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Cultural Television: Western Europe and the United States

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Uncertainties within the French audiovisual sphere about the viability of ARTE, the Franco-German cultural television channel, crystallize the crisis in the legitimacy of cultural television within the European public service. Promoted by successive Mitterrand governments as compensation for deregulation and privatization, and as a tool for building Europe, ARTE is drawing very small audiences in France, and reviving accusations against French official culture of metropolitan elitism. Based in Strasbourg, the bilingual channel is also marred by struggles between two national groups of professionals about conceptions of culture and its relation to the state. Meanwhile, in the United States, PBS is enjoying something of a revival within the cluttered American television landscape. This article examines the different heritages of a common Frankfurt School debate about the fate of culture within the mass media.

In September 1992 ARTE, the European cultural channel whose programming is half French and half German and is currently broadcast by satellite, went onto a French frequency vacated earlier that year by La Cinq — a commercial channel which was both loved and reviled as a bridgehead of American programming — before it was allowed to go spectacularly bankrupt. The controversial decision by the French government to award a precious terrestrial frequency to ARTE has renewed debate about the role of television in sustaining both national identities and a common European culture. The cultural channel was originally intended as an industrial gamble in new communications technologies — enabling Europe to rival America and Japan in terms of hardware — and subsequently, when the D2MAC format seemed doomed, it became a diplomatic tool of the Paris-Bonn axis. Will 'télé-Maastricht' find a place in a crowded European television landscape?

The expensive commitment on the part of the hard-pressed public service to extend reception of a channel widely perceived —

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despite disclaimers — as metropolitan, intellectual and elitist, is hotly disputed in France.¹ But its rich programme of documentaries, great performances, art and foreign films, and some news and current affairs — often packaged together in vertically programmed 'theme evenings' — will undoubtedly rekindle the envy of broadcasters and cultural programme-makers in free market economies, particularly the United States, whose model of broadcasting has often been contrasted with the European, 'statist' model. Yet the Public Broadcasting System (pbs) is now hailed by *Le Monde* as being healthy compared to ailing European public service television.² This article aims to examine the different approaches to cultural programming, principally within the public services, but also outside them, on both sides of the Atlantic.

Cultural Television in Europe

The cultural vocation of the European public service is no longer taken for granted, as it was long after deregulation. How does ARTE define its role? According to its English-language press release, it 'is not a proposition for impatient "zappers" who are whimsically drawn to some programme, only to linger there for a few seconds. . . . It wants to attract enquiring minds.' In a skilful synthesis of the philosophy of the purely French cultural channel, La SEPT (which since 1989 has tried to appeal to the discriminating viewer who wanted the television equivalent of a coffee-table book),³ and in line with a more generalist German philosophy that all television channels should also provide coverage of social and political issues, ARTE promises it will offer 'an up-to-date programme selection that transcends the "official" concept of culture . . . a menu served up fresh, not from tin cans'. That such a joint public service channel is taking a defensive standpoint is evident from the following statement:

The European Cultural Channel could be open to two kinds of misconception. The word 'European' is equated with the administrative machinery in Brussels, while 'Culture' is perceived as a mixture of extravagance and boredom. The viewer should feel quite free to cast off these prejudices. ARTE takes culture beyond the concepts of theatre, music and literature. And no contribution is ripped apart by publicity [*sic*].

Compared to La SEPT, which commissioned programmes and coproductions from its Paris headquarters, or the current German satellite channels, 3SAT and Eins Plus, which rebroadcast pro-

grammes made by the existing networks, ARTE's content is broad, with a weekly topical news magazine (using two presenters, each speaking their own language) and a short daily news bulletin. On the other hand, there are no sports broadcasts, variety programmes or soaps. There are no American series included among the programmes bought in from all over the world. The consensus among the French and German partners is a negative one, defined less in respect of national traditions, and more in opposition to what is perceived as the American broadcasting model, and its pernicious influence on previous transnational broadcasting ventures.

But is this contrast fair? Strangely enough, La SEPT's programming greatly resembled one American channel, not pbs, but the cable channel Bravo. The 'cultural discount' (Collins, 1990) of international art cinema, music and the fine arts is slender, regardless of the size of the prospective audience. Meanwhile, by giving a social, rather than an artistic definition to 'quality', the Germans seem to have more in common with the ideal of public service as in pbs or, more accurately, the semi-commercial Channel Four in Great Britain. Perhaps, then, the more meaningful contrast in approaches to televising culture in a deregulated and transnationalized era, is between countries like France and the United States, where there remains a canonical conception — grounded in their respective intelligentsias — of what 'culture' should be, on the one hand and, on the other, television cultures, such as in the United Kingdom and Germany, whose television aesthetics are based on a pluralistic notion of 'quality', which can be discerned across the whole programme spectrum, from high cultural genres to low ones, and which is addressed to a heterogeneous set of audiences.

That France and the US share a conception of cultural television can be measured by the legacy of the Frankfurt School, not to mention the contemporary significance of polemics such as Neil Postman's (1986) *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. The difference is that cultural broadcasting was hegemonic under the French state monopoly (which lasted until the late 1970s, at which point it had to contend with an increasing amount of imported entertainment) whereas high culture was always a minority output of the American cultural industries. For a long time the sole purview of pbs was stranded in the midst of a wholly commercial system. Programming aimed at cultivated audiences is now much more diverse, and

this article traces its history, and attempts to account for and illustrate recent developments.

Cultural Television in the USA

Historically, cultural television in the USA faced certain obstacles: economic (funding), sociological (limited numbers of viewers) and aesthetic (how to adapt the arts to the small screen). Such obstacles also prevail in Europe: in the 1970s the French Institut National de l'Audiovisuel was already trying to determine why there was such a low take-up of cultural programmes on the state channels. Television cultures on both sides of the Atlantic were heavily influenced by the Frankfurt School, particularly Adorno and Horkheimer's thesis of television as a cultural industry, and the opposition between minority high culture and mass culture. The difference is that early American efforts at cultural programming were integrated into an existing commercial apparatus, on the eve of a debate about mass culture which would not be recapitulated in France until the 1960s, under the rubric of an attempt at 'cultural democratization'.⁴

A brief history of cultural television in the US highlights the gradual segregation and internationalization of this sector of programming. In 1952 NBC created *Operation Front Lobes* in order to 'integrate the cultural, informative, expository and inspirational into existing entertainment patterns'; there was also NBC *Opera Theater*, offering live transmissions. In the same year CBS began (with funds from the Ford Foundation Workshop) an innovative series called *Omnibus*, which was criticized by the *New York Times* as snobbish and pretentious, seeming more 'commercial than programs which made no pretense to cultural uplift'. One solution was to find obscure time slots, enabling the CBS Sunday afternoon series *Camera Three* to go out unsponsored, as long as it used no sets or props. It remained on the air for twenty-five years, taking risks (such as a montage of *Krazy Kat* cartoons with *Waiting for Godot*), but was ironically classified as 'public affairs', not culture. But in the late 1950s, arts programmes on major networks declined as executive headquarters moved from New York to Hollywood — a trend highlighted in 1961 when the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, Newton Minnow, famously labelled the television landscape one 'vast wasteland'.

Education became the driving force in the re-establishment of culture on TV. In 1952 a small but influential lobby helped set up

the National Educational Television Center (NET), out of which grew PBS, which became the fourth network following the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967. PBS owes its existence to a 1966 report by the Carnegie Foundation, which in 1967 led to Congress creating a Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). This was a non-profit organization which would oversee a television (and radio) network, that is, a consortium of independent TV stations (there were 341 in 1991). These local stations acquired more autonomy in the 1970s when President Nixon punished CPB for its alleged hostility to the Republican administration. However, such political interference was egregious compared with state television in France, where routine censorship was rife up until 1974 — but where highbrow programmes were often used as vehicles for radical ideas because *création* was perceived as 'autonomous'.

Because of its origins in education, PBS was seemingly insulated from commercial TV. However, in 1971 media critic Les Brown attacked it for the same 'intellectual prudence, the social cautions and the feigned creative vitality that were hallmarks of commercial TV in America. The new network spoke a somewhat different language but ultimately for the same Establishment. . . . But if the service was designed for an élite minority and did not care to reach numbers of people, in what sense was it a public network?' (Brown, 1971: 316). 'Public' is in fact a euphemism for 'government-supported', said Brown. Something went wrong with PBS between its conception and its realization: was it a result of its insistence on local democracy; or the fault of bureaucracy; or was it the fault of its appointed directors? Money is not the problem, claimed Brown. PBS should become a real network competing with the three commercial ones: 'Superior television, and not a self-congratulating cultural service, should be the goal of public TV. PBS must embrace light entertainment, if for no other reason . . . than to give the lie to its being a snob service. An even better reason would be to demonstrate that light entertainment has broader possibilities. . . .' The interaction of high culture and mass entertainment was problematic right from the start. Brown's populist argument anticipates that of some Europeans exasperated at the lingering grasp of the state, twenty years later.

Television Aesthetics

Following the mass society debates of the 1950s and 1960s, the Americans were inclined to adopt an Adornoesque position that

mass culture produced homogenization; that high culture itself was being industrialized; that the bad drives out the good. In his 'Prologue to Television', written in 1953, Adorno was doubtful that television would be anything other than ideological:

It is impossible to prophesy what will become of television; its current state has nothing to do with the invention itself, not even the particular forms of its commercial exploitation, but with the social totality in and by which the miracle is harnessed. The cliché which claims that modern technology has fulfilled the fantasies of the fairy tales only ceases to be a cliché if one adds to it the fairy tale wisdom that the fulfillment of wishes rarely benefits those who make them. The right way of wishing is the most difficult art of all, and we are taught to unlearn it from childhood on. . . . To this day, Utopias have been realized only to disabuse human beings of any utopian desire and commit them all the more thoroughly to the status quo, to fate: For television to realize the promise that still resonates in its name, it would have to emancipate itself from everything that revokes its innermost principle, the most daring sense of the wish fulfillment, by betraying the idea of Great Happiness to the department store of small comforts.

The absence of artistic boutiques from television's 'department store of small comforts' was lamented in the early days of PBS in the United States. For example, Kirk Browning, veteran producer of *Live from the Met* (the Metropolitan Opera) remarked that "TV is not an art form and translation is not an art form, it is a craft. We have to recognise that the marriage of the performing arts and television produces a "monstrous Caliban" aesthetically' (quoted in Beck, 1983: 86). And Wendy Stein, of New York's Metropolitan Museum's Office of Film and TV, said in a 1982 speech:

Art is incompatible with TV. Art basically is still, television wants action. Art is silent; television is a chatterbox. Art comes in many sizes and many shapes. Television obliterates that; everything is the same size and it wants everything in the same forms as much as possible. Art requires time; television wants speed. Art also invites you to choose a pattern of looking; film and television give that choice to the director. . . . And finally, art is rare, it is unusual, frequently it's unique; television will bring [art] into everybody's living room and make it universal. (quoted in Beck, 1983: 89)

The motivations for artists to put their work on television are straightforward: money; increased exposure; audience development; and, in a few cases where artists (like the choreographer Twyla Tharp) compose for the television medium, artistic. Television was not and could never be an art form in itself. France, meanwhile, saw a slow shift from the use of TV to disseminate

culture relayed from other media, to an incorporation of 'creative television' on the auteurist basis of the cinematic aesthetic. Television might become the '8th art' if the *téléastes* were not inhibited by the programmers, with their eyes on the Audimat ratings.

The British experience was paradigmatic. At the BBC in the 1960s, where the Music and Arts Department led viewers on the 'involuntary ascent of the cultural pyramid', as one director general put it, the paternalist motive of developing the audience was paramount. The 'relay' approach was succeeded by the profile (the artist was usually interviewed and filmed while working), and by a more creative interpretation of the arts, involving some elements of emotionalism and narrative. This form was pioneered by *Monitor* in the 1960s and still appears on London Weekend Television's *The South Bank Show* — edited and presented by the writer Melvyn Bragg — as the flagship of commercial television's arts coverage. In parallel was a tradition of illustrated lectures — Lord Clark's *Civilisation* (1969) was the forerunner of a long line of blockbuster (and lucratively exported) arts series, which did not fall into disrepute until the late 1980s, as well as creative biographies — Ken Russell began a series of biographies which followed in the footsteps of the BBC's *Omnibus*. As John Wyver concludes: 'This trilogy of the profile, the lecture, and dramatized biography retains its dominance today, as do the organizing principles which each element utilises: narrative, individuals, feeling rather than analysis and a positivist concept of knowledge. These principles are complemented by a series of assumptions about the value and worth of "the arts", assumptions which also issue from specific history' (Wyver, 1988: 29). While these sub-genres of cultural programmes also exist in the US and France, the 'specific history' of each, not to mention the language barrier, makes the dissemination of traditional arts programmes, apart from music and dance performances, very tricky indeed.

The French tradition is equally dependent on the assumption that 'Art is Good for You', but it is more analytical and less positivist than the British. BBC producer Fiona Pitcher, describing the production differences which made it difficult to find TV clips for her series *The Europeans* ('Unlike Britain, continental Europe does not have a strong documentary tradition'), noted that: 'The French have an intellectual approach to television, and many programmes offered were accompanied by documentation

explaining the logic and philosophy behind them. For British producers, used to delivering programme purpose in short sound bites, this came as a surprise' (Pitcher, 1989: 21). The French and German partners in ARTE trade accusations of pedagogism — the heritage of their respective cultural television traditions — despite the marginality of those programmes which are specifically educational.

Media scholars often diagnose a convergence (or homogenization) between 'serious' and popular TV. *Sesame Street* can be seen as PBS's most famous embodiment of Brown's strategy of embracing the values of light entertainment. Founded by the Children's Television Workshop in the utopian 1960s to overcome the educational gap of disadvantaged children, and since exported all over the world (sometimes as a language series), it is a symptom, according to hostile critics such as Michèle Mattelart (1985), of the hegemonic place occupied by mass culture in the US (as opposed to other institutions of socialization such as the school in France). It is also regarded as a symbolic matrix of the fusion of education, audiovisual technology and mass culture. *Sesame Street* was revolutionary as a media commodity because every feature was replanned:

The series is poles apart from that 'inspired' improvisation, that form of creativity associated with the solitary genius of an author, of a scriptwriter, of a director, of an entertainer. [It is] the work of an interdisciplinary team to co-ordinate areas of knowledge and to map the educational initiative with all the instruments of science and the techniques for management . . . (Mattelart, 1985: 169)

Mattelart's ambivalence toward the industrial production model is typically French, as is her implicit hostility to the series's entertainment values:

The new educational series could only rely, to draw its audience . . . on the audience's desire to watch and to go on watching. The first decision fundamentally coherent with this strategy of organising attention through desire, no longer through constraint, was the decision to use television no longer as a tool inscribed within the schooling system, but within the space of the private, the space of leisure. (Mattelart, 1985: 178)

Sesame Street is prototypical of the seepage of the advertising aesthetic into television as a whole. Neil Postman's book, significantly one of the few American works examining television which has been translated into French, also lambasts *Sesame Street*. The

point here is that it is PBS, not the commercial networks, which is held responsible for betraying its responsibility for preserving the national culture.

PBS heavily imports the cultural heritage of one country: the source of a major percentage of its prime-time programming is Great Britain, resulting in the familiar joke that PBS stands for 'Programmes Britain Sent'. Its International Activities Director, David Stewart (1988), retorted: 'Anglophilia is a largely unappreciated form of American masochism'; PBS was tired of lectures from complacent Europeans about how to run public television (after all, the European Broadcasting Union in 1970 was saying that new technologies were only a problem for Americans!). The decentralization of PBS is also blamed for its shortcomings. It is a consortium of stations, of which there are five major producers. For example, WNET (Channel 13 in New York) is responsible for both *Theatre in America* and *Dance in America*, which form part of *Great Performances*, the longest running anthology on PBS. It is dependent on corporate funding, usually from multinational companies looking to improve their public relations. However, the cultural alibi argument works just as potently there as it does in France; it is said that PBS effectively freed commercial networks from their responsibility to present prime-time cultural (and documentary) programmes, although some of the cable companies have found it advantageous to include some (see below). PBS's precarious existence, notes René Bonnell (1989), 'underlines the difficult survival of a non-commercial system in a hyper-liberal economy'.

Cultural Cable and Satellite

PBS, like the national broadcasters in Europe, was also threatened by the arrival of new technologies. In 1979 and 1980 the Carnegie Commission again commissioned reports on the future of public broadcasting, prompted by 'the likelihood that new consumer markets for communications services might well be developed entirely by private, profit-making companies'. The second report proposed a new national pay cable service for the Performing Arts, Culture and Entertainment (PACE), to form a bridge for public broadcasting into new technologies. Its cost was estimated at \$30 million in capitalization, but it could break even in the fourth year of operation, if it secured 750,000 subscribers (approximately 3 percent of total cable subscribers at the time). Its two

assumptions were: (1) public TV is the only non-profit institution whose mission makes it a natural ally for a non-commercial pay cable network; (2) an arts service on pay cable will go ahead anyway. PACE would offer subscribers two categories of televised experience: 'The PACE philosophy would have to provide both the depth demanded by *afficionados* of a particular art form or interest area and an introductory approach for viewers with more casual interest in each of the specialties'. Its signature would be arts magazines, hosted by a well-known popular presenter.

In short, PACE should alter popular concepts of 'culture'. While including the 'high' arts like opera, ballet, symphony music, and traditional museum exhibitions, the service can broaden this definition of what has, in the past, been known as elite programming. Exploring the contemporary arts means a commitment to risk, to untried and unpredictable programming directions. PACE will be judged on the strength of its convictions as an artistic force in its own right, and will, therefore constitute an extraordinary new voice for the extension and expansion of culture. (Carnegie Commission, 1989: 9)

This credo does not sound too far removed from that of the French prototype (La SEPT) of the European cultural channel ten years later, except that what is under discussion is a pay channel, rather than a public satellite channel (although both were trying to preempt commercial ventures into new technologies). The slowness of public service in Europe to respond to the challenge of transfrontier broadcasting caused much debate among communications scholars in the 1980s (Melody, 1988).

Although PACE never got off the ground, in 1981 Americans got three cultural satellite experiments, although these were short-lived.

The 'CBS Cable Story' is arguably one of the most interesting ventures in American television. William Paley created CBS Cable in 1981 as a 'first-class' service. The cultural orientation was chosen not only 'because no one else had yet claimed that turf', but also because it fitted with 'CBS's image of itself: Culture is *class*'. The idea of tapping into the urban, upmarket PBS audience seemed financially sound and won critical praise: 'CBS mounted and ran a high class boutique operation in an environment where street vendors were the dominant form of commerce'. Its drawbacks were that it was broadcast from a satellite which few cable systems received; advertisers did not see the attraction of a high-priced commercial version of PBS; and it already had competition

from ABC. Despite eventually reaching a *potential* audience of 5.5 million, only a small percentage of them tuned in; CBS Cable chose to produce its own shows, and the costs of these were never written off in overseas sales. Launched in October 1981 with a tin of caviar for the 'Audience that Appreciates' first-class service all the way (the evening hosts wore tuxedos), it was cancelled after less than a year, losing \$50 million. Its failure was blamed on poor management and 'lack of parental love' from CBS, giving rise to the suspicion it was simply a Trojan horse to allow CBS into cable.

Meanwhile, another cultural cable channel called ARTS was launched in April 1981 by ABC and Hearst. This channel adopted a more modest strategy of only three hours of inexpensive European programmes a day. The chief programmer promised a 'full spectrum of expression in all the performing and visual arts, from the most traditional to the most contemporary, from the performance through the documentary, from the economics of arts to the sociology of arts'. It experimented with theme weeks, and scheduling a different art form for each night of the week — both programming strategies much favoured today by ARTE. It modernized its image with electronic graphics, and linked up with ABC Video Enterprises. It soon had a deficit of \$8 million a year.

Finally, there was TEC, the entertainment channel, which was the result of a deal between RCA (who owned NBC) and the BBC to market the latter's programmes. It also featured live performances from the theatre. TEC folded after ten months in 1982, and merged with ARTS, to create Arts and Entertainment (A&E), a pay channel still in operation. A similar fate befell the British TV offshoots Super Channel and BSB, each tipped as a satellite 'Best of British', which were taken over by Virgin/Betatelevision and Sky respectively, and moved 'downmarket'.

The creation in the US of four commercial cable networks specializing in culture could be seen as 'narrowcasting', a concept much in vogue in Britain in the 1970s, and often linked in European discourses with pluralism. Empirical evidence, however, indicates that the cultural audience is not as substantial as surveys once predicted (around 10 percent in Europe, as Louis Harris claimed in his survey for a French Desgraupes commission in 1985 [see Desgraupes, 1985], although the directors of ARTE now say they will be content with 4-5 percent). Waterman (1986) found that the failure of the two advertiser-supported channels was due less to competition from PBS than to 'the apparent shortage of

high-value viewers *among* cultural audiences, viewers that entrepreneurs had counted on He cites a Nielsen study showing that those avid viewers, waiting for unlimited amounts of cultural programming, just were not out there. (European cultural specialists are likely to be equally disappointed by the lack of interest in ARTE in those countries which have access to it.) The two American premium (pay) channels which survived, shifted their programming policy away from a thematic approach.

The fourth cultural channel, Bravo, is not an offshoot of the major networks; it was launched in 1980 as the first cable arts network, and is currently (1993) a pay channel with no advertising, and has moved away from performing arts to 'highbrow' films. Other pay channels such as Home Box Office (HBO) concentrate almost exclusively on premium films, leaving Bravo and A&E as the main cable competitors for PBS (which is planning to take advantage of a new satellite system capable of carrying fifty-five video channels). Of course, the three commercial networks have also been hurt by cable (although less than they have been hurt by Fox, the upstart 'fourth' network), although they claim their long-term enemies are foreign supergiants based in Europe. At the end of the 1980s the big three responded by buying into the European television market (Paramount purchased Zenith in Britain, and Warners bought a third share in Swedish pay TV), and at the beginning of the 1990s, diversified their programming to attract upmarket audiences at home and abroad (e.g. ABC's *Twin Peaks*). There are currently several cable services offering some cultural programming, and a fine arts channel called Ovation arrives in 1994.

Transfusions

A colloquium at the 1992 Prix Italia bemoaned the parlous state of virtually all the European public service channels; east and west, they were all crying out for 'medical transfusions', according to *Le Monde*, whereas PBS was enjoying unprecedented popularity, with a 30 million student following, according to its President, Bruce Christensen (who appeared evangelical to the Europeans). Yet, as a distributor, rather than a primary funder, PBS's editorial control is limited: a series is difficult to discontinue if it is fully underwritten by a sponsor. Its Cultural Editor, Melinda Ward, would like to see more 'cutting edge, multi-cultural arts in a political context'; much as Eckart Stein of ZDF has argued for a 'contraband'

culture of subversion.⁵ The advent of cable has caused a restriction in the range of programming; PBS will keep only the monopoly on documentaries, now that cable competitors can afford to make forays into arts and entertainment. PBS is still too British in content; audiences are happy with adaptations of Agatha Christie but loathe subtitles, so there is little foreign material in evidence, and coproductions, even with Anglophone partners, are revocable for the American audience. The prime-time audience is better educated, wealthier and older than the national average. Ward says that the demarcation between high and low cultures has become messy; PBS's mandate precludes unmitigated entertainment, but a mix (e.g. gala concerts from the White House or *Mystery!*) is considered acceptable. Sponsors are looking for credit for contributing to the well-being of society; they avoid anything too abrasive, boring or political. In short, PBS must compete with cable for producers, audiences and product. From a US perspective, the trend seems to be an irreversible internationalism, plus ethnic particularism, as well as a return to story-telling. As in Europe, controversial programmes (Christensen, quoted by Woodrow - see Note 2, cited *Tongues United*, a telefilm about a black homosexual and his white lover) can be accommodated because they win festival prizes.

But the same can be said of pan-European fiction, where a balance must be achieved between the aesthetics of the international art cinema and those of the popular serial; between transnational themes and regional particularisms; between casts and production teams from assorted countries and a nationally specific marketing strategy. The desire to avoid the 'Euro-pudding' label has brought some apparently intractable material into European coproduction, such as the three-part saga about banker Siegmund Warburg. This was adapted from a biography by Jacques Attali - a former advisor to Mitterrand - now head of the European Development Bank, was financed by a consortium including La SEPT and the major French commercial channel, and was shot in Luxembourg for tax reasons. The cast included Sam Waterston (US), Dominique Sanda (France) and Julian Glover (GB). Various European subsidy schemes designed to encourage coproduction do produce results on the commercial and cable channels, however voluntary the quota of European content proposed in *Television Without Frontiers* (by the European Community in 1989) may have been.

Since the *Holocaust* controversy in France and Germany, increasing attention has focused on whether or not fiction is being drawn into the orbit of the television *feuilleton*. Apart from transatlantic concern for the documentary as a dwindling genre, less attention has been paid to non-fiction, and particularly that form which cultural television might call its own: the arts magazine. One of the ways the BBC countered the success of Channel Four in this respect was to institute — after a gap of many years — its own live programme *The Late Show*. France's magazines no longer seem to segregate art forms — cinema, theatre, music — but are still featured at the end of the evening transmission (*Cercle de Minuit* on France 2). (The privatized TF1 fulfils its quota obligation to original French programming by transmitting most of its worthy programmes in the middle of the night, and is consequently fined by the CSA.)

In the autumn of 1991, in the same week the mega-documentary *Columbus in the Age of Discovery* went out, PBS launched the first cultural magazine on American television. *Edge*, coproduced by WNET and the BBC, was immediately accused by the *New York Times* (2 October 1991) of being too mediatised: 'Old PBS has discovered the concept of "event" television that, at least in theory, should appeal to the younger, hipper viewers. . . . Where tutus and talking heads once reigned, there is now Paula Abdul.' With *Edge* and *Alive from off Center* PBS, like its European counterparts, seemed to be aiming at the intellectual, usually younger, New Class, and risked offending traditional culture critics.

In the 1990s, competition from cable in cultural, nature and public affairs programming, on the one hand, and cuts in state and local financing, on the other, led PBS to a controversial consolidation of national programming policy. Such a policy was in the hands of a central director (Jennifer Lawson) who began to compete aggressively with the networks. Under the new 'blockbuster mentality', the average rating share rose slightly, to 5 percent, but critics accused PBS of forsaking its purpose (freedom from commercial values) in order to cater for more affluent viewers.

Conclusion

As *Le Monde* concluded in Autumn 1992, PBS 'will probably never approach the uniformly high standards of state-supported Euro-

pean systems like the BBC or Italy's RAI — the desperate scramble to win corporate underwriting . . . makes it inevitable that efforts marked by too much daring, controversy, or expense will rarely be broadcast.'⁶ The American example shows the simultaneous logic of diversity of provision and homogenization of content. Todd Gitlin is pessimistic in the Frankfurt School tradition: 'Homogeneity at the cultural center is complemented by consumer fragmentation on the margins. Technology opens doors, and oligopoly marches in just behind, slamming them' (Gitlin, 1987: 332). However, he predicts that the US will accept more foreign programmes. Similarly, British observer Nicholas Garnham suggests the US are leading the way to a two-tier market, with a homogenized service being offered to lower income groups and differentiated among the better off. Television à deux vitesses is also a fear in France, where the duopoly is not just a financial and administrative demarcation, but a claimed market split in programming — though this is belied by polls which indicate the public does not perceive a distinction so cherished by TV executives.

Garnham believes 'the real danger of the US situation is that the history of its film industry will repeat itself and the US cable industry will use its large home market as a base for the invasion of the European market . . .' (Garnham, 1990: 126). Certainly the fear of American media imperialism has declined over the last few years. This is perhaps due to the alleged accommodation of European intellectuals to free market principles, but might also be because American producers increasingly estimate what European networks will be willing to buy, and what they seem to want is *quality* television. The experience of Britain as an importer of US series ranging from *Hill Street Blues* to *The Simpsons*, shows that the effects of the transnational programme market are not entirely negative. But Germany and Great Britain begin with a pluralistic television landscape, in which a generalist duopoly is well entrenched. There is freedom from political pressure, some measure of accountability and access, and culture connotes 'daily life' rather than upper-class patrimony. American cultural television, in buying, financing and coproducing European programmes for export, may assist in dismantling the fortress approach to culture inherited from the cultural pessimists — and perhaps that influence may work the other way across the Atlantic, too, reminding cultivated Americans that merchandising culture

tends to 'assimilate "serious" art of the past by adapting this art to the system's own requirements', as Adorno put it, back in 1955.

Notes

1. The most scholarly polemic against cultural television belongs to Dominique Wolton (1989); see also the press response to the Communication Minister's announcement on 23 April 1992 of the pre-emption of La Cinq's frequency. Also, the overview published by the regulatory agency, Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel (1992) *Le Positionnement des chaînes publiques et privées en Europe*.
2. Alain Woodrow, 'Le service public sous perfusion', *Le Monde*, 4-5 October 1992: 16-17.
3. For the development of La SEPT, see Emanuel (1992). 14: 299.
4. The cultural democratization movement in many ways echoed the liberal side of the American mass society debate. See especially Friedmann (1979).
5. Eckart Stein had pessimistic expectations of La SEPT (*Le Monde*, 22-3 October 1989: 16-17) based on a disillusionment with French culture generally: 'Vous savez, pour nous Allemands, faisant partie de la génération de l'après-guerre, la France, dans les années 50, a représenté un formidable espace libre. La culture, la philosophie . . . c'était vraiment l'école française. Puis lentement, très lentement, comme d'une maladie, je me suis désaffecté de cette France dont le paysage — pas seulement audiovisuel mais culturel — devenait de plus en plus cérémonieux, répétitif, rituel. Ce qui s'est passé à la télévision a été pour moi une grande déception. Il y a maintenant cet espoir d'une chaîne culturelle. Aura-t-elle le courage de pratiquer la contrebande? On craint côté allemand, de perdre une indépendance politique qu'on a réussi, je crois, à maintenir jusque-là. Une indépendance garantie par la Constitution. Je crains que ce 'mariage forcé' ne fasse surgir des deux côtés le tapis rouge. Je crains les concerts, les festivals, la pompe, la respectabilité des cultures, où chacun cherche à montrer à l'autre son Karajan. Je voudrais une chaîne dont les programmes soient plus proches de la prise de la Bastille que de l'Opéra de la Bastille. Je ferai tout pour être présent sur cette chaîne, insérer des nouvelles structures, mais je crains les pesanteurs, surtout politiques.'
6. *Le Monde* concludes: 'En Europe le bastion public est assailli de toutes parts par un secteur commercial vorace: aux Etats-Unis ce sont les mastodones privés qui s'entredévorent et le service public, petit dernier, trouve de nouveaux adeptes' (4-5 October 1992: 17).

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