



**Intercultural school**  
Talents pour le monde

**ÉPREUVES D'ADMISSION  
EN QUATRIEME ANNEE  
STRATEGIE DIGITALE INTERCULTURELLE**

**SESSION JANVIER 2018**

**ANGLAIS**

Read the following article then complete the exercise below.

## The Internet of Things Is Coming for Us



The Moche people lived on Peru's north coast long before the Spanish conquest of the Americas. They grew corn and squash, built monumental adobe temples and were master craftsmen in gold and ceramics.

They never had the chance to sell their wares on Etsy or Ebay, and yet they anticipated some of our most modern anxieties.

Like us, they saw themselves living in a vulnerable world where the technology created to make their lives better was just as likely to turn against them. While we worry about our baby monitors and home routers being hijacked by malicious hackers, they perceived a world in which everyday objects like jugs and clothes might come to life with ominous consequences.

Moche artists painted scenes of this happening on ceramic vessels and on the walls of their temples. They appear whimsical to us today — items of clothing, weaving implements, weapons, all with arms and legs, hands and feet, some with heads and faces, on parade or engaged in battle — but for the Moche they may have represented a deep-seated uncertainty and fear about the ultimate fate of the human-created world.

In some scenes, the animated objects are docile. In one, bowls piled with food and jugs have grown legs and walk toward human figures participating in a ceremony; some helpful jugs even bend over to pour liquid into vessels.

But other paintings show a world turned upside down, where the objects have taken charge: They fight and defeat human warriors and parade naked human captives.

In an excavation in 1991 near the town of San José de Moro, archaeologists, including one of the authors of this piece, Luis Jaime Castillo Butters, discovered the lavish tomb of a Moche priestess. Her coffin had been anthropomorphized, with a mask representing the priestess' face on top and with arms and legs fashioned from copper on the sides.

Inherent in the idea that objects have life is the more subversive concept that they also have desires; feel hate and love; seek revenge; and have the capacity to act on their own.

In the modern world, most of the objects that surround us are a result of an impersonal process of production — they come from factories, we buy them in stores or online. For the Moche, objects were not produced — they were created, imbuing them with the ambiguity and mystery with which life is given to animated beings.

Such objects could be either beneficial or dangerous, depending on whether they decided to serve their creators or turn against them, either of their own volition or through the black arts of others.

We now live in a world where objects once again have life. We can talk to them and they can answer back, as is the case with Alexa and Siri and their digital kin. With their help we can control and organize the world around us: We can make sure our homes are safe, turn lights and appliances on or off, summon a taxi or order food from a restaurant. Little by little we are transferring to these technologies the tasks that we used to do ourselves, and at the same time, we are giving them control over our surroundings.

The internet of things is made up of billions of everyday devices connected for convenience to the web. Last fall, hackers attacked this network, commandeering as many as 100,000 of these devices by using malicious software that guessed at their simple, factory-set passwords, and then ordering them to send volleys of nuisance messages to the computers of a company called Dyn, which functions as a sort of switchboard for the internet. That was enough to cripple many major websites, including Twitter and Netflix. We have given life to these things, but now we know that they do not obey only us.

There are alternative interpretations of the Moche ceramic paintings, and some researchers do not see a sinister component. But the paintings have an echo in a myth collected in central Peru in the early 17th century. In the myth, the sun dies, the world is plunged into darkness and household objects and domesticated animals revolt: Mortars and grinding stones eat people, and llamas drive humans.

Andean people before the conquest created a philosophical and spiritual system built around the concepts of duality and transformation — light versus darkness, order versus chaos.

The modern world is full of such opportunities for chaos, often created by humans and the increasing sophistication and technology-centeredness of modern life. A solar flare has the potential to disrupt electrical networks. A tsunami can flood a nuclear reactor. The digitalization of stock markets leads to flash crashes. Russian hackers stealing Democratic Party emails seek to influence an American presidential election.

Order gives way to chaos. The internet of things turns on its makers.

The Moche culture collapsed around A.D. 850. The reasons are not clear, but the collapse was most likely a result of the Moche's inability to cope with a hostile and perhaps changing environment, including the failure of their technology, knowledge and institutions to help them overcome those challenges. We can be certain that the technology they created did not rebel against them. But neither did it save them when they needed it the most.

## **Exercise**

In your opinion, how fearful do you think we should be of the connected objects that are now so ubiquitous in our modern world?

Use the article you have just read to help you with your answer. You should write around 300 words.