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Panel 150

The new technologies for African cinemas: The example of Madagascar

According to François Oussama, the new information and communication technologies (NICT) designate, “the whole new support and technical of communication, production, distribution and consumption of information” (2001: 119). The main objective of this article is to look at the impact of the NICT in the African cinemas, and especially in the Malagasy cinemas. NICT modify inter and intra-societal communication, but they also change spaces and social representations. Although the African filmmakers depended on foreign financial structures in the past, they today have a direct access to the medias of representation, thanks to digital tools. However, since their arrival in the beginning of the millennium in the African continent, it seems that we assist to what Deleuze and Guattari (1980) call a “deterritorialization”. Indeed, a “movement” operates simultaneously in the perception of the cinematographic images and in their creation. When Rochoux (2002) makes a distinction between those who produce NICT and those who consume them, for Hall (1997), the audience is as equally implicate in the process of creation as the filmmaker himself. For Hall as for Barthes (1964), a film is representative of a system. This means that there is a similar “code” between the filmmaker and the audience, otherwise the cinematographic messages could not be understood. For Hall, “encoding” depends on “decoding”.

In this article, I propose to analyze these “movements” and these “codes” in the Malagasy cinemas. The main objective here is to explain how the NICT modify the cinematographic creations, and how they change the socio-cultural spaces to produce an ideological discourse.

The new creative « codes » of the Malagasy cinemas

In order to understand how the NICT have an impact on the Malagasy cinemas, it is first important to look at the context of their appearance in Madagascar. Before the digital age, producing a film was an arduous task. With the lack of laboratory for editing the

films, the filmmakers have to send the copies in Europe. This operation was not only expensive but also was not time efficient. The Malagasy filmography counted around fifty feature films between 1937 and 1997. The former French colony, Madagascar became independent in 1960. In the seventies, the Malagasy government allowed itself the monopoly of the production, importation and diffusion of the films. In consequences, the spectators deserted the cinemas, which stayed closed for a period of twenty years. A wind of freedom blew in the middle of the nineties, and marks the end of the government's monopoly on the films diffusion and importations. NICT then arrive in Madagascar, furthermore, in a favorable economic growth context. China invests in the country, especially in the telecommunication sector. It also exports towards Madagascar low costs electronic products, such as cameras, DVD players and television sets. The availability of these materials contributes to the Malagasy cinema industry regeneration and development. Films are made and edited bake-off with a low budget, and are shown quickly with a DVD player or by Internet. However, the promptness of execution has consequences for the quality of the films. Indeed,

« One the one hand, the term digital suggests the elaborate, expensive, micro-managed, soulless, perfectionist aesthetic (...). On the other hand, it conjures the homemade, imperfect, intimate, mistakist cinema (...) films were digital does not imply cold, anti-human technology, but rather intimacy, spontaneity and imperfection » (Rombes 2009 : 97).

In Madagascar, these two ways of producing a film co-live. According to Hall (1997), there are several modalities of “encoding”: one dominant code and one emergent. In Madagascar, the dominant code looks like the Hollywoodian films. These films occupy a large space on the TV program, just before the Chinese combat films.

Tana Mania (2005) made by Henri Randrianierenana is an example of the use of the first way “of encoding”. This long feature film tells the sentimental affairs of three young and well-heeled girls in the capital of Madagascar. Actor and stager of theatre, Henri Randrianierenana is the co-founder-member of Theatre Company called Johary. He was an assistant of the Malagasy filmmaker Raymond Rajaonarivelo for the film in 35mm *Quand les étoiles rencontrent la mer* in 1996. He is also one of the first filmmakers who

starts making video films in the beginning of 2000 in Madagascar. With more than ten long feature films and institutional documentaries, he continues his activities for both theatre and cinema. Producing in two months in Antananarivo with non-professional actors, his film called *Tana Mania* is less interesting for its esthetical qualities than for its purpose. Indeed, for the first time in the Malagasy filmography, the narrative directly tackles the question of teenager's sexuality, in avoiding a moralizing pile or provocation. In this fiction in color, dialogues are shown in fixed shots. Like in the majority of the videos produced today in Madagascar, this film was made like the TV shows, which also explains its commercial success, because it corresponds with the dominant "code" the one the audience sees every day on the TV. However, whereas this "code" aims to be universal, this film was never shown abroad, because its thematic is too specific to Malagasy worldviews.

Just the opposite of these popular productions, one emergent "code" appears. It is firmly political. Indeed, as Cormier and de B'éri (2010) note, the use of new technologies are not « passives ». In Madagascar, their development contributes to liberate the expression and to political claims. For example, *6h58* by Laza (2009) is an eleven minutes short film. The filmmaker has modified the color of the images to obtain a sepia shade. This modification of the visual effect was made with a computer and underlines an esthetical intention. The narrative is about the story of Marc, a homeless man who survives by searching garbages. He escapes from its drab everyday in collecting books and posting cards. As the day pass, he encounters less and lesser books. He accuses the computers to be responsible of the destruction of the culture. In destroying a cyber-cafe, he hopes to voice his message. But, when the policemen arrive to arrest him, everyone thinks that he is a poor crazy man. This film is made by Laza, who studied in the FEMIS, the famous French school of cinema. He came back in Madagascar in 2002 in order to make his first long feature film called *Tana 2003*. This film is a violent critic against the corruption of his country and a pleading for a Malagasy author cinema. He realizes that the Malagasy audience does not have the "codes" of this kind of cinema and so he creates in 2006 a film festival dedicated to the short films: The National Short Film Meeting, which now takes place annually. The objective of this film festival is to create a habit of cinema in stimulating the production of film in order to help the modification of the audience's

gaze. Indeed, as Hall explains (1997), the process of understanding does not stop after the “encoding” phase, but continues in the “decoding”. Hall demonstrates that a wrong “decoding” leads to confusion between reality and fiction. The new technologies, in throwing back the film industry, have also intensified this confusion. The films are fast produced and fast consumed, in few weeks. Simultaneously, like a circle, the profits of one film allow the filmmaker to make another one. Furthermore, the digital technology gives an impression of reality because the movement increases with the instability of the camera. Filmmakers use the lightness and the maneuverability of the digital tools to make scenes with camera on the shoulders. With this truck, the audience is invited to stand by the characters and in the action of the film.

However, it is frequent to observe that the Malagasy audience is not able to differentiate the actor from the character he plays. A young actress, Estella Rasamiarison,¹ who played a seropositive prostitute in a Malagasy fiction, explains that the audience lump together the situations of her character on the screen and herself. In the same way, the audience regularly interpell Florent Malartre, who plays in a TV shows called *Jiaby-Jiaby*, by the name of his character « Seza »².

Furthermore, as Rombes remarks: « The digital era inaugurates a new form of invisibility » (2009 : 31). Indeed, as it is sometimes difficult to identify the author of a video posted on the Internet, the audience of cinema often confuses the producer and the filmmaker, who are, in the context of Madagascar, often the same person.

Hall (1997) considers that there are links between the production and the social. The communicational message interferes with the social practices. NICT contributes to interactivity between the films and their audience. For example, the continuity of a TV shows or a film depends on the understanding or the acceptance of the audience. Morin calls this phenomenon the « dialectic of production-consumption » (2008: 58). In other words, the multiplication of the videos films responds to a request of the audience, who want to see films in their languages, which talk about their everyday lives. Indeed, according to an opinion poll published in the Malagasy newspaper *L'Express de Madagascar*, in 2006, 68% of the Malagasy are « proud to see film adapted in the local

¹ Interview made in Toliara (Madagascar) in March 2005 during my PhD research.

² Interview made in Mahajunga (Madagascar) in April 2007 during my PhD research.

context and played by national artists³ ». The success of the film *Malok'ila* (2006) made by Mamy Razafimandimby convinces its producers to make another one. The narrative of this film, which has now nine episodes, is a mixture of love story, money complications and a dose of humor. More recently, during the last National Short Film Meeting, the spectators could vote for the Prize of the Public with their cellular phones, in sending a text message. Thereupon, strong links exist between digital technologies and cinema. Phone companies offer financial support to film festivals, but also produce long feature films, as in Madagascar, the Telma phone company sponsors all the *Malok'ila* films.

The NICT have contributed to renew the cinematographic « codes » but they do not simplify their comprehension. Furthermore, in changing the ways of making films, the new technologies have also dislocated the spaces of their cinematographic diffusion.

New technologies heading towards new spaces

The African cinemas, built during the colonization, close their doors, one by one, because of the disinterestedness of the states and of the lack of financial support to renovate them. Their closure changes production, diffusion and the way of seeing films. In 2009, during the Cannes International Film Festival, the Mauritanian filmmaker Abderrahmane Sissako notes: « one cinema closes each month in the African continent, where only fifty of them are still open ». (Jeune Afrique 17/05/2009). The situation is as equal in Madagascar. In 1972, there were around forty cinemas and five outdoor cinemas. Today, there are only ten active, mostly concentrated in the Malagasy capital. The only one with a 35mm projector is located in the French Cultural Centre in Antananarivo. The other cinemas show films on DVD or VCD. The projections are irregular, some days per month, above all during the weekends. At the beginning of 2000, video clubs appeared in each area of the Malagasy cities. Again, this phenomenon is linked with the accessibility of the NICT. With a TV and a video-recorder, one can record films on TV and presents them for a public screening. It becomes a real occupation and gives consequent supplementary revenue to the video-clubs owners. These video clubs were dedicated to a

³ L'Express de Madagascar. 10/11/2006.

popular audience. The entrance ticket was very inexpensive in comparison of a ticket for the cinema. However, their number has significantly decreased today. They closed because they showed pornographic films (which are illegal in Madagascar) or because of economical problems due to the multiplication of the home cinemas. With the new technologies, the screens move from public to private spheres, but also from the cities to distant villages. These screening projections in the rural areas are organized by NGO in order that everyone can have access to the cinema. Another example of the displacement of the screen is the projection of a Malagasy TV show called *Sangodim-piainana*. This soap opera was first presented on cinema before being on TV program.

Furthermore, smaller screens like TV, computer or cellular telephone's screens replace larger ones. As Rombes explains:

« Film itself is moving, because its screens are mobile. (...). The mobility of the screen erodes the boundary between the place of dreams and everyday life » (2009 : 65).

Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari (1980) explain that “deterritorialization” is also in the perception movement. The audience sees the film from a far distance because of the size of the cinema screen. However, when the screens are reduced, the audience's gaze has to come closer. This “closer vision” allow the audience to see the minor detail, like the emotions of the characters. Image is moving in the same time in the screen and with the screen. The gaze is re-oriented with the change of the screen size. As a result, the spectator's behavior in front of a screening is modified. Indeed, the audience reproduces the phenomenon of “zapping” as they are looking at a TV program. During a cinema projection, spectators often go out in order to smoke or to go in the toilet. The atmosphere in the cinema is noisy. Everyone comments the film with his neighbor and anticipates the action on the screen. The audience in cinema reproduces the private behavior in the public sphere.

This movement of “deterritorialization” is also oriented outward. The African films desert not only the classical rooms to go in the private spheres, but the spaces of projections stretch from the continent to foreigner international film festivals, which become their main, and sometimes their only, medium of diffusion. Indeed, there are several films festivals all around the world dedicated to the African continent

productions. With Internet, the possibilities of films diffusion increase more and more. Through the social networks, the filmmaker posts short films or teasers, in order to raise the audience to see their film on cinema. For example, to promote his new long animated film called *Andavabiby*, the Malagasy filmmaker Thierry Andrianasolo creates a page on Facebook. The *Malok'ila* films have also a fan club on the same social network.

Henceforth, the popularity of a film is based on different film supports, and is not measurable only with the number of entrances in the cinema and the video-clubs. If all supports are cumulated (cinema, Internet, television and VCD), more than 900 000 spectators have seen *Malok'ila* films since 2006 (Rivelo 2010) for a Malagasy population of around 19 million. Producers are prided to sell more than 50 000 VCD (Rindra 2010) per film when the making of the film itself is around 20 000 euros (Rindra 2011).

However, this “deterritorialization” of the cinematographic spaces allows what Chéneau-Loquay calls (2001) an “equalization” of the space or a “reterritorialization” (Deleuze, Guattari 1980). Indeed, for Deleuze and Guattari, “the deterritorialization can be covered by a reterritorialization, which compensate for it” (1980: 634). Home cinema could be a way to compensate the closure of the cinemas. Chéneau-Loquay evokes this « equalization » with the case of the cellular telephone in Senegal. She defines it as a democratization of the digital technologies access, even for people who live far from the cities (2001: 7). Hall (1997) also explains that the digital technologies contribute to open a window on the world. Malagasy people want to see on national television the same programs they see in the foreigner channels, like *Pazzapa*, the Malagasy version of *American Idol*. The growing up of the animated films is also related to the access of the NICT. Indeed, the filmmakers learn the 2D and 3D fundamentals on the Internet forums. Internet democratizes the access to the animation genre thanks to free software. Furthermore, animated films compensate the lack of professional Malagasy technicians or actors.

However, the wrong side of this “equalization” is the multiplication of the illegal copies of the films. In order to control this problem, the Malagasy Right Author Office (OMDA) proposes to add a hologram on each legal copy. This expensive measure gives rise to polemical from the filmmakers.

As Deleuze and Guattari state (1980), the concept of “deterritorialization” overtakes the geographical space to also evoke the immaterial space. NICT contribute to these displacements of territory, and modify the collective representations.

New representations in the Malagasy films

Hall (1997) explains that every discourse is ideological. NICT did not only come in a favorable economic context, they arrived in Madagascar during a significant political turning point. Indeed, after years of communism and censorship that reduce to silence most of the Malagasy filmmakers, the nineties open up to freedom of expression. A visa from the authorities is still necessary before showing a film, but it becomes more easily obtained. As a result of this new freedom of expression, new genre films appear, like horror, combat or detective fictions. The vocabulary also enriches with words to express the NICT, like “feo” which means “ringing, voice” in Malagasy language, or “hafatra” for “message”. These words are integrated in the cellular telephones (Rambelo 2008). These phones have more and more functions without connections with its first use of communication. They can be used to transfer Money. For example, since June 2010, the Telma phone company offers a money transfer service directly with the mobile phone inter-Madagascar. The cellular technology has also ideological representations. According to Peckmans (2009), mobile phone is a synonymous of security. Dibakana explains that having a mobile phone “indicates a social ascension” (2002: 143) and is a symbol “of modernity” (Brinkman et al 2009).

In the same way, in the film *Tana Mania*, (Henri Randrianierenana 2005), the mobile phone is not only a communicational tool. It is also a symbolic one. The three young girls receive mobile phone from their boyfriends as gifts. This object is fashion, but in this film its function is to satisfy the senses. It becomes an object of pleasure, and by extension, an object of power. The three female characters use the vibrator of the phone for solitary sexual pleasure, claiming as well their independence from the men. Morin underlines that:

« Objects become things, tools, instruments, but in the same way, immerse themselves in subjective, affective, esthetic values » (2008: 183).

Here, this diversion of the main use of the phone is used to materialize sexuality. Showing sex images in films is forbidden in Madagascar, so sexuality is suggested through the mobile phone. In 2006, with the success of this film, the filmmaker made another one called *Tana Mania 3* in which sexuality is more present. However, this time, the use of the mobile phone as an instrument of pleasure has disappeared. Indeed, when the censorship allows some explicit images of sexuality, the use of this diversion was not useful anymore.

The short film *6h58* made by Laza (2009) is another illustration of this ideological instrumentalization of the NICT. The main character of this film, Marc, does not directly accuse the political institutions to be responsible of his poverty, but he strikes out at the computer, as symbols of the economical development of which he is excluded. This fiction illustrates the “digital divide” on the Malagasy society, which means a “group of inequalities” (Rallet, Rochelandet 2004) or socio-economical and political as well as inter and intra-national “gap”, (Ben Youssef 2004). As Robert explains:

“NICT produce themselves a discourse (which is by image or by text) which reflects the society itself, they are tools of re-representation (...). (2009: 170).

There are not only discourses through NICT, there are also discourses on NICT through cinema. By the use of the new technologies, the narrative of *6h58* translates the distance that exists in the Malagasy society between those who can access to the new technologies and the others who are excluded. If the telephone networks cover about 80% of the country’s territory, more than a quarter of Malagasies owns a cell phone. There are less than 400 000 users of Internet in the country. The film underlines that the digital development is still for the powerful and the rich.

This article aims to demonstrate that the access of NICT in Madagascar appear in favorable contexts that explain their fast appropriation by the filmmakers. The NICT contribute to restart the industry of films in Madagascar. Today, there are more than

thirty long fiction films produced each year. This increase is directly linked to the appearance of the NICT. They modify not only the creative “codes”, but also displace the spaces of diffusion. The cinema screen, reduced to the television, computer or telephone screens does not function as a “filter” between reality and fiction anymore (Hall 1997). The “movement” from and by the image changes the ways of making and seeing cinema. It also produces ideological discourses on and through NICT. Indeed, every new object produces what Ling calls “the range of movement forms of social interaction” (Ling 2004: 173).

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