

Crioulas Media: Technology, Language and Identity from a Quilombola Community in Brazil to the Multicultural World

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Abstract

In this chapter I discuss issues around the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) by info-excluded communities, using the example of the experience of a Quilombola community in Brazil and the intercultural movement *Identidades*. The community is located in Conceição das Crioulas in the Brazilian state of Pernambuco. The struggle for land possession, led primarily by women, represents 200 years of the community's history. Depleted at various levels, organized around a subsistence economy, the community additionally faces gender equality problems and the severities resulting from dry and arid land. With a history of conflict – including the construction of their Quilombola identity – their tradition of participatory decision-making, which transformed them into a nationally studied model, created the need for the population to access the means to tell their own history and also to serve their collective struggles and aspirations. This need brought the community together with 'Identidades (identities) intercultural movement'. In April 2005, as a result of this experience, a group of young members of this community formed 'Crioulas Vídeo' (creole video) and their contact with ICT started at this time. They are the first Quilombola producers, and nowadays use video, photography and the web as a means of expression, in an autonomous and independent manner. This chapter will examine the impact and the consequences of ICT in terms of power, culture, language and identity, using the Conceição das Crioulas collective experience as a reference. It will question the implementation of technologies that were developed from Western models, ignoring and excluding other societies and cultures such as the community in question. Finally, this chapter relates this experience to some debates in the *Multiculturalism, Conflict and Belonging* conference.

Key Words: Identity, Quilombola, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), power, culture, language, interface, conflict, media, extensions.

1. Culture as a Medium

The orchestra of xylophones of the VaChopi – people who inhabit the south-east of Mozambique, in Inhambane province – is called *timbila*. *Timbila* is the plural of *m'bila*, the name that people give to the marimba. To the sound of the Timbila orchestra, the dancers move their bodies, muzimba, frantically.

Timbila and *muzimba* are closely linked, as there is in Chopi a close link between *kusinha* (dance) and *kuveta* (play), full communication that can lead to dialogue between soloists of both parts.¹

Timbila Muzimba is a group that combines musical instruments, rhythms and melodies of the Mozambican tradition with images and sounds of the contemporary world. Together with the *timbilas* it is possible to witness, the sounds of a bass guitar and a saxophone. Basically, the contemporary and the traditional adapt to each other, because, Timbila Muzimba is an urban cultural environment more than a band, continuing the VaChopi in the contemporary context. One may believe that electric instruments and gadgets brought modernity to this environment, but actually bass guitar and saxophone entered the *kuveta* and *kusinha* of *timbila* and cannot be disconnected from them; they are part of a whole and cannot be heard or played separately. For music producers this indivisibility produces, an unusual conflict because it is not possible to record the instruments separately since they can only act as a whole. There is no score to follow, there is only Timbila Muzimba: a culture that mediates with the instruments!

In *The Spell of the Sensuous*, David Abram's premise: 'we are human only in contact and conviviality, with what is not human' does not imply the renunciation of our complex technologies; it rather implies 'that we must renew our acquaintance with the sensuous world in which our techniques and technologies are all rooted.' Abram seeks to explain the importance of technologies in our progressive separation from nature, saying that it was the *animate earth* that allowed the emergence of these technologies.²

Timbila Muzimba integrates electronic technologies, maintaining the indigenous VaChopi oral culture as a medium, where this relationship with the *animate earth* remains. The electric bass, despite carrying the 'distanciation' from the *animate earth*, together with the *timbilas*, does not prevent us from approaching the *sensuous world* of the Vachopi. This issue of separation and return is present in all technologies and to regard culture as a medium is the basis of the integration of the various instruments that they can compose. When we speak of ICT, we have to keep in mind that these technologies carry with them the weight of a distance, the largest to which man manages to extend himself, and, at the same time, the need for approximation with the origin, from which these distances separate us: Nature. The Net is the word and medium that carries, absorbs and expands the ICT. In this chapter, we will analyse this medium from two perspectives:

- The Net as the need for a return, which frees us from logic and languages implied by various media. Nowadays, we can combine multiple possibilities of exploration of various

media, breaking with their syntax as an opportunity to build new languages.

- The Net as a departure, insofar as it carries grammars produced in the Western world through related cities.

2. The Net as the Need for a Return

We have to understand the media while framing them in their evolution throughout history, particularly in Western culture, in which the media characterize humans at the same time as the media is characterized. This symbiosis between technology and humans changed the perceptual field. At the same time the technology that was developed from the perceptual field is being altered. David Abram, following Merleau-Ponty says that ‘the event of perception, experientially considered, is an inherently interactive, participatory event, a reciprocal interplay between the perceiver and the perceived.’ And adds that ‘For language, although it is rooted in perception, nevertheless has a profound capacity to turn back upon, and influence, our sensorial experience.’³

The media are extensions of the human body. In the case of communication media, extensions of thought and of the body, that is, thought becomes the content of a medium, speech. By developing language, humans influenced their way of thinking. By inventing writing, they in a sense influenced perception, communication, thought, their brains and themselves. And in another sense influenced all the other media that followed: press, photography, cinema, internet, society, in short, themselves anew.

A medium may always be considered as a *multimedium*. This is one of the conclusions we may take from the aphorism ‘the medium is the message’⁴. When we consider that the content of a medium is another medium, it is the content of a container. It is also true that if the medium is changed, the message is also inevitably changed. In the history of technology, several media have evolved and influenced one other in diverse manners: painting as a medium and painting in photography, for instance, are influenced by their development, and return and repeat that influence throughout history in a permanent symbiosis. We are referring to a bidirectional interaction: influence is scattered to the adjacent media, to the painting content (drawing) and the photography container (video). Therefore, successively, the appearance of a new medium or the changes suffered in a medium have consequences for all media.

If we analyze a medium such as writing, the ‘container’ of speech, we see, from its origin until today, a game between the human mind and language, in a symbiosis that shapes a system, at the same time as this system shapes its agents. Derrick de Kerckhove explains these origins, in *The Skin of Culture*, taking as his starting point the research of Denise Schmandt-Besserat, where the relationships between the invention of money and the invention of writing emerge. Kerckhove shows the consequences of an alphabetic model that conditioned our mind, at the

same time that it was built by it: 'Because of the sequential properties of our alphabetic conditioning, the western mind has also been trained to divide information into small chunks and reassemble them in a left-right sequential order.'⁵ According to Kerckhove, this system had an impact on our mind and one of the effects was, for example, the invention of perspective. He concludes that 'The alphabet has supported the basic inspiration and the models for the most powerful codes of mankind: the atomic structure, the genetic string of amino acids, the computer bit.'⁶ The very example of the alphabet as software keeps us in this fragmented world that separates the mind, as software, from its brain, as hardware. This is a continuation of 'Descartes' error' in separating 'mind from body'.⁷ António Damásio acknowledges that this error could be ascribed to Plato, as does Abram, when he shows that the origin of this separation may be present in Hellenistic philosophy and in the Judeo-Christian tradition in that 'Indeed, they both made use of the strange and potent technology which we have come to call 'the alphabet''.⁸ In the chapter 'Globalisation, Transculturalism and Environment: Sharing and Understanding Indigenous Perspectives through Poetry', we can find more reflections about the separation between mind, body and environment.⁹ António Cuadrado-Fernandez shows us how to access the imagination of the poetry of the indigenous people, which is, from my point of view, inseparable from the *animate earth*.

Humans shape language like language shapes humans. The media shape contents and contents shape media. Particularly when these contents are 'needs' or messages that need to expand their containers, developing technologies that create changes in people's perceptions. In this crossroad of media, man himself becomes a medium carrying on the necessary mutations, from the invention of the alphabet and its consequences in human perception to the conception of a fragmented and fragmentary world. In this text I analyze the technological and social evolutions, that have culminated in a *netocracy*, (a society dominated by the power of the network), for a better understanding of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and of the Net in which the *medium is the user*.¹⁰ As McLuhan foresaw, the Net is an extension of the brain, electrical energy is pure information and, in fact, simulates the conditions of our central nervous system.¹¹ It is therefore a privileged medium for the *return* and to *renew our acquaintance with the sensuous world*.

If a medium such as writing transformed the world 'to its measure', a fragmented world, a medium like the Net, like an extension of our 'central nervous system', probably gives us back ways of thinking and relating closer to our origin as humans. This does not mean to say that this is a regression; on the contrary, there is a need to free dormant logic and language by various media. The internet has already witnessed the deconstruction of grammars and syntaxes developed by the Western world, for example the oralization of writing and the introduction of ideographic characters such as the emoticon, the Renaissance perspective and the

film grammar (frame, shot, scene, sequence introduced by D. W. Griffith), are dissolved in a multidimensional world. My second perspective – analyzing the influence of the Net with the *bidirectionality* that a medium demands – is a challenge that needs a generalized vision of human history.

3. The Net as a Departure and a Consequent Estrangement

In this section I focus on the anthropological field in the classical sense and on urban anthropology at the same time. Man has transferred his evolution, the evolution of his own body, to extensions, thus accelerating the process of evolution. As an organism, man has created his own extensions by taking them to a specialization level in which they substitute nature; he created new worlds (cities, for example) and has inevitably fractured his relationship with the rural environment. Being Non-places, cities are collective areas articulated between political space (*polis*) and public space (*urbs*). Presently, *polis*, which may be mistaken with power, is actually merely strength; however it is not capable of controlling the *urbs*. As for the *urbs*, we already can speak of power, more accurately of potentiality, the true demonstration of the public space.¹²

In *The Perfect Crime*, Baudrillard speaks of the ‘disappearance of the Real’, making space for illusion and fiction, suggesting that the ‘extensions of man’ tend to be ‘exclusions of man’.¹³ The failure of today’s cities is the result of human extensions: a complete disentanglement from Nature and human condition. The *polis* has become a space that has stopped serving the *urbs*, and the *urbs* is composed by so many different individuals that they become more and more detached from the *polis*. The only aspects uniting them is anonymity, the constant search for identity in a ‘liquid modernity’¹⁴, and the refusal of *polis*. This failure obviously first took place in the so-called under-developed societies for several reasons. However, considering this chapter’s study, it remains important to study the cultural and technological causes.

At present, with ‘nodalization’¹⁵ (extensive migration across national borders to cultural centers), instead of countries, the West is made of cities, borderless spaces; all the technology that has emerged has been configured and dematerialized, and it has also configured those cities; this is the Occidental man’s and extensions’ ‘biotope’. ‘Man and his extensions constitute one interrelated system. It is a mistake of the greatest magnitude to act as though man were one thing and his house or his cities, his technology or his language were something else.’¹⁶ This is the ‘cultural dimension’ invisible in the Western exportations to other countries, creating deep fractures with the other likewise-hidden cultural dimensions. The present model of the cities’ *polis*, of technologies and languages is condemned in front of an *urbs* profoundly related to Nature. This model is also condemned in the long run, by a complete withdrawal from Nature, with man forgetting and misunderstanding it.

With this double perspective into account, we face the following problem:

- Facing culture as a medium and as a narrative, the discussion about ICT as fiction or scientific research media has much to do with the author's perspective and with the public's eye. Once we all live in fiction and narrative, will it be enough to merely introduce the new media to excluded villages, in order to let mediation be performed?

4. The Experience

Since 1996, a intercultural movement called 'Identidades'¹⁷ has been promoting relations between Mozambique, Cape Verde, Brazil and Portugal. This movement consists mainly of students and teachers of the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Porto (FBAUP) and is based in Gesto Cultural Cooperative. Today we may for example refer to, 'Identidades - Portuguese group' and 'Identidades - Mozambican group'. This trend seems to be the result of the sharing feeling enveloping Identidades. From the various cultures traversed by Identidades, new groups with the same desires appear; it is thus no longer an energy emanating from Portugal, but an intrinsic energy of all joining countries, converging in the project proposed by Identidades: a truly intercultural movement.

The trajectory of Identidades carried ICT to communities that are economically in a subsistence phase. The latest case, is the Conceição das Crioulas in the Brazilian Northeast, 550 km away from the capital Recife, far from the tourist destinations on the Brazilian coast. There are neither tropical beaches there, nor even drinking water. The place is barren and dry, surrounded by hills. In the eighteenth century, six black women have settled down in this adverse terrain and tried to survive. Women are leading this Quilombola community since the beginning, which still maintains its matrifocal spirit. Quilombos are an ethnic group of predominantly rural black population, descended from slaves, which defines itself through relationships with their land, kinship, territory, ancestry, traditions and cultural practices. The willpower of these women surviving in hostile environments, characterizes the community today and the struggle for land still continues with different contours. Approximately 3,800 people survive in the region, through to family farming and handicrafts. In addition to the disadvantages of the territory and the consequent lack of resources, the inhabitants, like their ancestors, struggle for what is theirs by right. The core of this struggle is about the possession and use of land usurped by large landowners.

Crioulas have become prisoners of their land and habits. They have built their history autonomously, by overcoming the hardships; they have built their character by the organizational power that characterizes them and gained freedom in the spirit rooted in the handicraft that they nowadays embrace. The earth resists the *Crioula* and the *Crioula* resist the land until they are confounded with one another.

Their land has been stolen, without understanding the strong unity linking the *Crioulas* and their land.

Since August 2003, invited by the Centro de Cultura Luíz Freire, Identidades is involved in various activities in the Conceição das Crioulas. In 2004, during a meeting, the community's interest rose towards the Video Workshop provided by Identidades, particularly in Mozambique and Cape Verde. The people of Conceição das Crioulas were used to seeing documentaries and stories about their own community, but the result never pleased them. They never identified themselves with the stories told by others and wanted to tell their own story through a videographic medium. Identidades provided the media and expertise to perform this task, and in April 2005, the organization offered a video workshop for five days at the Conceição das Crioulas' Vila-Centro. The equipment provided included an Apple iMac G4, a Sony 'digital 8' video camera, a tripod and a microphone. During this workshop, the Crioulas Vídeo was born; this team has since produced several videos from the community.

In April 2005, computers, cameras and video were absolutely new here, having been seen only with visitors and in occasional workshops. The Conceição das Crioulas Quilombola Association (AQCC) had an old PC for office use. The relationship with new technology was practically nonexistent and the participants in this workshop were taking the first steps. In front of cameras, people would come closer or feel uncomfortable. Suspicion hovered and curiosity never disappeared. In the community the few that had television shared it, placing the set in front of the window, facing the road, so that everyone could see. At that time, in a predominantly rural community, people in the middle of the road looked towards the interior of a house and saw the outside world beyond Conceição. In August of the following year, Internet broadband arrived to AQCC (the single post in the community). In the meantime Crioulas Vídeo has produced over 20 videos, independently and professionally. The people are no longer shy in front of the camera. Video has become a political tool, a true weapon of promotion of Conceição and, sometimes, the proof that was lacking of the hostilities suffered by the community.

In August 2007 there was no mobile network in Conceição das Crioulas, but several people used a multimedia phone in Salgueiro, the nearest city, almost 42km away. Credit systems have also arrived. Several houses now have a TV, satellite and a DVD player. Some already have a refrigerator despite the impossibility of filling it up with food. Drinking water is closer but still inaccessible. The world invades Conceição with its vices. The 'Information Project' came to Conceição. What is the role of the people who resist and keep struggling for their land and identity?

Crioulas Vídeo increased their videographic productivity with their documentary 'Serra das Princesas', broadcast by Recife University TV as well as by the Portuguese festival *Tom de Video* in Tondela . The team participated in a

collective documentary project 'Açude de Conceição', which was selected for the audiovisual festival *Visões Periféricas*. They receive commissions from various institutions and through this generate income. The team also trained new members from the community's youth and also began to train other Quilombola communities. It is one of the major community institutions and well known in other Quilombola communities. Yet the message needs to go further. We decided, therefore, to take a further step and create a multimedia workshop.

The Internet usage in AQCC was focused on email exchange, chats and little else. Many have their own MSN, Orkut and Hi5 accounts, yet we wish to start using this medium as a broadcaster and generator of the Conceição das Crioulas Quilombola identity. To this effect we organized a web publishing workshop with two Crioulas Vídeo members. In this workshop we created the Crioulas Vídeo and community website.¹⁸ Hoping to develop with upcoming workshops, a working group explores this new medium in the same way they have done with video.

5. The Interfaces: Netocracy and Africa

A new culture has developed in this technological world. Those closer to the structures of new media understand the Internet's power in terms of control of the masses. A new class has arisen that dominates the masses and don't follow the paradigms of the past: They are the 'netocrats', who manipulate information artistically, managing to capture the attention of the multitudes and keep them prisoners of their webs.¹⁹ Once again, the consequences in terms of power, culture and identity are almost invisible if not hidden.

When we open the door of the Net to a community, we are exporting the entire universe discriminating, isolating, and forgetting this community. We are, however, also offering these people a political tool to defend themselves from this world and to enable the community to expand their message and identity. Time will tell the benefits and damages of this process. We now believe that the benefit is addressed to the 'developed' world, by opening a window to a different way of living.

By realizing that Africa is not limited to the continent and that, by virtue of globalization, it has multiplied into several communities around the world, we chose the Quilombola community of Conceição das Crioulas because it lives the deep contrast of the issues addressed: the community lives in constant search of its Quilombola identity, whose deepest roots remain in Africa. In the search for new media as means of expression of their identity, the community finds languages that are not theirs. These new media, supposedly integrating and bringing time and space closer, such as their past in Africa, at the same time distance the community with grammars and syntaxes developed for the Western world, bringing conflict to this process. The community is in a rebuilding process, from its identity to the media it uses. Everything is questioned. With regard to this issue, it is also up to us to reduce and understand this separation, using new media for recuperation and

integration purposes. The Internet, potentially demanding universal accessibility and participation in the creative process of new languages, is in rupture with one-way media. If this process of reconstruction is a parallel challenge to info-excluded communities, embracing them in the same project will be the first step to success.

We can only assess that we did not find multiculturalism in this project, we understand the *other* as opposed and it is in conflict that we find an authentic intercultural laboratory; a laboratory where ‘guinea pigs’ – ourselves and others – are in deep reconstruction and in need of rebuilding their languages and interfaces, in order to face this experience.

In an internet increasingly focused on semantics, we do not find a universal translating interface, nor do we find the translation of certain African words in the world of information. It is necessary that they appear and inspire these new media, spaces and times. Like Timbila Muzimba incorporated the contemporary instruments in their band, hopefully African culture will engage with ICT transforming these and themselves. By using them with the close connection existing between new media and Nature, let us learn from and in Africa what we have been losing with our extensions.

6. Intercultural Labs: Launching the Debate

This intercultural laboratory, promoted by the ‘Identidades intercultural movement’, is as important in the context of research and internal action as in its confrontation in debates with the exteriority of the movement. To the relation between return and estrangement, we have added the relation between ‘inside and outside’, linking frontiers that, in such context, lose their configuration and bewilder our crucial references. These are conflicting spots we had to face. They are the basis of the identities carried and faced in each space during this experience.

Conscious of moving on risky grounds and in a permanent quest for balance, we have ignited several inertias as a counterbalance, knowing that when the participative dynamics are potentiated, or when a single community is given power through technology, such power drives in different uncontrollable directions, starting by learning the sense of experience. In this way, we acquire the power in a configuration process that the power is released for others. This game of power resignation is inevitable, which prevents the balance between the parts (the communities and us), maybe contributing even more to the imbalance than the inherent social-cultural inequality. In this conflict, we have studied the hypothesis concerning the suspension effort of the improvements which are endogenous to the movement itself. In that sense of sought apathy, we have moved forward with a set of actions coming out from the needs of the community. Therefore, the greater effort is to hold back our own rhetoric, our own certainties and habits because we know that these impulses may more easily lead to ruptures rather than strengthen the relationships we have embraced. Those impulses suspend the immediate

successes of the experience so that this experience may also be developed in unknown areas, more exactly what we want and what we can learn. This process, understood as a method, allows the actions to swallow us and savour themselves, following the concepts of Brazilian 'Antropophagy movement' and 'tropicalism'. It also permits learning to reciprocally emanate from the processes and avoiding the risk of adopting a paternalist attitude, or to make use of the exercise of power. From each individual's point of view, I believe that we also seek the unknown inside ourselves, the inter-subjective space that is neither the *self* nor the *other*: *neither space*.²⁰ A space inside each one and the other that belongs to no-one, but from where one can express belongingness to difference.

In the Identidades movement, both multiple 'experiences' and the study of everyone involved are subjects of reflection and discussion at a regular basis. This habit has evolved into systematization and organization of the participative reflection, which we identify as a field of action and research. In this sense, the roots of this reflection lie in action, and this particularity has determined what has become the conducting line of the movement: the need to merge reflection and activities. Action has led us to research (not to mention that research may lead us to action) and has strengthened the intercultural sense in the activity and its own dynamic, where the production of shared knowledge only supports and strengthens the path, removing the possibility of deviating its course. The nature of this process binds the potentiated and promoted research, focusing on the problematic which makes the movement move. However, the pursued thoroughness and 'scientism', both derived from the community's interests and necessarily and consciously from our interests, concerns and epistemological accuracy, are never cast aside. Everybody's earning is shared with the others and it has never become a collectivized force, but only a set of forces filled up with the enriching multiple personalities embodying it, thus establishing relations among themselves, even in a contradictory and conflicting manner. This strength avoids the formation of a doctrinaire collective, where imposition rules. These are the tensions that keep the movement together, which is established by the game of affectations that determines its volunteering, democratic and participative sense.

The conscious rejection of having collective doctrinaire ideas derives from the organicity of this movement and from its 'dehierarchization', therefore favoring the 'shared lessons' in debates, joint experiments, and in daily life, for each participant's individual and intimate ground. The effort lies in the establishment of objective, practical and reflective conditions so that everybody may acquire maximum experience and strengthen their knowledge, in order to preview new events, sustained in more developed epistemological constructions. Each participant belonging to diverse fields of action and research interconnects the otherness of their experience, cross their learning in movement, disseminates and discussed his/her ideas in (inter)national forums. There we find a new strength, a

new knowledge coming from diverse spaces of organized knowledge, distant from our experiences, but whose parallels are visible and relevant for our activity.

In the field of international and multicultural debates, the confrontation of ideas is assumed in an uncommitted and fearless way, or the quest for a qualified and deep understanding of the epistemological complexity that is part of the world of art, design and development and of artistic education. In this chapter, the quest for inertia in the field of intercultural action is understood in an inverse manner and dispensable in favor of a declared search for conflict, authority and fight for power.

We face these academic spaces as another ‘community’, as another experience in which, transformed by the activities we submit ourselves to, we carry those actions of knowledge and meaning and the uncomfortable feeling of imbalance in which we move. This consciousness justifies our scientific interventions and endows them with a positive, factual, affirmative and emotionally involving weight.

7. Society as Fiction

In ‘the Net as a return and departure’, we pointed out life between ‘narrative and fiction’, evoking the presence of a subjacent narrative in everyone, at least in the history of these cultures. It is a space of the imaginary inspired in reality, which transforms reality at the same time. In this aspect, the distinction between fiction and reality becomes diffuse, particularly when the space that tells both stories, fiction and reality, is the medium space. It is not surprising that, in a century marked by audiovisual domination as the twentieth century was, the essence of history has been represented by cinema, as it was the technology that best expressed this essence, often anticipating it.²¹ Actually, within the audiovisual media, we could have been tempted to select the documentary model as the most appropriate portrait of the 20th century’s history. But cinema remains in fact the closest to this history and portrays it more accurately.²²

Fictional space is inherent to political space. The latter contaminates the first, having made it an instrument of the various ideologies throughout history. The History of the West enables us to make this statement. The documentary format has often been used as propaganda and directly as a political instrument. Cinema has also been used many times as a political instrument, but being the great model of consumption was what most transformed our *sensuous world* and reality itself that, let’s not forget, is a consumer reality. Essentially, the anachronistic properties of cinema and fiction were often able to anticipate reality more efficiently than any other documentary focused on the future.

We emphasize that, more than the idea of country, the idea of city prevails in the Occident and although the *polis*, as a political space is close to fiction and detached from the *urbs*, cities did not become fiction due to the *urbs*. Albin Wagener defined ‘nation’ as fiction in the session ‘Problematizing Nationalism’ of the conference *Multiculturalism, Conflict and Belonging* (2010), and develops this

concept with respect to ‘access to French citizenship’ in his chapter: ‘Representations and Defence Processes in Cross-Cultural Conflicts: France and the Case of its ‘National Identity’.’²³ It seems that today’s nations are fictions or a nation is ‘an imagined political community.’²⁴ These fictions support politics and are also used to support certain cities usually known as capitals. The concept of nation has become obstructive to the country administration in several grounds. We are interested in analyzing this from a multicultural perspective. The idea of nation is an illusion of belonging which hides culture. We realize that in intercultural relations, the local/regional is a more important referent than nationality. Forgetting this aspect has led independent countries to adopt the former colonizing countries’ language, which has culminated in the disappearance of hundreds of autochthonous languages, often leaving the search for identity in one of the few remaining ‘ethnic heritage(s)’, i.e. traditional clothes. As Cheryl Sim shows us in chapter: ‘The *Cheongsam*: A Site of Wonder and Contestation for Canadian Women of Chinese Heritage.’²⁵ Parts of narratives still remain in these habits, a fictional and real space waiting to be rescued by people, like a Crioulas Vidéo which may be able to transform that space into an image, or Timbila Muzimba which may give narrative back to the ‘image of dance’ (inseparable from music). The narrative of culture, present in the ‘image of the dance’, can also be rescued in the text and photo of a book, as in the concrete case: ‘The Image of Dance and the Narrative of Secular Culture in Edward Said’s *After the Last Sky*’ that Rachid Belghiti presents in this volume, showing the epistemological fields open by this ‘image of the dance’ and how that image transforms the structure of the narrative of the book itself.²⁶

In a wider sense, the whole society is fiction and only people are real – it is from this perspective that Jacques Rancière explains what emancipation is: ‘learn how to be equal in an unequal society.’²⁷

We insist on the idea that both in rural and in urban areas, laboratories of ideas start in *urbs*, people, and culture. It is in acting and observing within the several cultural experiences that we may analyze what might be the principles of intercultural politics. If there are ‘thick’ and ‘thin’²⁸ aspects in cultures, attention and discussion about both should be balanced. Western politics suffers from the temptation to only discuss the thick aspects, because these can be regulated. As one is tempted to again evoke Baudrillard: ‘Touche pas à ma différence’ (Hands off my difference!), following his findings about ‘Rights as universal reference’.²⁹ But, concluding positively, I prefer to refer to the importance of tenuous (or thin) aspects like the connection to the *sensuous world* with culture.

8. Media Rethorics

Crioulas Vidéo’s early work, using fiction inspired by the stories and legends of the community, strengthened the relationships of the group and of Crioulas Vidéo with the community, manifesting a great sense of belonging. As works became

more institutionalized, either for the community or for the exterior like the Quilombola National Movement, and although those were very important works at a political level, such feeling of belonging seemed to fade away both in internal relations within the group and in the object itself, which is contaminated by medium grammar.

Several factors contribute to this, but the determinant factor is the rhetoric of the medium. The fact that the use of a medium implies ‘team work’ and ‘work organization’, establishes relational dynamics that makes decision sharing about ‘contents’ more scattered and often negotiated with ‘external’ interferences (either collaborative or ordered). The media impose a regulation (grammar) on the language so that ‘thick’ aspects do not leave much space for ‘thin’ aspects. In the language field, what, may survive within the medium rhetoric may be literally translated, i.e. transliterated. What often cannot be translated, due to the strength of culture, has to be *transcreated*, thus forcing grammar to be changed. Thus, if the message is changed, we have to change the media or its structure, mainly because the media grammar is not universal and may be built according to each culture. This is valid for any kind of technology. The withdrawal of some communities from the audiovisual reference world inevitably favor the search for a personal language which may be incorporated in laboratory contexts and therefore acquire a field resistant to appeals from the outside.

When establishing a parallel between this small-scale videographic experience (Crioulas Vídeo), the cinema and the 20th century’s history, it may then be possible to establish that if the community members work with the audiovisual media using their imaginary and their own defined grammar, the community will be not only reporting its history, which was their first goal, but also edifying its own resistance to draw its future.

9. Eulogy to Darkness Technology

Technological worlds still need to be discovered, submersed in cultures that did not have the opportunity to develop and organize knowledge about the latent technological competences, so that it could be adapted to the way living and sociological performances and solutions are configured.

We recall Junichiro Tanizaki’s question: ‘if we in the Orient had developed our own science?’³⁰ In the 30s, Tanizaki, disappointed with the disappearance of the shadow culture in the East due to the importation of the culture from the Western science and technology, put the hypothesis of the East to develop its own science, developing for instance the photographic technology, which would enable one to question: ‘how much better our own photographic technology might have suited our complexion, our facial features, our climate, our land.’³¹ These kinds of questions undress the commercial embarrassment made by facial recognition technologies that do not work in different ethnicities. These comical problems are far away from the invisible problems at the cultural level.

In the image of the city of Singapore, presented by Michael Kearney, in the chapter: ‘Designing Identity: An Attempt to Manufacture Singaporeans’³², in an operative field, it is possible to separate two languages as official (mother tongue) and technological. This is a *polis*-like solution so that an *urb* can have access to technology and to ‘progress’. This *urb* is swallowed by technological rhetoric or it may take advantage of that aspect to use that *neither space*, being conscious of these two languages and of what separates them. This dividing place can be used to expand concepts and develop technology to serve the *urb*. Another possibility is to face this question as a complex one, and consider that division, impeditive of a science sustained by culture, as a technology at the *urb*’s service. It is not at stake whether culture derives from this hybridism. What is at stake is a space of knowledge in the shadow, which would emerge from the same spot where people ‘are born’, thus establishing the belonging relation of such knowledge with people. This way, technology is established at the service of culture.

10. A Political Return

We constantly go back to politics and language because language is the political field. Ideas are completed in discourse, which is itself completed in media. If certain values are merged and mistaken and are mixed up to combine multiple ideologies and reach new values, which may satisfy this globalized world, there still is a possibility of rupture with the origin of these values. The difference is in the attempt to hold culture to ideological hybridism or, on the contrary, to make it from people and their ‘social’ experiences, i.e. to make it from cultures and everybody’s multiple identities and understand their new possibilities.

We undoubtedly need both actions and also the tension between them. The first hypothesis will always be the *top-down* actions problem, which due to the *urbs*’ distance is separated from it in a liquid reality that tries to keep the *urbs* impotent. As we have already discussed, we place our field of action in the second hypothesis. We are conscious that the rupture with certain ideals such as introduced by Enlightenment does not mean to discard them, but that a society built upon those ideals may be reoriented on needs distinct from those that fostered these ideas. This means that we may understand that the idea of equality is intrinsic to the idea of human, and that society inevitably promotes inequality. The human is used as a protocol; it is the equality unit used in unequal circumstances. *Learning how to be equal* becomes emancipation in this irregular ground. It is from this emancipation that the dynamics of power should be changed and new meanings and ideals should be created. This plan’s premises consider that each unit can communicate with one other and that, in case of misunderstanding, this misunderstanding may be used. After all, this is the best space for emancipation. Emancipation is the great victory of translation, as it is explained by Rancière in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*.

Jacotot's students' adventure with the bilingual text – in the mother tongue and in a foreign language – has not only enabled them to learn a new language, but also to experience a deep interiorization of the text's content. Above all, as Rancière tells, it is possible for an ignorant to learn from another ignorant; better said, all of us are ignorant and are learning from one other, because: 'This poetic labour of translation is at the heart of all learning.'³³ The translation exercise is another exploration of the possibility for language and thought to expand. Not only are we considering words; we mainly consider concepts because language may be the same, while culture may be different. In other words, the same concept circulating in different significance systems acquires different characteristics. In fact, words do not have meanings; they have uses.

From the conclusions of Alejandro Cervantes-Carson, in the *Multiculturalism Conflict and Belonging* conference, we can understand this circuit, starting a concept in the assertion hemisphere in a 'thick' quadrant, moving to a 'thin' quadrant and descending to the assignment hemisphere, finding the possible designations.³⁴ This fits into the technological moment we are experiencing. The sharing values held by networks become stronger, opening cultures in new communication channels: 'Not necessarily of shared values, but of sharing the value of communication.'³⁵ This is one of the possible responses to the problem of the 'exclusive power of culture' that Agnieszka Jarzewicz presents in the chapter: 'Cultural Entanglements of Human Rights Discourse'³⁶ There is no escape from the network contamination. We may consider the question of the meaning acquired by the network in each culture. What are the meanings present in the network within each culture? What emancipation capability do we create?

Translation is also a challenge between the message and the medium. If the interfaces are technology 'translators', they will have to be built on culture, which will necessarily result in different interfaces for equal individuals. This is the communication society's basic conflict, which emancipates in the multicultural field by using the network. This conflicting field gains ruling relevance in the intercultural laboratory promoted by the *Identidades* intercultural movement.³⁷

It is important to recall that in the binary reality black is as important as white and that *zero equals one*. What we ensure as neutral from a technological point of view has to be ensured from a resistant and emancipating political point of view. Even in the network, there will be cultures that due to their 'exclusive power' will close networks and make them more obscure. The fact of being under the same protocol implies that those are potential doors to be opened.³⁸ A door is opened whenever two different cultures meet, tolerating their differences in order to communicate. These intercultural relations emerging from two cultures open a way to the redefinition of both cultures and even society, with the basic principles of communication, respect for differences and the need to tolerate the organization of conflict areas. This conflict is solved because we want to be equal, while culturally

different. Communication becomes the ground to ‘put in common’ the differences to find new meanings and new differences.

The space of conflict is the conflict experience, which may expand concepts in virtues fostered by languages. The space of conflict is the *neither space*, which we may wish to not reach or accept, in order to try to remain in ‘between’. Following Daniel Hameline’s thought: ‘So we’ll keep at a distance the seductions of a chimeric and anonymous rationality, without thereby reclaiming the symmetric folly of salvation through the desperate celebration of unique differences.’³⁹

It is in the *other* that we may ‘belong’ and therefore create another identity among many others. This is the intercultural dynamic needed for multiculturalism, which, far from being unifying or based on domination, becomes plural and based on differences. Like the Net, which becomes a network of networks, we move from multiculturalism to multiculturalisms. This passage from the singular to the plural was suggested at the conclusion of the conference by Charlene Rajendran and we can follow it in the conclusions of her chapter: ‘Multicultural Belongings on the Contemporary Stage: Krishen Jit’s Theatre of Identity in Malaysia.’⁴⁰

11. Conflict on Language

We make new meanings out of daily routine; we give action back to the metaphysic plan in order to expand our limits. Our intercultural laboratory operates in actions between the communities and the Identidades members. Although such actions have their origin in communities, research about this activity is rarely focused on the problems of those communities, because this research emerges from everybody’s problems. This does not mean that we withdraw ourselves from the community’s problems; the problems are present in the activities and fundamentally in the emotional relationships established over the years and in the bonds of complicity established with the wishes of the populations.

The research dynamics are focused on the community when the members of this community are implicitly involved in Identidades. In this sense, activities organized by Identidades in Mozambique, Cape Verde, Brazil and Portugal carry the members of each of these countries to an intercultural context, for the sharing of ‘all’ crossed problems and, naturally, for the discussion grounds as well as for action and research. Despite being united by the same language and having a shared history, cultural conflicts emerge and, in its ambiguity, language raises communicability problems. In the Artistic Education International Meeting (EIEA) in Cape Verde, the word ‘*clarificar*’ (clarify) was pronounced several times. Márcia, one of the Quilombolas leaders of Conceição das Crioulas did not agree and insisted that the term ‘*negritar*’ (blacken) should be used (in Portuguese the word ‘*clarificar*’ means to ‘make clear’, therefore highlighting an idea, for example; playing with the words and colors associated to them, can also mean to ‘make whiter’). ‘*Negritar*’ is a neologism coming from the word ‘*negro*’, ‘black’ in Portuguese. The word ‘*negritar*’ raised several questions; probably everyone

associated them with the fact that the Quilombolas were mainly black. In Portuguese, *negrito* is also the ‘bold’ function in the word processor formatting tools used to highlight parts in a text (in this case ‘to darken’). Marcia has transformed this function into a verb giving it action and meaning. She gave it the highlighting sense associated to the word ‘*clarificar*’, but now belonging to the Quilombola point of view, adding a perspective, which enriches and expands culture, language, concepts and knowledge.

Following Setsuko Adachi in the issues presented in this volume in the chapter: ‘Undermined Empathy, Undermined Coexistence: Japanese Discursive Formations Related to Empathy’⁴¹, one can say that if the word ‘empathy’ is missing in Japanese discourse, the hypothesis of its existence in other cultures raises the possibility of opening this ‘door’ in Japanese discourse. Opening this door not only widens Japanese discourse, but also the concept of empathy. The space of fiction is crucial for empathy as, if it did not exist, how would we imagine the *other*? Making use of Adachi’s idea, learning how to use empathy is more important than knowing or translating the meaning of empathy in each culture.

The root of identity lies in the area contested with the *other* or with oneself. It is there that we understand where we belong or where we may belong to. In fact, the Babel myth was not a punishment; it was maybe one of the best accidents of humanity, as long as we give to misunderstanding a translation space of a permanent cultural maieutics.

Notes

¹ T Muzimba, *Por Conta Própria*, Gesto Cooperativa Cultural, Porto, 2004, (CD Cover).

² D Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*, Vintage Books, New York, 1997, pp. ix-x.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 88-89.

⁴ M McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, 1994, p. 7.

⁵ D de Kerckhove, *The Skin of Culture: Investigating The New Electronic Reality*, Kogan Page, London, 1997, p. 34.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ A Damásio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*, Penguin, New York, 2005, p. 248-250.

⁸ Abram, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

⁹ A Cuadrado-Fernandez, ‘Globalisation, Transculturalism and Environment: Sharing and Understanding Indigenous Perspectives through Poetry’, in this volume, A Wagener & T Rahimy (eds), Inter-Disciplinary Press, Oxford, 2012.

¹⁰ A Bard & J Soderqvist, *Netocracy: The New Power Elite And Life After Capitalism*, FT Press, London, 2002, p. 203.

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- ¹¹ McLuhan, op. cit., p. 351.
- ¹² M Delgado, *El Animal Público*. Anagrama, Barcelona, 1999, pp. 192-209.
- ¹³ J Baudrillard, *The Perfect Crime*, Verso, London, 1996, pp. 35-45.
- ¹⁴ Z Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2000.
- ¹⁵ Bard & Soderqvist, op. cit., pp. 134-135.
- ¹⁶ E. T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension*, Anchor, New York, 1990, p. 188.
- ¹⁷ <http://identidades.eu>, last updated: June 5, 2011, viewed on June 19th 2011.
- ¹⁸ <http://crioulasvideo.org>, last updated: July 10, 2010, viewed on June 19th 2011 and <http://conceicaodascrioulas.org>, last updated: August 10, 2010, viewed on June 19th 2011.
- ¹⁹ Bard, op. cit., pp. 95-118.
- ²⁰ A Cervantes-Carson, in the 'Development Meeting and Closing Reflections', broadening the discussion that had started in the communication: Anuradha Choudry, 'Psyche East and West: The Problem of Identity and Strangeness', at the *4th Global Conference - Multiculturalism Conflict and Belonging*, Oxford, 2010.
- ²¹ J Rancière, *Film Fables*, Berg, New York, 2006, pp. 171-186.
- ²² Reflection on the talk 'The Image in Question' by Jacques Rancière at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 3 February 2010. See for example: Slavoj Žižek, *Lacrimae Rerum*, Translated by Luís Leitão, Orfeu Negro, Lisboa, 2008.
- ²³ A Wagener, 'Representations and Defence Processes in Cross-Cultural Conflicts: France and the Case of its 'National Identity'', in this volume, A Wagener & T Rahimy (eds), Inter-Disciplinary Press, Oxford, 2012.
- ²⁴ A Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London, 2006, p. 6.
- ²⁵ C Sim, 'The *Cheongsam*: A Site of Wonder and Contestation for Canadian Women of Chinese Heritage', in this volume, A Wagener & T Rahimy (eds), Inter-Disciplinary Press, Oxford, 2012.
- ²⁶ R Belghiti, 'The Image of Dance and the Narrative of Secular Culture in Edward Said's *After the Last Sky*', in this volume, A Wagener & T Rahimy (eds), Inter-Disciplinary Press, Oxford, 2012.
- ²⁷ J Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1991, p. 133.
- ²⁸ E Asaf Bekaroglu, 'Belonging through everyday-life practices: The Dutch case', *4th Global Conference - Multiculturalism Conflict and Belonging*, Oxford, 2010.
- ²⁹ Baudrillard, op. cit., p. 138.
- ³⁰ J Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows*, Leete's Island Books, Sedgwick, 1997, p. 7.
- ³¹ *ibid.*, p. 9.
- ³² M Kearney, 'Designing Identity: An Attempt to Manufacture Singaporeans', in this volume, A Wagener & T Rahimy (eds), Inter-Disciplinary Press, Oxford, 2012.
- ³³ J Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, Verso, London, 2009, p. 10.

³⁴ A Cervantes-Carson, 'Development Meeting and Closing Reflections.', *4th Global Conference - Multiculturalism Conflict and Belonging*, Oxford, 2010.

³⁵ A-M Târnovan, 'Transcultural Values in the Network Society', *4th Global Conference - Multiculturalism Conflict and Belonging*, Oxford, 2010, quoting: Manuel Castells, *The Network Society - A cross-cultural Perspective*, Edward Elgar Publishing Inc, Massachusetts, USA, 2004, p. 39.

³⁶ A Jarzewicz, 'Cultural Entanglements of Human Rights Discourse', in this volume, A Wagener & T Rahimy (eds), Inter-Disciplinary Press, Oxford, 2012.

³⁷ From where my own unrestlessnesses and the shaping of my technological performance pour.

³⁸ The events in Tunes and in Cairo at the beginning of the year 2011 are the evidence that those technological doors are important for the *polis* control and for the *urbs* expression.

³⁹ A Nóvoa (ed), *Profissão Professor*, Porto Editora, Porto, 1999, p. 40. Translated by me.

⁴⁰ C Rajendran, 'Multicultural Belongings on the Contemporary Stage: Krishen Jit's Theatre of Identity in Malaysia', in this volume, A Wagener & T Rahimy (eds), Inter-Disciplinary Press, Oxford, 2012.

⁴¹ S Adachi, 'Undermined Empathy, Undermined Coexistence: Japanese Discursive Formations Related to Empathy', in this volume, A Wagener & T Rahimy (eds), Inter-Disciplinary Press, Oxford, 2012.

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