlike people', who therefore need to be under the supervision of the 'adult people', has not aged a bit when considering the legitimation strategies of world hegemony. Just look at what is happening in Iraq. What has, on the contrary, changed in the last two decades, is that the myth of transparency tends to sweep away any reference to the concept of ideology. And because of this amnesia, questioning the new sources of symbolic violence with respect to the people split up on either side of the demarcation line of 'development' also tends to disappear. I am not the only one who thinks that the Occident, after a period of questioning its colonial relationship with other cultures, has ceased to think its relation to the other. It is reconciled with its history. It celebrates difference and diversity, but it does not really pay much attention to what is not 'itself'.

During the 1980s, the transition from the 'paradigm of the mechanic' towards the 'paradigm of the fluid', as I called it with Michèle, in *Rethinking Media Theory*, brought me closer to the writings of Antonio Gramsci, Michel de Certeau and Michel Foucault. They helped me to define the new theoretical challenges posed by the emergence of modes of reticular organisation of power and the return of the subject with its actor status, with respect to mediators and intermediaries, intersubjective links, rituals of everyday life, common knowledge, ways of operating invented by users, identities of proximity and multiple memberships. Gramsci would provide his concepts of hegemony and power relations, both at national and international level, his analysis of Fordism and Americanism as organisational modes not only for the enterprise but also for a new type of society and civilisation, his approach to popular literature and intellectuals in their relation to the people. From de Certeau, I used his reflections on the networks of anti-discipline, the practices of everyday resistance that were taking the opposite view of Foucault's analyses – and, at the same time, clarifying them – on the networks of discipline and surveillance. The book I wrote with Michèle, *The Carnival of Images: Brazilian Television Fiction* (published in English in 1990, three years after the French version), explores the mode of production of the 'telenovela' genre, that is, a curious alchemy between technical hypermodernity and the mechanisms of traditional melodramas; it offers an application case of the change of view concerning the link between popular culture and mass culture, between the national and the international.

From the 1990s onwards, I especially committed myself to historical research. This led to several books, most of which – but not all – were translated into English between 1994 and 2003. They are *Mapping World Communication*, *The Invention of Communication*, *Theories of Communication* (in collaboration with Michèle), *Networking the World*, and *The Information Society*. Incidentally, I would like to make it clear that, in the late seventies, I had already made a foray into history when writing, along with Seth Siegelaub, a two-volume anthology called *Communication and Class Struggle* (1979 and 1983), gathering a number of texts published since the end of the nineteenth century by, among others, Bourdieu, Brecht, Cabral, Fanon, Gramsci, Marx and Trotsky.

Through Foucault, I discovered the genealogical approach to history: the deconstruction of networks of ideas, the unearthing of their origin(s) and of their lineage(s), the framework of their connections, their affiliations, obvious and hidden, and their interactions, the attention to neglected sources. Through Fernand Braudel (and the historical school of the 'Annales'), I discovered the concepts of 'world-economy' and 'world-time'. These conceptual tools highlight the way the hierarchical organisation of the planet is constructed, ever since the conquest of the New World by the Europeans. Braudel's vision of history leads to a cultural decentring. It undermines the historical discourse imprisoned within the occidental logos. It is the same for the historiography of dominated cultures as proposed by Michel de Certeau. The 'silent inventions' of the natives from the so-called New World, doing 'something else' from the liturgies and the laws the conquerors tried to impose, allow him to think about the contemporary strategies of the weak against the strong; without ever denying the unequal relationship between the two cultures. Braudel as well as de Certeau have been strongly marked by their contacts with the 'Latin Americas', according to Braudel's expression, who refused to speak of the sub-continent in the singular as it is so 'diverse'. It is during one of his many scientific

missions in Brazil in the thirties that the latter, for example, became aware of the necessity to look at universal history from the point of view of the 'other'. During his numerous fieldworks in Brazil, de Certeau elaborated his vision of the resistance of the oppressed. With these two thinkers, I share the idea that interdisciplinarity is conceivable only if it is crossed by the desire of interculturality.

Finally, the archaeology of the imaginary of industrialism that Walter Benjamin addresses in *Passages: Paris, Capitale du 19ième Siècle* (in English, the book is titled 'Arcades Project') offers a crossroad of ideas to track down the formation of the ideology of modernity/infinite progress.

But the main power lines that irrigate my research also come from a multiplicity of readings outside the field of social sciences. The letters and short stories by Jorge Luis Borges, the utopian and dystopic novels, undoubtedly freed in my mind some imaginative forces. On another totally different register, I assiduously read the makers of modern strategy, from Vauban to the theoreticians of the revolutionary war, including Clausewitz.

Q: You suggest that it will be a good idea for at least one of your books (*Mapping World Communication*) to be read as a 'strategic map'. Do you want to elaborate on what this means and whether it could be extended to other works?

A: First, I would like to make a comment about something which is not just a minor detail. The title of the French edition of *Mapping World Communication* is *La Communication-Monde*. And the subtitle: *Histoire des Idées et des Stratégies* (*History of the Ideas and Strategies*). The English title is therefore far from the original title. The term 'communication-monde' (literally world-communication) explicitly referred to the Braudelian concepts of 'temps-monde' (world-time) and 'économie-monde' (world-economy). The American editor suggested changing the French title, on the ground that it would not sell in the Anglo-Saxon market. I proposed *Mapping World-Communication* because it seemed to translate my intellectual project: to weave networks between ideas and strategies with respect to 'international communication'. In the end, I had to sacrifice not only the word 'history' but also the Braudelian concept as the editor advised me to suppress the hyphen between 'communication' and 'world'. This remark shows how certain terms that are meant to designate the movement towards world integration – what is commonly called 'globalisation' – travel badly in the space of global circulation; how much they remain marked by intellectual cultures anchored in a geo-localised feeling. The differentiated perception of the word 'history', in particular, is emblematic. In the English editions of two other of my works, *Histoire de la Société de l'Information* and *Histoire des Théories de la Communication*, the word 'history' has also been cut out. The binomial communication/information network seems to have become so allergic to the historical viewpoint that only the time of perpetual present is able to express it. Yet, in my sense, any 'strategic map' has to cross the historical viewpoint and the geopolitical viewpoint, the time and the space, the event and the structure.

Mapping World Communication (1994) can be read as the outline of a strategic map. One can discover networks of words and things, of concepts, of doctrines, of theories, of policies that punctuated and continue to mark the construction of the thinking on communication in its international dimension. This is the objective I express in the preface: 'The history of international communications and its

representations is a history of the interwoven paths of war, progress, and culture, and the trajectory of their successive arrangements, their ebb and flows'. This framework of ideas and strategies prepared and founded the contemporary ideology of boundless communication as a substitute for the philosophy of infinite progress. The technologies of communication embody the promise of a way out of the structural, economic and political crisis, diagnosed as a crisis of 'civilisation'. By guaranteeing universal transparency, they found a new mode of world government.

It may be easier to understand the sense of my general approach by reading the short synthesis I wrote at the end of the critical history of the notion of 'information society'; this other offshoot of the ideology of communication, which prescribes cutting out the fields of knowledge and the fields of non-knowledge, designates actors and non-actors, directs decisions towards one direction and not in another. 'The genealogical approach that inspired the perspective adopted here on the so-called information society is based on a conviction and a project: no pedagogical effort to foster grassroots appropriation of technology can neglect the critiques of words which, though presented as having no national roots, nevertheless continually find their way into ordinary language and frame our collective representations. It is through these words that the meanings of the concepts of freedom and democracy have undergone important shifts and through them, as well, that we are invited to accept, as an obvious necessity, the reality that now exists and the one that is supposedly emerging.'

My analyses on the universal and cultural diversity are the subject of two books that have not been translated into English; they can be read according to the same pattern. The first one, titled *Histoire de l'Utopie Planétaire: De la Cité Prophétique à la Société Globale* (1999) is a critical history of the thought that led to the current discourse on globalisation. Following the projects of world community that, under the sign of religion, of empire, of an economic model or of the struggle of the oppressed, succeeded one another since the conquest of the Americas, that is, the founding moment for Occidental Europe taking possession of the world, I brought out the contradictory ideals that have been successively invested in the 'universal', the 'cosmopolitan', the 'world', the 'planetary', the 'international' and the 'transnational'. I wondered why and how these sedimentations of concepts, theories, doctrines, utopian stories, expansion plans have a tendency nowadays to lose any identity, melting into the 'global', converted into an impassable horizon.

The second book, *Diversité Culturelle et Mondialisation* (2005), marks out the trajectory of the concept of 'cultural diversity'. It situates the different powerful movements of history, which gave or refused to give sense to it while carrying along material definitions of culture, cultures, interactions and phenomena of acculturation that marked the lives of societies. I show how we arrived at this ambivalence and ambiguity that nowadays leaves the concept torn apart between two poles. Being a critical axis of the new world information order, cultural diversity is the basis for a world democracy. But it is also a support for a new mode of management of the *Global Democratic Marketplace*.

If we want to prevent the market of words from conforming to the words of the market, we must revive the memory of words that have been expropriated from their meaning and, at the same time, to wonder about the logotype-notions distilled by the globalisation of modes of saying and doing, produced by managerial practices. Social atopia, as the oblivion of the place where ideas and practices are being produced,

goes hand in hand with the loss of the power of enunciation, the power to name things. It has a direct effect on the production of mental and institutional tools, which – because they shape classifications, nomenclatures, patterns of perception and interpretations of the state of the world and its future - inspire models of action and strategies.

Q: You argue in *Networking the World, 1794–2000* that the globalisation of communication is not a new phenomenon but can be traced back to enlightenment ideas and the liberal ideology. How does this inform current geopolitical and geoeconomic predicaments?

A: From culture to communication, from culture to cultural, from people to audience(s), from citizen to consumer, from communication to information: through theses semantic shifts and permutations, what never stopped being at stake over the last two centuries, is the meaning of the tensions between the project to set up a 'universal mercantile republic' marked by free trade, and the vision of the 'great democratic republic' of the Enlightenment, claiming the universalism of values via the 'enlightenment of the minds', in Condorcet's words.

Nowadays, this tension focuses on the following dilemma: is culture a mere merchandise among others or should it have a particular status as it bears meaning? The question of culture is ever-present in debates about world communicational space, about the meaning of policies that intend to promote cultural, linguistic and media diversities and, more broadly, about the aims of the global development model. It is therefore central in the controversies over the concepts of 'cultural exception' and 'cultural diversity' and over the philosophy of 'common public goods'. These three concepts, each one from its field of competence, recognise the 'specific nature of cultural activities, goods and services' and lay down the premises of international law that preserves the particular status of 'products of the spirit' against market reason.

If the principle of cultural exception is new, and has been established since the 1990s, this is not the case with the political philosophy that underlies it which dates back, in fact, to the entry into the era of audiovisual media and the first cinematographic policies set up between the two World Wars by some European countries and Canada in the face of Hollywood's hegemony. The idea of an 'exception' in this domain consequently results from clarifying a long process of maturation, which is not free from its own ambiguities.

'Cultural exception' was formalised in the Euro-American power struggle within the GATT in 1993. The issue at stake was the liberalisation of the audiovisual, but also of cultural industries as a whole (like the book or the record industries, for example). After many negotiations and compromises among its members, the European Community succeeded in asserting the clause of exception. The principle of national and regional policies supporting film or programme production and broadcasting was confirmed. But the principle of exception has not been necessarily unanimously accepted by the members of the Union. This clearly appeared later in 2000, when the notion of 'cultural exception' was replaced by the notion of 'cultural diversity', on the pretext alleged by the most sceptical member countries about the idea of giving a special status to the 'products of the spirit', that the first notion connoted too defensive a position. As far as the European mega-groups were concerned, they seemed no less hostile to a particular status for culture as their counterparts from the United States.

When negotiating the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, the Canadian government managed to snatch, for its part, a clause of 'cultural exemption' (a less legally restrictive notion than the term 'exception') from Washington. Here again, public policies were legitimated. Mexico never thought it was worthwhile adding this restrictive clause. After their failure towards the European Union, the United States never ceased to dissuade the candidates for exception all over the world. Consequently, the State Department and the Motion Picture Association (MPA), acting as spokesperson for the *majors'* interests, put pressure on governments in Chile, South Korea, Morocco and the former communist countries so that, within the framework of bilateral agreements, they would give up their right to set up cinematographic policies in exchange for compensations in other sectors.

The area of application of the 'cultural diversity' principle, as defined by the UNESCO Convention and quasi-unanimously adopted in October 2005, goes far beyond the sole domain of the audiovisual sector and cultural industries, as it stretches out to the 'multiplicity of forms through which the cultures of groups and societies find their expression'. These forms also concern language policies, support policies to the craft industry, fine arts as well as the development of the native peoples' knowledge systems (for example the protection of traditional medicine) or measures in favour of cultural minorities. The role played in the 1990s by countries like Canada or France in the processes that led to the recognition of cultural exception or culture exemption explains their position at the beginning of the third millennium when promoting the project of the Convention.

There is, however, a significant difference between the Euro-American debates on cultural exception in the early 1990s and the ones that were conducted for the adoption of the UNESCO Convention: the difference is that culture was brought back into an international forum which, as a matter of fact, has a specific administrative competence in this domain. The debate on the exception has been corseted, that is, formatted in a way, by the institutional frame where it actually took place: the GATT, whose field of competence is trade relations. For this organisation, culture is only a rubric in the list of 'services'. Within such a framework, it is therefore difficult to open a real debate on culture and cultural expressions, even if the professional organisations involved in culture that met during the cultural convention have seized the opportunity to do so. For most government negotiators, 'European culture' and 'European values' have remained black boxes, unidentified political objects.

However, the principles of 'exception' and 'diversity' only make sense in the light of a much broader question about the model of society: namely what is the status for all common public goods? These goods that have for name, not only culture, information, communication and education but also health, the living, the environment, water, the spectrum of radio and television broadcasting frequencies, and so on, all these domains that ought to constitute 'exceptions' in relation to private appropriation. All these goods should be produced and shared under conditions of equity and liberty in accordance with the constitutive principles which founded the very definition of public service, whatever the status of the enterprises ensuring this mission may be. But the definition of this common heritage is always, and more than ever, the subject of disputes in international institutions, from the World Bank to the United Nations Program for Development, through to the World Trade

Organisation. This is also where a real geopolitical and geoeconomic struggle takes place, over a concept that questions the excessive liberalisation of all the interstices of life.

Q: In what ways can religious and socio-legal concepts like excommunication and being incommunicado help us understand modern practices of communication?

A: The cognitive map of communication is historically inhabited by religious concepts. This is where its profound eschatological nature lies. A common theme runs through the concept of the 'great human family', demystified by Barthes, and the one of the 'global village', termed by Marshall McLuhan, who himself inherited it from the Jesuit theologian and palaeontologist Teilhard de Chardin's concept of 'planetization', a synonym for the 'spiritualization of the world', that is, the equivalent of the *Civitas Christiana*, dreamt by the evangelist Saint John.

The religious genealogy of the irenic matrix shaping the language of communication allows us to better comprehend the egalitarian myth on which the modern ideology of communication was built. This myth is present from the very first moments of the juridical legitimation of the conquest of the Americas. It forms the basis of the juridical argumentation developed by the Spanish theologian Francisco de Vitoria, a precursor of public international law, who was seeking to justify the rights the new settlers occupying the New World territories were claiming against the natives. Two rights, in particular, are, according to him, part of the common heritage of humankind: the *jus communicationis* and the *jus co[m]mercii*. The first title the Spanish Empire can put forward in order to justify its presence 'can be called the title of natural society and natural communication'. By virtue of it, the newcomers have the right to move and settle in these regions. The immigration right therefore embodies the communication right.

The second title, namely the trade right, does not only concern material exchanges of goods and the freedom to exploit common things, such as, the gold from the mines and rivers, the pearls of the sea and rivers, but also the exchange of ideas. It gives the newcomers the right to 'preach and announce the Gospel'. The obligation of the Indians is to allow the free propagation of religion. Should the natives oppose the use of these two rights, the Spanish must try to convince them and show that they do not intend to harm them. However, if the method proves insufficient and if the Indians use force, they are authorised to make a 'just war' against them, while restraining their retaliation. Moreover, the Spanish are expected to act in 'total loyalty and absolute conscience', and on behalf of universally applicable principles rather than for personal interests. Armed intervention through the propagation of ideas is another possible case. Here non-reciprocity reveals one of the numerous contradictions in the scholastic position. It is the same for the trade right. Bartering, that is the most common form of relationship between the Spanish and the Indians, is carried out under scandalously-unequal conditions of exchange: trinkets in exchange for gold and precious stones (as in the Walt Disney's comics we analysed in the chapter of *How to Read Donald Duck* that I quoted above!). A quite unfair deal but a real fool's bargain. This conception of the 'communication right' and of the 'trade right' as natural principles for equal exchanges between humans would be convincing only if it was founded on abstract fully-fledged subjects. Yet this equality is invalidated by the cultural and economic inequalities, within the reality of the power relationships that the empire imposes.

Consequently, instead of taking a look at the word 'communication' to give an account of the present, it is better to address the lexicon of 'excommunication'. Indeed, excommunication lays bare the dark zone of the pacifying and pacificist vision of communication flows. Let me remind that in Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopaedia*, one ecclesiastic would define this term as the 'separation from communication or trade with a person with whom one previously enjoyed it'. 'In this sense', the author goes on, 'any man excluded from a society or a body, and with whom the members of that body no longer have communication, may be said to be excommunicated'.

'Excommunicated' is today the status of three-quarters of the world population. The more the hindrances to free flow of goods and free circulation of its officiants collapse, the more big multimedia and multinational groups overbid their vocation to merge all humans into a global community and to triumph where the great religions failed; and the more electronic barriers, fortified zones, walls with watchtowers and barbed wire, paramilitary patrols with dogs, that is, a whole logistics aimed at controlling and holding back the flows of those left behind by the socio-techno-economic apartheid of the world integrated capitalism. Those who are 'excommunicated' are the new 'dangerous classes' and their movements that the established powers criminalise. 'Excommunicated' are the cultures and cultural areas that the theologisation of the apocalyptic struggle between good and evil have inscribed in the new code of the enemies of empire since 11th September 2001.

Contemporary jurists and philosophers seeking to define the 'communication right' question the essentialist vision of human rights. For them, the communication right is possible only if it guarantees the political, economic, social and cultural conditions that permit humans to exercise what Spinoza called the *conatus*, that is, the power of transformation and change enabling humans to persevere in their struggle for the recognition of human dignity. 'Creating the conditions for the development of human potentialities': this is what is at stake in struggling for the actual recognition of social, cultural, political and economic rights, of which the 'communication right' is but one part. The recognition of these rights is the recognition of the right of everyone to participate in the transformation of society.

Q: Are there any viable alternatives to the global corporitisation of communication and the hegemonic role of emerging technocracies? What do you mean by proposing (in *Networking the World*), if I read you correctly, that we must 'abandon salvation' and embrace 'tragic hope'?

A: First, I would like to answer the first part of the question. Surely the 1980s and half of the 1990s were years spent in the wilderness for the forces likely to formulate viable alternatives. The model of integrated world capitalism called 'globalisation', inspired by the ultra-liberalistic vision of organising the planet, has been theorised and experienced as a fatality. Big international organisations, themselves, have toned down the idea of public policy as regards communication and culture. The UNESCO, in the seventies, which had accompanied the claims from the Non-Aligned Movement in favour of policies of democratisation in communication and of a New World Information and Communication Order, beat a retreat. After the United States and Great Britain left the institution, the memory of the controversies was tabooed. A black legend was woven during this period, known as a time of extreme 'politicization' of the problems of communication.

The discourse on the benefits of globalisation only started to lose its univocity in the second half of the 1990s, following the crisis of markets and networks of the geofinancial world as well as the first failures linked to the adjustment plans applied by the good pupils of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. At that time the first signs of resurgence of the social movement appeared. The guerrilla movement of the neo-Zapatistas in Mexico, after 1994, and the opposition from the NGOs' world network, between 1995 and 1998, to the project of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), showed the emergence of new forms of critique and social mobilisation against the model of neoliberalistic globalisation. At the end of 1999, the demonstrations against the GATT in Seattle constituted a milestone.

During the first World Social Forum that took place in Porto Alegre, Brazil, at the beginning of 2001, a new configuration of actors emerged, beginning to stand aloof from the dominant dynamics and to become conscious of the strategic importance the appropriation of communication technologies means for the construction and affirmation of socio-political subjects in the public sphere. Treated in a dispersed manner during the first two sessions (2001 and 2002), and, actually, without any explicit position from the social movement, the themes of culture and communication were only established two years later. In 2005, they occupied four of the eleven thematic spaces organised within the Forum. Broadly speaking, they focused on autonomous thinking; reappropriation and socialisation of knowledge and technologies; diversities, plurality and identities; arts and creation, such as how to build cultures of resistance for people; communication: counter-hegemonic practices, rights and alternatives. This situation has arisen thanks to the development, over a long period, of transnational networks, federating national and local networks, weaving multiple relationships between them. A paradigmatic case is the example of the network CRIS (Communication Rights in the Information Society) which results from a slow accumulation process.

The newly acquired legitimacy of communication issues is an important advance in social movement thought. For a long time, as I said above, the instrumental approach to the media, to networks (and to culture) made it difficult to formalise an overall thought related to their role in the strategies for social change; what's more, in their international dimension, many strategies were actually discovered with the irruption of the Internet! Let me point out that this process of legitimation is far from being due to the majority of the elements of the social movement, even if all of them are quite skilled when using the new digital tools. It owes a lot to the pioneering work of the networks involved for several years in the sector, such as the *World Association for Christian Communication* (WACC), based in London, the *Agencia Latino-Americana de Informacion* (ALAI), in Quito, the *Association Mondiale des Radios Communautaires* (AMARC), in Montreal, and so on. The idea slowly moves forward that building social macro-usages of technologies is inevitably inscribed in a field of political forces you cannot cut off. On these grounds, it is also the affair of citizens. To say, from this point, that we had opened doors for viable alternatives would be jumping the gun. But the conscience had definitely been born of the necessity to sustain a democratic counterbalance against more and more concentrated political and financial powers. The extreme variety of centres of interest, of linguistic and cultural origins characterising the new and old socio-political subjects as well as their forms of action, demonstrate that if there is actually a source for a new plurality, it

is indeed the diversity of the protagonists that have been appearing in the world civil sphere since the end of the last century. Now, as regards the possibility of politically linking the differences from which a critical force would emerge and be able to influence the course of social evolution – and not just make do with influencing realpolitik calculations – the answer to the question is still wide open.

As for the second part of the question, this is what I can say. Without utopia, there is no hope of another possible world, namely, a fairer world that is based on solidarity. This hope is tragic because it is lucid. Breaking off the thought of salvation means leaving one's innocence and cultivating another type of hope. This is what Aldous Huxley did in his critical satire of utopias, *Brave New World*, when quoting the maxim Voltaire put on Candide's lips: 'All is for the best in the best of all possible worlds'. Technically, humankind has never been so close to achieving the dream of the 'World City', as it has been conveyed by all the social utopias that viewed in communication the carrier of concord. But there still is a big gap between the fabulous potential of information tools and the possibilities of using them to serve 'happiness for all'. The future glimpsed through the dystopic stories is also a possibility. Indeed, in the last three decades, the non-emancipatory uses of technology advanced far beyond the forecast of the so-called apocalyptic intellectuals. In spite of these regressive logics, I keep on thinking that only the utopia of democracy through knowledge can protect us against the dramatic return of ethno-centric ideologies.

Q: You wrote about the contribution of advertising and marketing to the privatisation of public space as well as the extent to which they have contaminated contemporary culture. Does this mean that democratic resistance has been co-opted and can only have a limited effect, or none at all?

A: What and why should we resist? This is the real problem. The omnipresence of advertising and marketing technologies is just another clue of the hold of managerial reason as a 'technical version of politics'. The citizens' freedom of expression is enjoined to hand over to the 'commercial freedom of expression', that is to say, to free the way leading to the penetration of market mentality into all the recesses of the public sphere. Therefore, the neo-populist notion of the global democratic market-place is being naturalised and, along with it, so are the clichés about freedom of speech and individual choice in the post-Fordist regime. The absolute sovereignty of the consumer and the liberation of the producer's creativity are the founding myths of voluntary servitude, of constrained involvement of the former as well as the latter. This double mystification justifies the expropriation of the *savoir-faire* at the same time as the *savoir-vivre*, which are both required when bringing about a particular model of 'information society'.

What kind of psychic construction, what kind of mental formatting does it mean for the inhabitant of a society which combines flexibility and security and aims at capturing the hives of creation for the sole purpose of creating capitalistic values? Resistance to the whole of the new market implies questioning the type of subject and subjectivity required by the dynamics of world-integrated capitalism. This questioning recurs in the initiatives from citizens who are seeking to pave the way in order to reappropriate and resymbolise the use of communication and information tools, apart from the hackneyed marketing formulas and other univocal practices inspired by a diffusionist vision of relating to the other.

To resist is also to oppose the new regime of concept production. On this point, it is worthwhile reading over and over again Deleuze and Guattari's *What is Philosophy?*, where they worry about the way the 'disciplines of communication' (advertising, marketing, management, and so on) helped themselves to the term 'concept' and indoctrinated it in order to serve the operations of techno-market pragmatism. This is a real semantic abduction showing the irresistible rise of the 'universals of communication', which legitimate the promotion of the enterpreneurial organisation model as the paradigm for the new 'control society'. What it is all about is control in the short term, rotating rapidly, but in a continuous and unlimited movement, following the mechanisms of constraint and panoptic surveillance put forward in the disciplinary societies as outlined by Michel Foucault. According to these thinkers, only a process of resistance deep-rooted in the 'pedagogic age' of the concept can prevent our societies from falling down into the 'absolute disaster for the thinking' represented by the new age of 'commercial professional training' of the concept. This is the real issue when universities fight not to turn into simple technical schools serving the individual and flexible society; when research institutions struggle to escape from global market needs and to produce public goods and innovations in response to the non-marketable demands from civil society; when battling to change the status of knowledge and the relationships between those who are supposed to know and those who are not supposed to know.

Q: In *The Information Society* you say that 'revolutionary language has emigrated to the neoliberal camp, which turned the notion of ''information revolution'' into a sort of Russian-doll term with totalising pretensions'. Can you explain the implications of this for diplomatic and military affairs?

A: In the nineties, a notion suddenly clicked: 'the new world information order'. It was used for the first time by the Clinton Administration along with the notions of 'global society of information' and 'global information infrastructure'. The 'revolution in military affairs' and the 'revolution in diplomatic affairs' are variations of the geostrategic doctrines based on the new information deal.

The euphoria that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall urged strategists to exploit the dividends of peace. The watchword was the peaceful enlargement of the so-called international community through the integration of more and more countries into the *global democratic marketplace*. It implied, on the one hand, taking advantage of the accumulation of symbolic investments realised across the world since the end of the World War II by the conveyors of mass culture and other signs of the *American way of life*. Intensive exploitation of this cultural memory presupposed, on the other hand, that the multiple resources of the Web of Webs be maximised. Hence the essential requirement, from the only superpower that had stayed in the race, to perpetuate its global information dominance, that is the network hegemony. In the immediate post-Cold War perspective, cultural hegemony merges with the exercise of *softpower*, that is, the seductive power and obliteration of strategies resorting to force and constraint. What it was about was controlling the agenda of global priorities so that it could be imposed on other states as the only possible, the only reasonable agenda. The objective was to lead them both to desire and to accept standards and institutions in accordance with the interests of the head of the system of systems, that is, the 'lonely superpower', in Samuel Huntington's words.

The other side of the doctrine of global information dominance was dealing with security and defence. The diptych *netwar* and *cyberwar* expresses the two components of the so-called 'war of knowledge', the 'noopolitics', a neologism explicitly derived from the notion of noosphere coined by Teilhard de Chardin. The *netwar* concerns the new enemies that resort to networks: drug cartels, activists, terrorists, and so on. The *cyberwar* applies to the new forms of war that are made possible by controlling the technologies of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. During the first Gulf War and in former Yugoslavia's conflicts, the doctrine of information dominance was put forward to justify the myth of the 'clean' war, with its surgical strikes and collateral damage.

However, the launching of a global war against terrorism, following the 9/11 2001 attacks, inflicted a serious blow to the 'information revolution' myths on which the so-called 'revolution in military affairs' and 'revolution in diplomatic affairs' were based. The least one can say is that its foundations are cracked. Let us mention the following: the end of CNN's hegemony, the symbol of the global media since the first Gulf War, which found itself competing with other sources of information during the second Gulf War; the crisis of the United States' image; the crisis affecting the belief in 'technological totality', that is, the unshakeable faith in the electronic panoptic devices of civil and military intelligence or surveillance, aiming to control the flows of the planet; the demise of the sanitised war; the crisis in representing globalisation actually governed by the sole immaterial resource and rediscovery of long-term geopolitical issues linked to the control of energy supplies; the loss of credibility of the *leitmotiv* stating the end of the state and nation-state. Ultra-liberalism rediscovered the virtues of nationalism and of public authorities' repressive prerogatives (defence, security, police).

Above all, the idea of universalism is in crisis. The doctrines postulating the construction of world hegemony have been shaken up. The occupation of Iraq showed the gaps in a specific strategic thought anchoring culture and cultures in 'communicational totalization'. Violence is now presented as the crucial agent in order to achieve the economic project of global integration, or better, the 'shaping of the world' to quote the language of strategists. *Softpower* gave way when hard versions of power and constraint appeared. The new model of empire embodied by the United States combines the use of force and control over economic and financial mechanisms, the mobilisation of world multilateral institutions (WTO, IMF, World Bank) for their own profit. The control of electronic time, real-time observation and targeting, is a common instrument to these two aspects of the construction and maintenance of supremacy. *Timely knowledge flow*: since the Afghanistan war and the massive use of the couple networks-sensors-drones that fluidify the chain of decisions, this terminology which has been founding the new military doctrine of network-centric war is shared by the strategists of global firms. 'Competitive advantage' and 'traceability' are two terms that account for tracking down enemies (within the country or outside) as well as for the observation of the course of production and consumption. The new combination of military force and economic coercion considerably extended the sphere of activity of propaganda, manipulation and media lying, thus discrediting the belief in the advent of an integration of particular societies within the global market through the means of metabolic action resulting from the universal standards of information and communication.

The law-and-order paradigm as a mode of government shapes the architecture of world networks. One illustration is the militarisation of space, as testified by the Pharaonic projects of satellite coverage. More globally, the tightening of institutions around the objective of national security tends to revive the old synergetic schemes that legitimated, during the Cold War, the military-industrial complex when university research, industry, and military and civil intelligence organisations were brought together. The agenda is about the construction of an integrated database-network system intended to centralise and cross reference information on individuals (social security, credit cards, bank accounts, judicial profiles, movements, and so forth) for the purposes of 'pre-emption' and 'prevention of terrorism'. The regime of exception has a serious impetus at world level, first through unilateral measures and then through multilateral agreements. Consequently, in 2004, the United States obtained from the European Union, following many pressures and threats of sanction, the right to be systematically informed of all the data that enables establishing the profile of each passenger on transatlantic flights. In the end, this meant departing from the directive on the protection of private life.

The European Union resisted for a long time the use of the term 'internal security', preferring the expression 'social security'. Bomb attacks in Madrid (March 2004) and in London (July 2005) finally made the EU step forward. The budget dedicated to research in the field of 'internal security' increased and the big European electronics and aerospace groups, in the civil and military domain, determined not to leave the security market to the largely dominant American enterprises, allied themselves with university centres through consortiums.

Q: What is your assessment of the United Nations' attempts to address global information inequalities and the digital divide?

A: Two United Nations agencies are official parties to the negotiations on this question, as it comes under their institutional competence: the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), housing the world summit on information society; and the UNESCO, through its programmes on infoethics as a condition for the respect of cultural and linguistic diversity. The wish to make up the disparities in accessing information and knowledge between industrialised countries and developing countries, as well as within these societies, actually justified the ITU and UNESCO's mobilisation around the world summit which took place in two phases: in Geneva (December 2003) and then in Tunis (November 2005), which appeared to be a very bad choice as the current regime muzzled its opponents and censored the freedom of expression on the Internet.

From the first phase of the summit, fundamental differences appeared around the pluralist project of constructing 'societies of knowledge' for all in the sphere of circulation and production, and also around the univocal project of a 'global information society', that was oblivious to the power struggles in cultures and economies. Different visions of society clashed, each one referring to architectures and uses that have little to do with the information and communication networks on a worldwide scale. From this point of view, the *prepcoms* or preparatory conferences turned out to be a genuine laboratory. Because, for the first time in the history of the United Nations, when the international institution decided to take into account the organisation of communication networks, 'civil society' was invited, as a sociopolitical subject, to give its opinion when working out the declaration of principles

and plans for action. The representatives of the private sector, coordinated by the International Chamber of Commerce, spoke in favour of reducing the role of public policies, creating the best environment for investments, and argued that the promotion of local diversity should not cause 'unreasonable barriers to commerce'. Civil society put on the agenda the finality of technological innovation and of the models of development associated with its upsurge. This kind of argument goes against the discourses on 'the digital gap' that tend to relegate to a position of secondary importance the reasons related to the aggravation of socio-economic disparities. Overstating the digital marginalisation screens the countless sources of social division. Let us start with the field of education, that is, one of the origins of inequality. This agenda has possible variations: the need to link the digital experiences to the memory of the social appropriation of previous technologies, particularly the radio; priority to literacy schemes, education and research, to human rights, to knowledge as the heritage of humankind, to cultural and linguistic diversity, to media diversity against the processes of capitalist concentration (a real taboo in all the United Nations agencies!), to the struggle against the discrimination of native peoples, immigrants and women, to cheaper Network connection costs, to questioning the regime of intellectual property and the recognition of free software, to the security of citizens' right to communicate currently under pressure by the law-and-order obsession. Despite the heterogeneity of their components, and despite the fact that we may express doubts about the criteria that prevail when accrediting NGOs, the appointed representatives of the organised civil society managed to express in a single voice – but without renouncing their differences – when it came to claiming the primacy of 'the communication rights' as new social rights: freedom, access, diversity, participation, within the framework of public policies. Unsatisfied by the way the ITU were dealing with their propositions, they insisted on issuing their own statement before the Geneva summit. We can easily understand their reaction when we see the wavering mentality of many governments.

Still, the image of a global society affected by the magic of information technologies was inflicted a serious blow by the pleas from the organised civil society. Inside the UNESCO, the notion of 'information society' vies more and more with the notion of 'knowledge societies' which, contrary to the globalising representation induced by the former, puts forward the diversity of cultural, political and economic modes of appropriation concerning information and knowledge in each society.

The aim of the plan of action decided in Geneva was to reduce the 'digital divide' before 2015, connecting schools, libraries, hospitals, local and national public administrations, and so on, to the Internet. 'Connectivity' became the keyword. E-education, e-health, e-government, constitute its display case. The risk incurred by the Final Statement is to proclaim great principles with which no one can disagree, that is, principles concerning solidarity among peoples in the world, international cooperation, cultural identities, and so on, while the technicist ideology is still rife, in depth. This risk is even more real when big industrialised countries refuse to mobilise public resources in order to finance a 'digital solidarity fund'. In order to initiate the demand, the philanthropic foundations of the information industry's transnational firms are ready to fill in the gap created by the lack of political will from states. We are far from meeting the recommendations of the 1999 report by the United Nations Program for Development (UNDP) intended to overcome the digital divide: to tax the international telecommunication flows and the patents deposited at the World

Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO), as these operations employ common world resources.

In practice, one of the most innovative experiences at the level of financial resources comes from the world network of cities and local authorities. This experiment in decentralised cooperation contrasts with the overcautiousness of many states. Initiated by the cities of Lyon (France) and Geneva (Switzerland), a first world summit of cities and local authorities against the digital divide was held a week before the first meeting of the world meeting on the information society. Openly claiming to be 'part of civil society', these new agents undertook to participate in the struggle against exclusion, in particular by supplying the fund for digital solidarity. This political will was confirmed the day before the second meeting of the world summit on the information society. The minister of culture of the Basque government handed over to the Secretary-General of the United Nations the proposals from the second world summit of cities and local authorities against the digital divide that had just taken place in the city of Bilbao. During the same meeting in Tunis, the official delegations parted after mere declarations of intent concerning financing which was, crucially, one of the two main issues on the agenda.

The other controversial issue concerns the reform of Internet governance that was on the second meeting's agenda. The Web is indeed managed by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN). Endowed with a special status (it is a non-profit company under Californian law), this organisation has been controlling, since 1998, the access to all virtual domain, whether it is generic (com.,org.,gov.,edu., and so on) or national. Ultimately, it comes under the authority of the American Department of Commerce which delegated the job to the ICANN. Even the changes made to databases by the private firm in charge of the plan need to be agreed by the ministerial services. The lever allowing the American administration to exercise its geopolitical hold over the Internet and which gives it, at least in theory, the prerogative to exclude a country from the world network, is primarily technical: the 'roots-servers', which are the bridgehead of the addressing system. The very topography of these roots-servers illustrates the tropism of world flows and the reality of 'global information dominance' exercised by the solitary hyper-power: thirteen powerful computers, installed in the United States (four in California and six near Washington), and one each in Stockholm, in London and in Japan. The great majority of countries (especially the whole European Union) and particularly active governments, like Brazil, China and Iran, argued that the management of the system should be entrusted to an independent organisation related to the United Nations or shared with other partners in order to supervise the running of the Web. For their part, most organisations of the civil society had made this reform their key issue. In spite of this unanimity, and despite the UN Secretary-General's exhortation to change the rules of the game, Washington maintained its hegemony, underscoring how vulnerable the system would be to the terrorist threat as well as the incessant pursuit of technical innovation, and the need to stop censorship from some governments and to avoid takeover by bureaucrats. In June 2005, the Department of Commerce notified its refusal to consider a new status for the Internet as follows: 'The United States will continue to support an approach based on the market and the leadership of the private sector in the development of the Internet'. The compromise solution led to creating a new regulating institution for the Web: the 'Forum for Internet Governance'. This international cooperation tool around public interest

issues is a sphere of dialogue with no decision-making power. Governments as well as representatives from the private sector and the organised civil society will sit there.

In fact, without being necessarily authorised to solve all the questions raised by NGOs and some governments from the South, the world summit on information society, without knowing it and despite its obvious limits, half-opened the black box of the institutions that have a central role in structuring the so-called 'World Information Order'. These institutions not only include the ICANN but also the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO), an intergovernmental agency that only joined the United Nations system in 1974 and whose function is to define through its treaties the standards regulating the production, distribution and use of learning and knowledge. The first one is in charge of deregulating telecommunication networks and liberalising audiovisual and cultural services through the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). As for the WIPO, it is directly concerned with patenting common public goods, a growing activity illustrated by the private appropriation of learning and knowledge by cognitive monopolies. Let me give a few examples: the informatic codes and the control of technical standards, the development of proprietary formats, the living, plant varieties, the seeds or the biotechnological medicines, and so forth. The expansion of knowledge monopolies and of their short-term profit-making logics may increase the gap between the info-rich and the info-poor, thus restraining the collective ability to develop general interest innovations. This is why the Argentinian and Brazilian governments submitted, at the end of 2004, a reform bill aiming at the functioning rules of the WIPO. This is a clear indication of the weight acquired by the new primary resources of 'information and knowledge' in the formation of economic value.

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