

# The willingness to weave: cultural analysis, cultural fronts and networks of the future

*The following paper is divided into three sections. The first sketches a panorama of the conditions of construction of knowledge, not 'about' but from the perspective of culture. The second is a self-critical presentation of the author's work on what he terms 'Cultural Fronts'. Lastly, some of the characteristics and effects of the cultural fronts project are presented, which is currently being developed in Mexico and, through recently-initiated collaborations, in other parts of Latin America.*

*'Yequeene cenca quimiztlacahuia yn Diablo ynaquique conmaliznequi yn tlēyn ychtacachioalo anoço ychtaca nemiliztli anoço yn tlēyn tepanchioaz.'* Fray Andrés de Olmos, 1553

*'In the infinite games, the game is not about winning, but about creating the conditions to continue playing.'* John P. Carse

The origins of Latin American cultural analysis are varied and multiple, and its development has been uneven. Almost all of the region's countries have produced work on cultural questions. However, in this paper it would be impossible to give even a rough account of their development. It is impossible to have an overview because of three central factors: the lack of *information*, the lack of *dissemination* and the lack of *connection*. We see only the tip of the iceberg, but is there even something we could call an 'iceberg'? The academic world recognises a small portion of the attempts that are being made in this part of the world to understand the processes, changes and continuities of our societies from a cultural standpoint (González, 1994). However, the shortcomings mentioned above have shaped the structure of research and are one of the greatest obstacles to changing the situation.

## Conditions for the construction of knowledge

There is a basic culture, a social discourse shared by our societies, that, rooted in daily life and common sense, provides us with a way of relating to reality; this perspective even includes thought that aims to be scientific. Having experienced a long and widespread period of colonisation, we tend to see ourselves as the colonisers wanted to see us: we despise what belongs to us and we admire what belongs to others; we have developed low self-esteem; we have little discipline, much imitation, and, more dangerously, little imagination. So, for example, we can review studies of culture in Mexico in at least the second half of this century and we will almost always see the prevalence and often the uncritical importing of authors, theories, methods, and techniques, whose principal value is that they are 'foreign'.

The order of the day is to offer parades of references, statements and 'analyses' that follow the fashions dictated in the currently trendy capitals of thought: Europe first – Spain, France, Great Britain, Italy – and then the United States – Chicago, New York, Berkeley.

The point is certainly not to reject all 'foreign' contributions with a chauvinism dressed up in the guise of autochthonous scientific aspirations, but to examine the way in which the systems of creation of knowledge in Latin America and the rest of the world have been linked together, the type of local and regional structures that they have generated, and the internal dynamics that they portray.

It so happens that we exist on the very edge of the *Mappa Mundi* of knowledge, in the suburbs,<sup>2</sup> which is not so strange and perhaps not so problematic either, but I find that the true problem resides in the uncritical importing of the questions that we might pose about our complex and plural realities. Because of our colonial inertia, at the end of the 20th century we often continue looking at ourselves with the eyes of outsiders. That objective situation has led to serious consequences, insofar as the imports have extended from bibliographies to epistemological frameworks (Piaget and García, 1982; González, 1994: 338). We have invested much effort in trying to generate the questions pertinent to the deciphering and thick interpretation of our realities, and the subsequent development of a perspective that would allow us to develop inside the specific characteristics of the structural connections that our incipient scientific systems in Latin America maintain with the exterior (Maturana and Varela, 1990; Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1993).

## The Aztec pyramid of the half-blind

'In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king,' says a well-known refrain, and this is practically the only way out for us: the first to read and translate the 'outsiders' become by this very act the successors and legitimate representatives of the true thinkers. The academic public (still small, uninformed, unc cosmopolitan, disconnected) immediately grants them the capital of recognition and, from there, their place and survival in the local field will be based on having arrived *first* at the latest fashionable book, or applying the new concepts to local situations. Their work of popularisation will be unquestionable. At times, this includes interesting critiques, but at other times it only changes the names of the concepts. The objective conditions of this phenomenon reside mainly in a vertical, pyramidal structure, in the image and likeness of the European and Anglo-Saxon systems, in which, however, there does exist (at least relatively) a 'market' for the development and social use of these studies. Some figures provide a profile of that 'market' for which we are producers.

In our societies, the public sector supports some 90% of the research that is carried out. The private sector, more attentive to the Dow Jones average, simply does not invest in this endeavour. As we have been in a deep political

and economic crisis since 1968, it is easy to imagine the 'adjustments' and the social cost that the sector has suffered.

So, in Mexico (and I think in most of Latin America) the internal 'market' is extremely weak and uncertain, it is not consolidated institutionally, and it has serious problems of coordination, circulation, maintenance, and, of course, reproduction. At the same time, studies and publications have little resonance in the educational system. In Mexico, less than 3% of the population reach higher education, and this represents only 15% of the population aged 20 to 24 (1.36 of a total of 91 million: 1.5% of the population)

### The formation of producers and potential public:

One structural aspect of the pyramid is precisely that of the population that is in the country's higher education system. Figure 1 shows the proportions: only 0.004% of Mexicans have formal training in the general production of knowledge. Furthermore, of the total of recognised researchers, 32% are concentrated in just one institution, the National University, and only 14% are based outside Mexico City.

The number of people who buy books or consult libraries regularly is very low; half of Mexicans did not buy even one book in a year and the highest-selling titles have print runs of two thousand copies and very limited circulations (González and Chávez, 1996). There are 18 recognised Mexican social science and humanities journals, and of these only two systematically deal with the problems of culture.<sup>3</sup>

This framework illuminates the researchers' need to link to foreigners in order to disconnect themselves from the movements and flows of cultural configurations that are woven into their own society.<sup>4</sup> We have also seen the academic neglect of cultural processes that have not been legitimated by internationally-recognised researchers.<sup>5</sup> The external situation is no better. A comparison with the United States is pathetic (De los Santos, 1995). We are completely outside of the 'market' when in international compilations only 3.8% of 1200 references and one of 43 authors is of Latin American origin (or at least Spanish-surnamed) (Grossberg et al., 1992)

### Fragments of a bundle of deficiencies in search of paradigm

In short, our scientific practice is full of prejudices and shortcomings.

Firstly, within research communities we suffer a 'scientific' prejudice regarding the character of science and of scientists. It is useful to clarify the scope of the term. Only 'hard' science is considered 'real science'. In this view, the study of culture belongs in the realm of speculation, insofar as it is not executed with the rigour of scientific method, and because of its paradoxical, mobile, and discontinuous nature. For better or worse, this prejudice is eroding and leaving behind studies that have opted for the rigour (this time, *mortis*) of analysis of generally quantitative information. Those taking a contrary view clamour for 'hermeneutic' freedom, that simply flows from the sensibility and experience of the author, who navigates at will through speculative seas of qualitative information.

~ *Theoretical* deficiencies: The uncritical importing of interesting ideas generates an incomplete panorama. These undigested ideas are partial and validated only because they are in fashion. Unfortunately, once the fad has passed, the prey is discarded and the focus changed.

*Strategic* deficiencies: Congruent with the previous theoretical attitude, the strategic level of methodology is often

confused with the mere application of methods and sometimes even with the techniques, producing flat and often unidimensional approximations. The rejection of this level – implicitly (due to personal style, elegance, omission or excessive modesty) or explicitly (because it is not necessary) – is also a rejection of the effective exercise of the occupation of making the world intelligible within the conventions of a community, and of the very development of the occupation.

~ *Tactical* deficiencies: A review of the technical arsenals of social scientists in Mexico (among them those dedicated to the study of culture), shows an enormous and stereotyped poverty that without doubt is tied to the above rejection. We see an endless procession of survey research making superficial use of statistics, many ethnographies rich in description and poor in perspective, dozens of cruelly semi-logical semiological studies, and some predictive tests, but the general panorama shows imagination locked into habit. Very few studies attempt a complex approach, worthy in fact of the complexity that they are seeking to describe, analyse, and interpret.

~ *Information* deficiencies. Of course, all of this generates second- or third-hand data, little elaborated and less analysed. At the same time, this deficiency is tied to the poor 'official' information on cultural processes. Advertising and market research agencies know more than the institutions specialised in knowledge. We are swimming in a great negative culture of information: we are not able to generate it or to use it, nor, therefore, to value it.

< *Critical* deficiencies: little or no systematic criticism, many 'glosses' and cross-references ('I cite you, you cite me; I invite you, you invite me'). If something is not convincing, rather than criticise in order to grow, the procedure is to ignore it in order not to compromise oneself (don't cite, don't invite, don't recognise, etc.). Characteristic of social spaces based on familistic principles, lacking a solid public sphere, in Latin America we still do not make a healthy distinction between the critique of a work and an *ad hominem* critique.

*Epistemological* deficiencies: our weak tradition, with insufficient theoretical development and founded in our own processes, greedy for a strategic imagination, blocked in stereotyped tactics, accustomed to easy second-hand data, seduced by the gloss instead of the critique, cannot turn its instruments of objectivisation upon itself. By importing nothing more than askable questions, we condemn ourselves to a pernicious blindness in our epistemological frameworks and we distance ourselves from any possibility of second-order reflection, of knowing knowledge (Maturana and Varela, 1990). This is an excellent scenario for the hara-kiri of any autonomous development that might bring the interpretations and explanations necessary for understanding our cultural processes and our own place in the world system of cultural production (Fossaert, 1991).

*Political* deficiencies: As a consequence of all of the foregoing, our analyses of society from culture, suffer from an inability to actually touch society and its processes. It is like schizophrenia in that it prevents a connection with reality and with the many actors around us. Enclosed in insiders' idiolects that stir up competition between initiated elites, our field is devoted to a limited kind of reproduction, but its exercise, its composition and trajectory have not significantly increased the critical mass of producers nor of those who need this kind of information.

In sum, besides the structural constraints mentioned, we have been confronting complex objects with tools that are

clearly inadequate. The best-known and most-disseminated studies overemphasise description (Giménez, 1994), and although they provide interesting paths to follow, they lack a theorisation that would permit a weaving together which would be not only elegant, but subtle.

In strictly cognitive terms, we have many suggestive descriptions but a weak level of explanation coupled with a lack of explicit methodology that might be shared and validated. Given these conditions, we can justifiably ask: is it worthwhile to analyse ourselves as complex societies from the perspective of our cultures? Will we be able to do it? How can we break out of the circle?

### Cultural Fronts: a self-critical view

As an accomplice and participant in various ways in the panorama described, I will present a brief review of my own experience in order to illustrate the situation. Beginning in 1976, I studied Mexican society at the Iberoamerican University, questioning it from the perspective of culture, first in rural communities and their cultural relationship with the larger society (González, 1978, 1980) and then in the study of the formation and characterisation of the culture of Mexico's mountainous region as *habitus* (González, 1981). During these first two studies in the Universidad Metropolitana-Xochimilco, a group of colleagues opened a space in 1980 dedicated to this type of analysis: the area of research in 'Communication, hegemony and subordinate cultures' which remained active for more than ten years.

It was not academic exchanges – that is, the internal dynamic of the field, but rather external events – military repression in South America – that, through networks of friends and acquaintances, brought us into direct contact with colleagues with strong academic backgrounds. From the mid-seventies, they refreshed the depleted atmosphere of Mexican research with their positivist, or alternatively, critical certainties. With them came fresh bibliographies, authors, perspectives and problems. They clearly influenced the reorientation of Mexican research topics and, in turn, were influenced by the diverse traditions and currents that were developing in Mexico.

In 1982, upon critically reviewing previous analyses, I realised that although the categories I had used since 1976, especially the perspectives of Gramsci, Cirese, Bourdieu and Fossaert (hegemony, subalternity, internal inequalities of culture, *habitus*, logic of production) had helped focus more precisely on questions of Mexican cultural analysis, they had several gaps, mainly of a methodological nature.<sup>6</sup> This led to the proposal of working on *Cultural Fronts* which I first put forward in 1982 to study urban fairs, religiosity in sanctuaries, and the vast experience of Mexican culture with melodrama in the mass media.<sup>7</sup> All these phenomena have a markedly transclass character.<sup>8</sup>

The category of *Cultural Fronts* serves as a methodological and theoretical tool to help think about and empirically investigate the historical, structural and everyday ways in which a warp of relationships of hegemony in a given society is constructed. The deliberately polysemic term 'fronts' is used with a double meaning: a) like *boundary zones* (porous and mobile borders) between the cultures of different classes and social groups; and, b) like *battle fronts*, arenas of cultural struggles between contestants with unequal resources and conditions. The fronts describe general social relationships which, from the point of view of the daily construction of the meaning of life and of the world, elaborate the evident and

the necessary, values and multiple identities. Precisely that which *could* unite us all.

In terms of boundary zones, the Cultural Fronts perspective normally allows us to observe symbolic forms and social practices which, over time through multiple operations (economic, political and especially cultural in nature), have become obvious, common and shared between socially different agents. This perspective counters interpretations of culture as exclusively the creation of distinctions. Hegemony cannot be studied by using differences as the sole starting-point. A social relationship of complex articulation of consensus and authority must necessarily be based on at least some common elements. The histories of the subordination and domination of magic thought in England (Thomas, 1984) of literacy education in Europe (Mucchemleud, 1976) and of the colonisation of the new world (Gruzinski, 1988), provide stimulating examples of the emergence of these processes as strategic and sometimes bloody (and not only symbolic) battles for the establishment of an 'intellectual and moral' direction for society achieved by a bloc of more or less solidly allied social agents.

That process of the destruction of certain pre-existing and emergent forms was interlaced with the symbolic delimitation of 'common zones' in which shared forms had to amalgamate through a specifically cultural, signifying, cognitive and, of course, collective process.

So far as the category of battle-fronts is concerned, this pushes us to try to make visible the multiple symbolic skirmishes unleashed between combatants with unequal power and resources: it is these that enable us to create and recreate the shared sense of what is 'necessary' to live, of what is 'worthy' in life, and of 'who we are' in the world. There, where we find shared meanings between socially differentiated agents, lies a historical process of multiple symbolic struggles, that upon being made visible through a methodologically complex strategy (Morin, 1990), shows us what makes up the social relationship that we call hegemony and how it has been negotiated (certainly in unequal circumstances). Thus, the analysis of culture from the perspective of cultural fronts imposes upon us a methodological polyphony that provides:

- Thick descriptions of the current state of those completely fractal zones of intersection and interpenetration, and of the social agents involved in them.<sup>9</sup>
- A historical reconstruction of the trajectories that have led to this phenomenon, which highlights symbolic and cultural resistance, 'capitulations', negotiations, and skirmishes.
- A characterisation of the processes of change, transmission and reconstitution of the participants themselves.
- A semiotic description of the specificity of these processes.

All of this would be unthinkable using a single technique or a rigidly predetermined methodological approach. Neither is it viable without a base of documentary, cartographic, oral, anthropological, and census data that might provide at least some pathways through the courses of the trajectories that we want to reveal. It is also clear that to tackle this task individually or in an isolated way is simply not feasible. The panorama in this case has been quite depressing because such configurations and information do not exist, they are not available, or they are dispersed and unconnected.<sup>10</sup> As a colonised country, one of our characteristics continues to be the neglect and the scorn of the 'subjects' (that is to say, almost everyone) for information. In various empirical studies carried out between 1982 and 1991 this scientific necessity was increasingly

linked to the strategic necessity of working in horizontal networks in order to increase the critical mass of generators and users of information about the cultural dynamics of contemporary Mexico. Given our profoundly authoritarian culture along with what Galindo (1996) tellingly calls an 'information society' that favours and rewards the concentration and the relationships of authority of the few over the many, this seemed to us a plausible way out. That is the sense of the Culture Programme and of the most recent investigations that our research community has undertaken: the analysis of the formation of cultural resources and their publics in twentieth century Mexico (cartographies, genealogies and cultural practices) that we call the FOCYP project.<sup>11</sup>

### A precursor: the Culture Programme

In the mid-1980s, a group of colleagues who were finishing their PhDs founded the Culture Programme at the University of Colima, as a space for the documentation and continuing analysis of Mexican cultural dynamics.<sup>12</sup>

We initially concentrated on three areas (cultural industries, urban culture and cultural fronts). Studies of religion and popular communication, neighbourhood cultural identities, fairs and rituals, collective memory and urban culture and, lastly, television melodrama (González, 1994a; Galindo, 1995), occupied our attention for nearly ten years, but the bet was not only on the production of knowledge.



Philip Schlesinger (left) discussing the finer points of 'cultural fronts' with Jorge González.

During that decade, we also wanted to transform some of the conditions of production of that knowledge. But that is a long-term project.

In the specific conditions – both internal and external – of the Mexican intellectual field, in which there is an intentional consecration of the high concentration of wherewithal, funds, and capacities for the study of culture, our strategy was to decentre (to distance ourselves from the individual and institutional *cathedrals* of knowledge) and obstinately to weave *horizontal networks*, at a point in which our cultural history left space only for conventional pathways, for the rigid verticality of institutions: an enormous investment of energy in order to look good from above and, at the same time, to be vigilant down below in order to do what the *institution* wanted.<sup>13</sup> The scientific field manifests a kind of structural homology with factories, which appropriate not only the

workers' means of production, but also their ownership of the conditions of work and of life.<sup>14</sup>

In a situation where hundreds of people working in institutions who, due to problems of politics and internal interests, or because 'there are no funds', spent years languishing, losing strength, and mouldering without doing or being allowed to do anything, the horizontal and lateral perspective of thought and organisation in the network not only permits the generation of knowledge, but also injects creative energy into the institutions. Since 1993, the 'FOCYP' (González, 1994b) has been an adventure in forming cross-disciplinary research teams, in order to bolster the 'culture of information' and to recover the memory of this century of cultural development in Mexico.<sup>15</sup>

### The FOCYP project

Our project has three areas of work based around eight *cultural fields* that have been decisive in Mexican cultural development in this century: religion, education, health, art, publishing (the 'media'), and leisure.<sup>16</sup> The list has been completed with the culture of food and the culture of the consumption of goods, which while not as specialised as the others, are nevertheless vital for understanding the processes of change in Mexican society. These eight 'fields,' form the backbone of the investigation in the three areas.

*The cultural accoutrements.* The first asks about the formation of the cultural accoutrements and resources of those eight fields. The cultural fields are definable as dynamic systems of positions and forces. One way of making their dynamic visible is through their relative presence in the apparatuses and institutions in which their specialists are trained (priests, doctors, editors, artists, teachers, etc.), in which are inculcated their specialised modulations of meaning and in which are legitimated (or not) the practices of their 'clientele' (the faithful, patients, readers, followers, students, etc.), and by means of which culturally specialised products are put into circulation.

We posit that the consolidation and expansion (or shrinking) of a particular field is related to its differential presence in the urban fabric through facilities and specialised products. Therefore, we are constructing cultural cartographies in order to observe the trajectories and interrelations of the cultural apparatuses during four periods of the century in a number of cities throughout the country (González, 1995b).

*Culture's publics.* The second area is centred on the formation of the publics and clienteles of these fields. Here we posit that any agent becomes the public of a given cultural field only if he or she has embodied the dispositions that allow the culturally specific products of the field to be perceived, distinguished, evaluated and 'preferred'. Culture's publics are not 'born', they are 'made'. We posit that those trajectories are also guided by basic family education and are modulated and modelled in the course of interactions with the institutions of the fields and with the ideological networks of coexistence. Therefore, part of the investigation has involved the collection of oral histories, family histories, in which we observe the different social trajectories (occupational, spatial, familial and educational) across at least three generations. With this technique, and through each family network, we are able to bring out dozens of 'successful' and 'unsuccessful' trajectories (always with regard to the different fields) of each family (González, 1995a) and, complementarily, with the technique of life histories, we can probe the reflexivity of the actors in terms of their own individual and

*from sketch*

family trajectories (Galindo, 1994).<sup>17</sup>

*The public faces the offers and the apparatuses: their cultural practices and habits.* The third area of the project operates with a survey of habits and cultural practices. Using a questionnaire applied to a nationally and regionally representative sample, we obtained a descriptive, quantitative and extensive perspective on the way that Mexicans currently relate to the eight fields. This would be equivalent to a description of the intersections of both trajectories referred to earlier. That is to say, by trying to observe the form in which the objectifying structures of culture take shape, the exterior is made interior, and the way that matrix of incorporated dispositions is behind the logic of agreement of all practices is shown. Despite processing information from three generations and having a complex battery of respondents, in our survey we could only aspire to describe some tendencies and to group or separate out some information that is useful for gaining knowledge of the terrain and of the pattern of relationships of the public with the eight cultural fields (González and Chávez, 1996).

The first results have a 'classical' tone because we have offered only descriptive information. In the subsequent analyses, we also used heuristic and interpretative methods (Ford, 1995) on the same information. The task is to explore multiple conjectures and possibilities with few presuppositions, instead of deducing or forcing 'prescribed' and foregone conclusions onto the data.<sup>18</sup>

### **Networks: lateral thinking and horizontal organisation**

This progress was only made possible by participating in a network composed not of recognised and trained researchers, but rather of many *searchers* of different educational backgrounds, ages, and abilities. One of the main results of the work has been the increased self-esteem of the *emergent research communities* that are beginning to build respect for this activity at the same time that they are generating and taking responsibility for their own information.<sup>19</sup> The network structure gives each emergent community access not only to its own information, but to the entirety of the data generated by the study. However, the situation is far from idyllic.

Obviously, we also face the unequal distribution of abilities and resources needed to enjoy (analyse, disclose, share, etc.) the information. The dispositions that underlie scientific abilities, of course – our own study demonstrates this clearly – are unevenly distributed. Given this, the network organises workshops and seminars that promote the acquisition of these abilities and the generation of new ones. With many needs, given the lack of official budgets, we opted to combine small miseries. The experience continues and more than a few institutions have been refreshed by the energy of these small emerging research communities.

In this way, the concrete analyses from the perspective of cultural fronts and of the composition of Mexican regional and national culture become more meaningful. Not only to write books and be cited in the academic Hit Parade, but also to exercise the function of reflexivity on daily social life that the vocation of research entails.

Analysing Mexican culture (and I believe that our situation is similar to that of the rest of Latin America) has become, then, a question as strategic as the eternal question of paying the foreign debt, of expanding democratic life in a country that has not made the transition from an oral culture to a

mass-mediated culture and that floats in an authoritarian culture which is breaking down amidst lies and corruption, violence and graft.<sup>20</sup> We face the possibility of becoming citizens in order to stop being subjects, with all the risks and uncertainty that this implies. It is a question of gaining ground in individual, collective, and social reflexivity, when at present our experience dictates obedience, observance, dependence and submissiveness.

If cultural analysis cannot provide us with the tools to dismantle this scenario and others even more terrifying than those already foreseen with the coming of the fourth capitalist world-system (Fossaert, 1991) – which will exclude, at a single blow, more than 40 million extremely poor people in my country, and many more around the world – and if we are unable to analyse elegantly, as if we were in any of the centres of world knowledge, or to take on the task of bottom-up and lateral transformation of the forms of organisation of specialised knowledge, of increasing our culture of information, then just as happened with the dinosaurs, we are going to *disappear*. We are going to throw away the first (and maybe only) opportunity to use the technology that generates the first intelligent means of communication in the history of humanity; the infrastructure that could end the pattern of a sole transmitter and millions of silent receivers; the first time that a technology of horizontal participation has been created: the world interconnected through the Internet and the network of networks (Landow, 1995; Negroponete, 1996; Piscitelli, 1996) that, in the same way as the conventional electronic media, bring about cognitive transformations that for the time being are only projects, conjectures, signs, but that with strategic social and collective action could be used in a truly horizontal manner.

### **Conclusion**

I have outlined the current structure of the construction of knowledge in Mexico. This picture is repeated throughout Latin America: the high concentration of resources and know-how. To this must be added the uncritical attitude with which the field of studies reproduces itself. I alluded to a series of characteristic deficiencies that lead to the importing of epistemological frameworks which in turn 'permit' the topics and the approaches that are 'feasible' in our weak market. Also, the relationship of the local structures of generation of knowledge to those of the international market shows us to have a marginal and sporadic existence. The reasons are obviously neither the result of a 'tropical' incapacity nor based on racial or 'rational' perspectives. The properties of our system of knowledge are not natural, but are due to its time and place. This is how it was when we entered the game. The rules place us in an unfavourable position.

In Latin American countries, the uncritical assumption of the same rules (which presumes their cynical and not clinical knowledge), lead to the sanctification of personalities who manage to enter the list of recognised figures: language, writing style, bibliographies and references, operate as a kind of selective filter. Only the better-placed in our countries will achieve 'distinction' on the world stage. However, this does not necessarily bring about a significant growth in the critical mass of those who generate and use information about the processes that make our identities mobile, individualised, and displaced.

The approach outlined earlier offers a perspective on the horizontal organisation of emergent research communities; for the past ten years this has appeared to be one of the pathways

to the sustainable development of the analysis of culture. After a long journey, the Cultural Fronts perspective has led to a system of cultural information (in which organising ourselves to generate generously as implied by the FOCYP project has an important role). This information will be public, open and participative, and oriented toward knowledge of the forms and structures of construction of cultural analyses in Latin America and particularly in Mexico. Thus, those who are not able to control the conditions of use of the knowledge that they generate, are also unable to control the cognitive conditions of their own knowledge.

Latin American and Mexican systems of knowledge will aspire to a more open future only if we open it up ourselves. The training of weavers of networks seems to be the way to do this.

The true challenges can scarcely be seen. The coin has been flipped, the game has already begun, and the emergent research communities are debating whether to have a place on the world stage, by learning to belong to the international academy with dignity, or whether to invent themselves by taking up the risky artisanal practice of becoming the weavers of networks.

The future has already begun. ■

Translated by Nancy Morris and Philip Schlesinger.

- 1 'Ultimately, the Devil tricks those who wish to know how secret things are made, or perhaps even to know the secret of life, or perhaps what will happen later'. Fray Andrés de Olmos, *Tratado de hechicerías y sortilegios 1553*, Ed. de Georges Baudet, México, UNAM, 1990, pp.18-19.
- 2 Just like the suburbs of Latin American capitals, we lack services such as sewers, roads and pavements, electricity, street-cleaning, etc. The comparison between the services and equipment of academia (libraries, talent, institutions, financing, researchers, scholarships, etc.) has had a parallel development.
- 3 I am referring particularly to *Estudios sobre las culturas contemporáneas* and *Comunicación y sociedad*, both, not by chance, based outside Mexico City.
- 4 The criteria for entering the ranking of recognised researchers require being distributed in other countries and constant appearances in the *Citation Index*. Nonetheless, this makes the tip of the pyramid even smaller, because it does not rely solely on the quality of the works, but on the relations or social capital of the researchers with the international community.
- 5 This is, for example, the case of the study of the relationship of Mexican society with *telenovelas*, which after nearly 40 years of production and construction of a public, have scarcely been studied. See 'La cofradía de las emociones (in)terminables . . .' and the other texts on *telenovelas* in González, 1994.
- 6 Credit for pioneering the dissemination in Mexico of the studies and thought of these authors and their influence on the training of Mexican researchers in these themes unquestionably belongs to Gilberto Giménez
- 7 The text *Más(+) Cultura(s)* published in 1994 contains a review of ten years of studies based on this conception.
- 8 The term comes from Cirese, who upon confronting Gramsci's vision with that of Croce on the popular, enriches the vertical and classist Gramscian perspective with a perspective of transverse cuts that opens the

theoretical possibility of thinking the subjectivity and of not reducing processes like art, genre, ecological movements, etc to 'class interests' (Cirese, 1983 and 1986).

- 9 In this context, the rich dialogue with anthropology called EoE, *Ethnography of Empowerment*, is very useful. It is centred in educational processes and has generated an interesting tradition in the study of process of disempowerment of Hispanic and Asian minorities in the United States (Trueba and Delgado-Gaytán, 1991; Suarez-Orozco, 1995).
- 10 The objective of the National System of Cultural Information which the Seminar of Studies of Culture has contributed since 1990 is precisely to compile, generate and distribute as broadly as possible information on culture in Mexico. Its design has been taken up by the System of Cultural Information of Latin America and the Caribbean (SICLAC) as a project of the Latin American Forum of Ministers of Education and Culture, Crf. Amozurrutia, 1994).
- 11 The first phase of this work allowed us to connect into a network more than 140 researchers in ten cities. Two years later, after having received our last official grant, our network was not only not diluted, but the local communities under investigation had grown in number and area. Currently we are connected with almost twice as many cities and about 250 researchers.
- 12 Culture Programme, (Programme of Studies of Contemporary Cultures), Centre of Social Research, University of Colima, 1985. Since its founding, our Programme has proposed the creation of permanent networks of researchers, the creation of information systems of different scales to monitor cultural processes, a systems of publications (*Estudios sobre las culturas contemporáneas*) and a system of media production (radio, video, and recently Internet), all nourished by the system of research in priority areas.
- 13 'Weavers of networks and institutions'. Interview with Jesús Galindo (Culture Programme) by Gabriela Olivares of the newspaper *Zeta*, Tijuana, 15-21 March 1996.
- 14 One of the most important research centres of the country, located outside of Mexico City, has reached the point of forbidding internal meetings that are not sanctioned by the institution.
- 15 As can be seen, this is precisely the culture of the 'one-eyed kings' that devour budgets, concentrate bibliographies, accumulate mobilising relationships, publish unceasingly, declare themselves 'experts' in the mass media, etc. And thus they become the new priests of science, as being cited in their work or statements opens the way to the top of the ziggurat, and reciprocally, citing their work and opinions (even when they do not apply or have been said by others long before) provides the possibility of being consecrated.
- 16 The concept as used by Bourdieu designates specialised social spaces (institutions, agents and practices) produced by the social division of labour in the creation, preservation and diffusion of meaning. See Bourdieu, 1992 and Calhoun et al., 1993.
- 17 In the family histories, the criterion of statistical representativeness of the family unit does not apply. Our families are not representative (nor can they be) of the totality. By applying a holographic principle to their construction, we propose to elaborate the structural representation of each family, which allows us to 'read', through these histories, the totality of social processes



and their effectiveness in daily structures.

- 18 González, López-Romo, Chávez y Arana, *La cultura en México (III): Perfiles y públicos*, (forthcoming).
- 19 The project has generated many theses, dissertations, articles, books, publications, monographs, new academic projects, videos of family histories and a national video series about cinema publics during the first hundred years of cinema in Mexico.
- 20 The present relationship between newspaper readers and radio and television audiences in Mexico is abysmal: 28% of Mexicans read a newspaper daily; one of every two homes is a member of a video club and 9 of every 10 people listen to radio and watch television (González and Chávez, 1996: 113).

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