

## AMERICAN TELEVISION AND CINEMA IN FRANCE AND EUROPE

— DIANA QUINTERO —

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More than 10,000 demonstrators lined the streets of Paris on 4 January to defend the French cinematographic industry against the United States of America and “les gangsters” of Hollywood. People spoke out against an influx of films said to threaten the French way of life and render the Gallic film industry obsolete. One actor explained that the imports “[e]ndanger the very existence of dramatic art. The change in French taste may well be irreversible and fatal . . . for a Frenchman, this amounts to giving up his citizenship!”<sup>1</sup> Intellectuals also decried what they perceived to be the triumph of a mass consumer society and warned that it would eventually lead to the end of French civilization.<sup>2</sup> People could be heard shouting, “C’est la chute de la culture dans la marchandise!”<sup>3</sup>

This scene, however, did not occur during the recent GATT audio-visual controversy between France and the United States. It took place on 4 January 1948. In fact, French protest of the American film industry goes back to the 1920s when American silent movies invaded not only Europe, but the entire world.<sup>4</sup> Then, as now, the French set quotas; even after implementing a French law to limit U.S. films, the U.S. film industry maintained its predominant position.<sup>5</sup> The German occupation from 1940 to 1944 was the only hiatus of American Cinema in France. Following World War II, Leon Blum and James Byrnes signed the now infamous Blum-Byrnes accords.<sup>6</sup> These accords essentially gave France U.S. aid in return for American access to key sectors of the French economy, notably the film industry.<sup>7</sup> The Blum-Byrnes accords were criticized by many,

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1. Frank Costigliola, *France and the United States: The Cold Alliance Since World War II* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), 56.

2. Richard Kuisel, *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 12.

3. “It’s the collapse of culture into commercialism!”

4. Costigliola, *France and the United States*, 55-6.

5. Each year, 188 dubbed American films were played in French theaters, another fifty with an English soundtrack. Geneviève Sellier, “Le Précédent des Accords Blum-Byrnes,” *Le Monde Diplomatique*, No. 476, November 1993, 15.

6. Blum was head of the French government in 1936 and represented France in the post-war negotiations; Byrnes represented the United States.

7. Costigliola, *France and the United States*, 54.

who argued that few media are as powerful as the film industry for the dissemination of American cultural values.

This perception coincided with the decline in French film production of 91 films in 1946 to 78 films in 1947, while at the same time the United States had increased its film production from less than 200 films to 338. Demonstrations and demands for a renegotiation of the Blum-Byrnes accords were the result.<sup>8</sup> The renegotiations led to an eventual increase in French film production to 121 movies per year (although U.S. films could still occupy up to 40 percent of the French market).

Assessing the U.S. film industry's penetration in France in the late 1940s and in the 1990s, it is clear that quotas have been an ineffective means of limiting American film dominance. Why then did the French encourage other European countries to support them during the GATT negotiations? When France successfully demanded the exclusion of the audio-visual sector from the trade rules, it was in essence fighting to maintain the existing quota laws regulating American films and television programs as established under the Television Without Frontiers Directive, which came into effect on 3 October 1991.

It is the purpose of this paper to explain the semantics of the Fifty Percent Programming Rule and the recent French and European efforts to exclude the audiovisual industry from the GATT negotiations. Will their GATT success modify existing trends or viewing patterns or, as many propose, kill the ailing French film industry? What role does the process of *Americanization* play in the French efforts to exclude U.S. films, and are all Europeans and Frenchmen as apprehensive about this issue as one is led to believe? Will the French lose their cultural identity? Finally, what lies ahead in a European Community where cultural distinctions may blur as integration moves ahead, and as global communications shrink the notion of the nation-state?

Concern over the GATT negotiations was widespread among the French and Europeans. Both the agricultural and audio-visual sectors were seen to be at risk if protectionist subsidies were lost or if Americans were allowed unlimited access to the European television and film markets. France ranks as the second-largest agricultural exporter, with a trade surplus of ten billion dollars last year.<sup>9</sup> It is also the third largest film producer after the United States and India. Despite its standing, France felt especially threatened by both the GATT negotiations and the United States. Some argue that it was an especially difficult situation for France because these decisions were perceived to be taken by non-European Community member states through the European Community.<sup>10</sup> How well-founded were these fears?

The audio-visual industry, including films, television, and video, is America's second largest export industry after aerospace and accounts for almost four billion dollars in exports to France alone.<sup>11</sup> Overall, E.C. officials calculate that

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8. Sellier, "Le Précédent des Accords Blum-Byrnes," 15.

9. "French Farmers Against the World," *The Economist*, 11 September 1993, 47.

10. Adam Sage, "France Flies a Tricolor of Defiance," *The Observer*, 24 October 1993.

11. Nicole La Caisne, "La dure loi des séries," *L'Express*, No. 2205, 14 October 1993, 38.

this represents 75-80 percent of the entire film industry and 55-60 percent of television programming in Europe.<sup>12</sup> What worries most Europeans is the alarming increase in the number of American films being screened throughout Europe. In Germany, for instance, American movies accounted for 55-60 percent of screenings between 1980-1989; however, since then, American films have increased to occupy 83 percent of the market.<sup>13</sup> This trend prompted several powerful organizations, including the European Broadcasting Union, to warn legislators that an eradication of regulations would leave Europe vulnerable to U.S. domination.<sup>14</sup>

The United States and the Hollywood elite, however, have a different opinion on the matter. The United States has called for further liberalization of the audio-visual sector in both France and Europe. U.S. film directors Steven Spielberg and Martin Scorsese both spoke to their French colleagues on the importance of maintaining an open market. What many fail to realize, however, is that there are no quotas on the number of American films shown in movie theaters.<sup>15</sup> A tax, however, is collected on every film shown in France to subsidize the national film industry. In fact, the issue of open markets pertains almost exclusively to television. Unfortunately, the two are confused.

The American government and film executives such as Jack Valenti, President of the Motion Picture Association of America, assert that unfair treatment of the United States in the audio-visual sector amounts to economic protectionism and censorship, and will ultimately doom any prospects for free trade.<sup>16</sup> Some have gone so far as to accuse France of a Socialist conspiracy. In 1989, Michael Jay Salomon, President of Warner Brothers, said, "[T]he people making these decisions are essentially bureaucrats and politicians influenced by left-leaning journalists and film-makers."<sup>17</sup> Ironically, he charged the French of "trying to inflict their opinions on the rest of Europe,"<sup>18</sup> an accusation often directed against Americans.

When looking at the basis of U.S. government protest, one must not overlook President Clinton's support for the American audio-visual industry. This issue is crucial in terms of trade deficit reduction. Furthermore, concessions to the Europeans might establish a dangerous precedent in international business relations for the United States.<sup>19</sup> In a world where many have begun to question

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12. "Europeans Can't Kick the U.S. Film Habit," *Agence France Presse*, (hereafter AFP), 24 September 1993.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Robert Evans, "Eurobroadcasters Seek Special Treatment in Trade," *The Reuter Business Report*, 7 October 1993.

15. There have not been any since the afore-mentioned Blum-Byrnes accords. Henri Behar, "La Controverse sur le GATT: Scorsese et Spielberg se prononcent sur la libre circulation des biens culturels," *Le Monde*, 6 October 1993.

16. Linda Greenhouse, "Ideas and Trends," *The New York Times*, 13 August 1989.

17. Jonathan Weber, "Turning the Volume Down; Hollywood nervous over possible European TV quotas," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 July 1989, 4:1.

18. *Ibid.*, 1.

19. AFP, "Europeans Can't Kick the U.S. Film Habit."

American hegemony and economic power, the United States is compelled to demonstrate its power on these issues.

### The Television Without Frontiers Directive

Gone are the days of Jacques Brel when, to flatter a woman, one could simply sing to her, "Mon Amerique moi."<sup>20</sup> But even today, if a Frenchman wants to express his indifference about something, he says, "Ce n'est pas l'Amerique."<sup>21</sup> Despite admiration and compliments, criticism of the United States exists, and the French accuse the United States of "cultural dumping."<sup>22</sup> Howard LaFranchi, a reporter for the Christian Science Monitor, wrote that "some children are so accustomed to American crime movies that they expect if ever arrested, to be told, 'You have the right to remain silent,' — as guaranteed under United States law."<sup>23</sup>

According to the American Film Market Seminar in Hollywood, despite the Television Without Frontiers Directive, American movies and television continue to "reign supreme"<sup>24</sup> in Europe. This E.C. Directive, also referred to as the Fifty Percent Programming Rule, requires television stations to dedicate 50 percent of their programming to European-made works. At the same time, it has ramifications for the entire European Community, as it establishes a common market for the audio-visual industry. In theory once states sign the Directive and thus promise to meet the quota rule, there would be freer circulation of programs within the European Community.

While the French eagerly enforce a 60 percent quota on non-pay television stations,<sup>25</sup> as well as provide indirect subsidies and \$263 million in state aid to filmmakers and TV channels that abide by the rule,<sup>26</sup> most countries make little, if any effort to enforce the quota system. In Great Britain, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Greece, more than 90 percent of television programming comes from the United States. When Greece tried to enforce the quotas, private channels protested until the government abandoned its efforts.<sup>27</sup> Italy simply tries to schedule Italian works around American programming. Given America's high market share, with laws already in place, it is not surprising that most countries are wary of further French attempts to limit U.S. programs. This is especially true if one considers that the Television Without Frontiers Directive does not include news, commercials, or quiz shows, but limits exclusively television series and feature films, the main U.S. exports.

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20. Charles Bremner, "Legends, image, and icons," *The Times*, 27 August 1992.

21. Ibid. "It's just not America . . ."

22. James Barr, "Box Office or Front Line? Movie Receipts Illuminate Trade War," *The International Herald Tribune*, 6 October 1993.

23. Howard LaFranchi, "EC chiefs warm to East Europe, warn US on trade ties," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 24 June 1993, 3.

24. Robert Marich, "U.S. Fare Still Tops in Europe," *The Hollywood Reporter*, 6 March 1992.

25. TF1 was fined five million U.S. dollars for violating the Directive. AFP.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

The most recent controversy over the Directive concerns Ted Turner and his attempt to directly transmit two of his networks, TNT and the Cartoon Network, through cable networks and home satellite dishes. France has protested Turner's attempts to flout the quota rule. Home dishes do not come under the Directive's jurisdiction. This epitomizes France's losing battle with the Directive. Technological changes in telecommunications are already rendering the quota rule obsolete. This issue will be explored later in the paper.

The tremendous economic profits at stake overshadowed the entire Directive and the GATT negotiations. Europe's trade deficit with the United States in the audio-visual sector was nearly \$3.7 billion in 1992. This provoked French Minister of Culture Jacques Toubon to sarcastically note, "and yet it is the Americans who complain about protectionism."<sup>28</sup> Total audio-visual sales to the United States from Europe were only \$288 million.<sup>29</sup> While Europeans seek quotas as a means to encourage native production and to save jobs, it is uneconomical for them to ignore the low prices offered by American companies. Alan Howden, head of program acquisition at the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) explains that the BBC pays between \$50,000 to \$2 million for the rights for television features.<sup>30</sup> The number of stations that schedule programming also affects pricing. For example, Italy has three stations and thus pays approximately what the BBC pays. As Spain and Germany, however, buy for only one station, each station thus pays a maximum of \$1 million.

At the same time, most stations are selective about their purchases. Although there are exceptions in Italy, most European buyers want top of the line films, box-office hits and mini-series, but are not particularly interested in "B" features.<sup>31</sup> New stations may also program many American shows and movies because they are cheap and popular, creating a catch-22 situation. By relying on a large percentage of American programming, they violate the Fifty Percent Programming Rule.

For pay-TV networks, American shows are purchased on a per title basis. American feature films are licensed at prices based on a multiple of the subscriber base.<sup>32</sup> In 1989, the president of Warner Brothers explained that prices ranged from sixty cents to ten cents a title, the exception being Canal Plus, the world's second largest pay-TV channel, which negotiated a flat fee.<sup>33</sup>

### The GATT Controversy

Cultural protection was one of the most contested issues of the Uruguay Round of the GATT negotiations. The French insisted that if the audio-visual industry was not totally excluded from the Treaty, they would boycott the

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28. Barr, "Box Office or Front Line?"

29. Jean Rafaelli, "L'Industrie du cinéma s'apprête à affronter les géants américains," AFP, 25 September 1993.

30. Marich, "U.S. Fare Still Tops in Europe."

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

Uruguay round. Until 29 September when the European Parliament overwhelmingly adopted a joint resolution supporting a cultural exception clause, ministers from the European Community were not swayed by the French argument.

The European Commissioner for external trade negotiations, Sir Leon Brittan, while sympathetic with the French, suggested instead a "cultural specificity clause," (after being pressured by the United States to abandon a cultural exception clause) which would include film and television within the GATT.<sup>34</sup> This was condemned by Belgium's Audio-visual Minister, Elio Di Rupo, who stated that if the GATT passed, it would be the end of audio-visual and cinematographic production in Europe.<sup>35</sup>

In fact, both the European Community and the French were opposed to a cultural specificity clause. Jaoa de Deus Pinheiro, the E.C.'s Audio-visual Commissioner, feared that a cultural specificity clause would set a precedent with the United States for compromise on other trade issues within GATT.<sup>36</sup> The French argued that the United States would manipulate the cultural specificity clause to their advantage, for as Toubon noted, "[y]ou cannot enter a system that encourages uniformity while at the same time fighting for diversity."<sup>37</sup>

Knowing this, other countries, namely Belgium, Spain, and Italy decided to support France. Momentum for the French cause increased after the "Mons Declaration." Under that declaration, European directors from all E.C. countries, except Luxembourg, considered taking the European Community to court if cinema and television were not exempted from the GATT or at least covered by an exemption clause. One director explained, "Audio-visual is the most powerful instrument of culture in our century. . . . It must not be likened to other products and services."<sup>38</sup>

What does the completion of the Uruguay of the GATT, which left cultural products temporarily outside the agreement, mean for the audio-visual industry? One possibility is an increase in state subsidies in order to jump-start domestic film production in Europe. This is necessary according to Jean Dondlinger, the E.C. Commissioner for Broadcast Affairs, who states that the major problems are the size of each domestic market and the number of different languages.<sup>39</sup> Many countries already aid the audio-visual sector. Denmark, for example, finances 50 percent of the production in the country and guarantees distribution.<sup>40</sup>

Nonetheless, many filmmakers predict the further collapse of the European

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34. "GATT: France and Commission Agree on the End But Not on the Means," *European Report*, No. 1887, 22 September 1993.

35. Raffaelli, "L'Industrie du cinéma s'apprête à affronter les géants américains."

36. Suzanne Perry, "Film-makers Threaten to Take EC to Court on Trade Rules," *The Reuter Library Report*, 4 October 1993.

37. LaFranchie, "EC Chiefs Warm to East Europe," 1.

38. Perry, "Film-makers Threaten to Take EC."

39. Steven Greenhouse, "Ideas and Trends: The Television Europeans Love to Hate," *The New York Times*, 13 August 1989, 24.

40. *Ibid.*

audio-visual market. If Europe truly intends to enforce quotas, television stations risk having empty slots because there are not enough European-made shows to fill the air time. The sheer quantity of program hours is daunting. European stations would need to produce 16,000 hours of drama and fiction a year, though current yearly levels are barely 2,500.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, both subsidized and non-subsidized networks risk bankruptcy because of the high cost of purchasing European shows. As American shows cost less than one-tenth of domestically-produced shows, budgets will be exhausted quickly by producing in Europe.<sup>42</sup> As far back as 1989, the French market saw its revenues drop by 50 percent from the previous year because of enforced programming requirements.<sup>43</sup> Enforcement would even affect Canal Plus, requiring the screening of 200 French films a year, though France annually produces only 130 for screening.<sup>44</sup>

Certain problems must now be tackled if Europe's successful challenge is not to become a pyrrhic victory. First, there is the problem of definition. Since France will hold the rotating European Union presidency for the first six months of 1995, it will continue to exercise its influence in the audio-visual sector. France currently plans to define concretely for the European Union what falls under the term "cultural," for most of today's production falls into the gray zone.<sup>45</sup> Since the GATT victory, France has not only tried to find new ways to enforce the Television Without Frontiers Directive, but has also proposed expanding the Directive's definition to include radio.<sup>46</sup> Nonetheless, France has indirectly acknowledged that telecommunications technology is bypassing efforts to filter out foreign programming. Moreover several groups within the French government have hinted at a willingness to adopt a more open and integrative approach to the audio-visual industry. Cultural Minister Jacques Toubon expressed this new push in early 1994 when he said, "If we do not want the productions that the communications industry will gobble up to be made outside Europe, we must multiply by twenty our potential for creation and boost distribution. . . . We must embark on a policy of alliances and partnerships."<sup>47</sup>

Even though France is being hailed as the defender of the European Union against the Americans, some people wonder if Europe, and especially France, are not simply bringing about their own downfall. In France, "Navarro," a police show that is "one hundred percent French" and earns high ratings, is produced by a Hollywood trained director who admits that he modelled his show after Steve Bochco's "Hill Street Blues" and "L.A. Law."<sup>48</sup> As George Wedell, director

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41. Tim Witcher, "TV Soap War Threat," *The Daily Telegraph*, 2 October 1989, 12.

42. Greenhouse, "Ideas and Trends," 24.

43. Weber, "Turning the Volum Down," 1.

44. John Huey, "America's Hottest Export: Pop Culture," *Fortune*, 31 December 1990, 50.

45. "Après Exclusion de l'Audiovisuel de l'Accord sur le GATT, Les Etats Unis Menacent l'Europe de Sanctions," *Le Monde*, 14 January 1994.

46. Ibid.

47. "France Calls for Powerful EC Culture Industry," *Reuter EC Report*, 11 January 1994.

48. La Caisne, "La dure loi des séries," 39.

of the European Institute for the Media comments, "There is a danger that European rubbish will be no better than the American rubbish."<sup>49</sup>

One of France's arguments during the GATT negotiations was that it remained the last country in the European Community with a healthy non-English speaking film industry, producing 155 films in 1992 that comprised 35 percent of its own domestic market.<sup>50</sup> Toubon emphasized that France's market could be bigger and more productive were it familiar to other nations. Through quotas France can expand its potential audience within Europe. Toubon adds that he "does not want to close the European market to Americans, but to open the European market to Europeans."<sup>51</sup>

By arguing to maintain the Fifty Percent Programming Rule, the French are simply maintaining the status quo. The quotas have yet to work, and are unlikely to be enforced at a time when new networks such as TNT and the Cartoon Channel are being launched. Furthermore, to say that Europeans are unfamiliar with the French film industry seems to be a gross misrepresentation of the impact of French films within the European Union. Names like Louis Malle, Gérard Depardieu, and Isabelle Adjani are household names in European Union countries, just as Fellini or Almodovar are in France.

The problem in France is best summed up by Alain Juppé, French Foreign Minister, who warned that "one of the main threats to jobs in France is the protectionist temptation."<sup>52</sup> Although France has increased subsidies to the national film industry, this has not increased the public's appetite for French films. If anything, there has been a decline in the number of French films in favor of American films.<sup>53</sup>

A growing perception by Americans and now more frequently by some Europeans, is that the French disagree out of habit and that their policies are often dictated by their biases rather than by reason. Lang proclaimed melodramatically, "So it's war and in war, our nation must stand together,"<sup>54</sup> and then awarded Sylvester Stallone, icon of American big-budget action films, *The Chevalier des Arts*, the highest honor an actor can receive from the French government.

Even Europeans are becoming irritated by France. Jacques Delors, head of the E.C. Executive Commission and a French Socialist, said angrily, "France is creating a drama all its own, inventing a Maginot Line, earning a bad reputation in 80 countries around the world. . . . Is it worth it?"<sup>55</sup> What worries many Europeans now are the enormous revenues at stake. Over \$200 billion could be lost if the United States decides to impose unilateral trade sanctions.<sup>56</sup>

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49. Greenhouse, "Ideas and Trends," 24.

50. AFP, "Europeans Can't Kick the U.S. Film Habit."

51. *European Report*, 22 September 1993.

52. "Belated Bonhomie," *The Economist*, 2 October 1993, 50.

53. Huey, "America's Hottest Export," 50.

54. Alan Riding, "Paris Seeks to Rally Support for its Opposition to Trade Talks," *The New York Times* 19 October 1993, A3.

55. *Ibid.*, 3.

56. Sage, "France Flies a Tricolor of Defiance."



### "The Contentious French"

Although all of these reasons are valid, the tense situation between France and the United States is multi-dimensional and spans over half a century. The origins of French-American rivalry lie in the past, when a bipolar world emerged following the Second World War. Today, when Washington officials explain that they find the French too "difficult to keep on track,"<sup>57</sup> they are reacting to cultural stereotypes about France that have slowly solidified because of Washington's past dealings with France. Likewise, when the French are outraged at America's reference to the European "pie" (audio-visual industry) that both can share, the French are, in fact, reacting to stereotypes of American greed and consumerism established during the presidency of Charles de Gaulle. Thus, to understand these misgivings toward the United States and determine if they still dictate policymaking in France or rather just linger in Gallic minds, one must first analyze their origins.

The affirmation or attempt to reestablish (depending on whom one asks) American hegemony and France's resistance to that affirmation seem to be at the heart of Franco-American tensions from the Cold War to the GATT negotiations. In his book *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization*, Richard Kuisel posits three reasons for the strong anti-American sentiment after the Second World War.<sup>58</sup> First, while America came out of its isolation after the War as one of the two major world powers, it was painfully apparent to the French that they were no longer contenders in the global arena. Second, France resented its reliance on the Marshall Plan. Last, and most important for the elite, there was a growing fear and resistance to what the surrealist poet and author, Louis Aragon, has referred to as the "Bathtub Civilization," namely American cultural imposition. Part of this apprehension arose from what Walter Lippmann refers to in his book, *Public Opinion*, as "stereotypes as defense." In this sense, stereotypes serve as a "defense" of a culture in a society; they are the "guarantee of . . . self respect."<sup>59</sup>

At the same time, Americans formed stereotypes that still pepper American understanding of France.<sup>60</sup> France remained for decades a defeated nation, no matter how many years had elapsed since the end of World War II. The stigma of being defeated by the Germans and rescued by the Americans is a fact the United States held over France until very recently. Secondly, many Americans' notions of the French were based on images of romance, perfume, Christian Dior, glamour, and gourmet food. France was thus perceived as feminine and weak — "a difficult bride."<sup>61</sup> As Lippmann points out, people first "notice a trait which marks a well known type and fill in the rest of the picture by means of stereotypes [they] carry about in [their] heads."<sup>62</sup> Lastly, many who have been

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57. Costigliola, *France and the United States*, 244.

58. Kuisel, *Seducing the French*, 16-17.

59. Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: The Free Press, 1922), 64.

60. Costigliola, *France and the United States*, 244.

61. *Ibid.*, 8.

62. Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 59.

(until very recently) France's staunchest defenders and most powerful critics of America fall into the category of intellectuals. Sartre, Aragon, Left Bank intellectuals like Malraux and Gide, were all cast as pedants by Americans and especially by the government, perhaps because the "Yankees" did not want to understand, perhaps because it was not in their interest to do so. In any event, these cultural stereotypes, as many are, were a convenient way to trivialize and discard French concerns about *Americanization*.

One should expect continued Franco-American rivalry. The French will continue to be contentious. These political and economic squabbles emphasize the continued perception of encroachment that many Frenchmen feel. The questions of identity and civilization resurface in France. Kuisel points out that the

basis of anti-Americanism is cultural and pivots on the notion of protecting and disseminating civilization. Though differences over international relations, trade, and economics will continue to stir criticism of hegemonic Western power, the core of resistance derives from a sense of French difference, superiority, and universal mission—all bound in the term civilization . . . the implied universality of civilization breeds competition with the United States because America has its own sense of universal mission.<sup>63</sup>

It is this sense of mission, disseminated in part through the audio-visual industry, that the French argue threatens their identity. Is this a valid accusation?

#### "Not a Market Problem, but a Problem of Civilization"<sup>64</sup>

Perhaps one of the most famous pieces of literature to emerge in the 1960s in France was *Les Choses* by Georges Perec. Taking the reader on a decade-long journey with a couple, Sylvie and Jerome, it exposed the dangers of the consumer society. Richard Kuisel defines it, explaining that:

America represented the coming 'consumer society.' This term suggested not just the mass purchase of standardized products of American origin or design such as Kodak cameras or jeans; it also denoted a style of life that encompassed new patterns of spending, higher wage levels, and greater social mobility. It featured new forms of economic organization including different kinds of industrial relations, business management, and markets. And the new consumerism depended on different cultural values. Consumer society suggested a life oriented around acts of purchase and a materialistic philosophy. It valued the productive and the technical and was

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63. Kuisel, *Seducing the French*, 236.

64. Francois Mitterrand, referring to the GATT/audio-visual controversy.

accompanied by the products of the new mass culture, from Hollywood films and comic strips to home appliances and fast food.<sup>65</sup>

Perec addresses the same theme that underlines much of the present debate about cultural identity in France and the threat to the audio-visual industry. As the previous quote illustrates, there cannot be an assault on a nation's identity without an aggressor, a counter-identity that challenges it. It is the "other" that helps define who the "we" are.<sup>66</sup> It was the formation of a "we/them dichotomy," agitated by America, that France was protesting. Since the 1950s, the French fear of losing their identity is due to an inherent contradiction they see in the United States between having and being. *Americanization* and the coming of the consumer society is the new basis for the modern era. America represents mass production, mass consumption, cheap products, money, and materialism. France does not. Nevertheless, the French do not necessarily consider the consumer society as something negative. It is when having and being are not in conflict that they embrace American culture. Material things, one could argue, are dual in nature. They are good if the consumer embraces them for pleasure and for personal gratification. In this case, having and being are in harmony.

When the consumer becomes preoccupied with being "cool," "GQ," and "chic," having and being are in conflict. It is also when the French cry out to protect their identity. At this stage, personal satisfaction is replaced with a longing for other standards, imposed not by the self, but by someone else, something foreign. Because it is the United States that people want to imitate the French see themselves trading in personal satisfaction and leisure for the web of American mass consumerism. Slowly, American materialism and consumerism corrode the distinctiveness of place, tradition, and *joie de vivre*. There is no longer a why, but a how. How to acquire this or that, how to be like a cowboy, and other trivial concerns are questions many Frenchmen feel diminish their way of being and their world view.

Valid or not, it is in this context that one must evaluate the French when they protest in order to protect their identity. When the French justified their position on the GATT by claiming their purpose was "to protect not just themselves, but all of Europe from the invaders,"<sup>67</sup> or when Toubon emphasized that culture is diversity and pluralism,<sup>68</sup> French identity was being assaulted by the American wasteland of consumer products.

Another important issue the French must grapple with is not a loss of identity, but a redefinition of it, taking into account not *Americanization*, but technology. This time, one must examine the 1870s, a time much like the 1990s. Technological changes also threatened France both socially and artistically. In one of his more famous works, *Au Bonheur des Dames*, Emile Zola surveyed the birth of the new

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65. Kuisel, *Seducing the French*, 3.

66. Kuisel, *Seducing the French*, 6.

67. Howard La Franchi, "With Dinosaurs at Door, French Cry, 'Cultural Invasion,'" *The Christian Science Monitor*, 20 September 1993, 1.

68. *Ibid.*, 1.

mass consumer society played out in the department store. He blasted the new materialistic rapport between people, defined through economic power, as being the seduction of a generation. Yet he also stressed the need to adapt to change, to reevaluate the old way of life. Those who did not adapt were destined to remain behind.

Art history also provides insight to a possible solution in the recent GATT controversy. The nineteenth century saw the birth of a science that nearly eclipsed some of the greatest artists in France's history. Photography challenged the realism of Courbet, Corot, and Ingres. Some proclaimed the end of painting in the same tone that many today herald the end of the European film industry. In fact, adoption and acceptance of the new medium led to one of the greatest artistic movements the world has ever known. Impressionists, such as Monet and Renoir, and some American converts like Mary Cassatt, redefined art without rejecting photography. In fact, they used it to fine-tune their play on light in their masterpieces. Some argue that Monet's "Rouen Cathedrals" exceeds anything photography can hope to reproduce. The Impressionists thus added a different dimension to painting. By redefining it and adapting to technology, they paved the way for Cubism and successive movements.

This history lesson is not lost on contemporary French youth. New generations that are more "culturally aware," or "corrupted,"<sup>69</sup> (depending on one's point of view), no longer fear America. In fact, they embrace its hegemony without many of the apprehensions of past generations.<sup>70</sup> Ory Pascal, a young cultural historian redefined culture to include pop music, television, cartoons, and science-fiction. No longer is the mass public guilt-ridden for demanding American products. Most do not long to be American any more than most Americans long to be French. Americans who wear Dior perfume, drink Evian water, or purchase Rossignol ski equipment know that they do not run the risk of losing themselves. Today, most of the French realize this as well. In fact, politicians and older intellectuals are the people who have created most of the uproar about *Americanization*. As is often the case with the media, the most vociferous receive the most coverage. Much of the protest against America now is due to economic friction between the two countries. The protests of French farmers against Euro-Disney had more to do with economics than a threat to civilization. The issue of cultural identity is trivialized. Few take it seriously when divorced from pressing financial issues. The new generation, and many of the old, realize that what they confront is not *Americanization*, but consumerism, a global process encompassing technological change and innovation.

The French have come to realize that "culture is not lessened simply because American film appears in the cinema or on the small screen."<sup>71</sup> As the lessons of the past illustrate, it is more rewarding, both intellectually and financially, to

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69. Huey, "America's Hottest Export," 50.

70. Brian Rigby, *Popular Culture in Modern France* (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1991), 161.

71. Andrew Bell, "Cultural Chernobyl? Euro Disney Draws Wrath of French Intelligentsia," *The Gazette*, 15 April 1992, B3.

adapt to technology rather than let others pass by. The pioneer advantage is something the French Impressionists embraced. With the strongest audio-visual industry in Europe, the French have a fleeting opportunity to invest in a global market. Resisting adaptation to change will only hurt and perhaps finish the French audio-visual industry. In any event, the technology is beyond their control. They are powerless to regulate it and many have come to realize that.

### Conclusion

The French government and the European Union can savor their recent victory, and subsidize the audio-visual industry and encourage quotas, but it is evident that they have not quenched the European thirst for American films. The European Union has watched five billion hours of U.S. films on television.<sup>72</sup> What the French must accept is the folly of protectionism. They must compete technologically in a multimedia world or risk being bypassed. More than any other time in history, the globe is now a "one world pop-tech civilization."<sup>73</sup> The Japanese have realized this and have invested over \$12 billion in the American entertainment industry between 1987-1990.<sup>74</sup>

The new French hero, Balladur, who today boasts over a 60 percent approval rating, acknowledges that "France has a vital interest in commercial development and free trade. . . . France is never greater than when it opens up to the world."<sup>75</sup> France seems to be moving very slowly towards an acceptance of this principle, especially when the country's most respected leader has tried to sell the idea to the public. If France uses the European Union presidency to encourage domestic protectionism, however, it will have learned nothing and sealed the fate of the French film industry.

In a world where multimedia mergers create supranational entities, it is time to redefine the term "power" as control over communications technology. Rather than resist it, why not embrace it as Canal Plus has done? By moving out of its French base and expanding into Europe, it has the opportunity to be one of the controlling media forces in the European market. Why limit this with quotas? The challenge is to shed old inhibitions about infringement on cultural identities and work within the European Community to usher in technology.

France must also realize that it is not the only player in the European Union. It should enter into negotiations with other European countries and be flexible about sovereignty issues. Otherwise it will lose credibility with its neighboring nation-states, and endanger further cooperation. Those most hurt by a more stringent Fifty Percent Programming Rule will be the British, Germans, and Italians who have the highest percentage of American programs. If the French

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72. Jack Ralite, "Le GATT contre la culture: danger pour la civilisation," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, No. 476, November 1993, 30.

73. Huey, "America's Hottest Export," 50.

74. *Ibid.*, 50.

75. Sharon Waxman, "GATT Result Opens Balladur Era in France," *The Chicago Tribune*, 30 December 1993, 6.

are so vociferous about the audio-visual industry, how can they hope to reach agreements about the movements of migrants within the European Community, a much more volatile issue?

The challenge, however, is adaptation to technological change. If the Europeans choose to become players in the multimedia arena, they will most likely further develop their own European Union networks. France is well placed to lead, with networks such as Canal Plus and the Franco-German ASTRA network. It must seize this fleeting opportunity.