

FRENCH AND  
AMERICANS  
*The Other Shore*

Pascal Baudry

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AMERICANS  
*The Other Shore*

Translated by Jean-Louis Morhange

LES FRENCHIES, INC.

*For Nathalie*

This book came out initially as a cyber-book, in November, 2000, and its current complete French version can be downloaded free of charge on [www.pbaudry.com](http://www.pbaudry.com)  
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## OTHER PUBLICATIONS BY PASCAL BAUDRY

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*Les Frenchies*, a comic strip inspired by *Français et Américains, l'autre rive*, by Pascal Baudry and Luc Nisset. Les Frenchies, Inc. Berkeley. September, 2004.

*Se préparer à partir aux Etats-Unis*, a videotape in French. By Pascal Baudry and Nathalie Monsaint. VHS Secam, 65 minutes. 2nd edition, Septembre 2004. Produced by Sciences-Com, Nantes, France.

*Essai sur la mentalité française*, to be published in French in 2006.

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# PREAMBLE TO THE FIRST EDITION IN ENGLISH

## A FIRST IN PUBLISHING

The publication of this book was a first in publishing. An initial sketch was published in French in November, 2000, as a cyber-book, free of charge on [www.pbaudry.com](http://www.pbaudry.com), where the complete text of the current French edition remains available. Thus French readers have a genuine choice between a free and a paying version of the same text. Helped by some 2,500 e-mails received from internet readers over more than two years, the text grew each month until it was first published on paper, in February, 2003, by Village Mondial / Pearson Ed. At the time, more than 25,000 readers had downloaded the text and there was already intense word-of-mouth going on. As this present first English edition is being published, there are more than 74,000 readers, and the author has received some 4,000 e-mails that which have helped him tailor the book for its audience.

A good part of the readership is, not surprisingly, located in France and in the United States. More than 400 readers asked the author for an English version of the book—mostly for their American colleagues in French-American companies on both continents, for their American spouse, or for U.S. students, academics, and researchers. Assuming that only a small fraction of the interested public contacted the author, it can be assumed that there is enough of a readership to warrant an English edition, which is made possible by the skilled help of Jean-Louis Morhange, assisted by Sondra Frisch, entrusted with the arduous task of translating a text already pretty convoluted in its original language.

In order to recoup the translation and publishing costs, the English edition is offered only as a paper version at this time. However, in particular to help students, a couple of key chapters can be

downloaded for free on [www.pbaudry.com](http://www.pbaudry.com). We may post the entire content online at a later date.

Readers are invited to send their comments to [pbaudry@wdhb.com](mailto:pbaudry@wdhb.com). This will help tailor the second English edition to their needs, to correct some factual mistakes that the author may have missed, and, most importantly, to enrich his analysis with a true American perspective. When it comes to cultural analysis, there is not such a thing as a truly neutral perspective. This book is definitely slanted, due to the French origin of its author, who later emigrated to the United States and became a U.S. citizen. There, he began to see French cultural idiosyncrasies which had escaped him (and most of his compatriots) when he was still living in France. At the same time, he was seeing the American culture “from the outside,” and that position as a double outsider, as well as his highly diversified academic background, allowed him to compare hidden aspects of both cultures and to try to understand some of their inner workings. You are now invited to share the results of this exploration.

Berkeley, May 2005

## INTRODUCTION

Let us make no mistake: the topic of this book is the French, not the Americans<sup>1</sup>.

This book will certainly help both partners in bi-national couples to place things into perspective. It will help expatriates to perceive differences that are obscured by apparent similarities, students to make use of a global comparative chart, researchers to develop some of the analyses that I started, CEOs to avoid making certain recurrent mistakes, and political leaders to recognize their responsibilities toward French culture. All of them may also gain a clearer understanding of the cultural dimension of their individual identity, which is so difficult to perceive from within one's own culture.

But the main goal of this book is to help the French reflect upon their own culture by contrasting it to a different one, to make their weak and strong points explicit, and to introduce the cultural perspective—which has until now been largely implicit and thus out of reach—into the French collective debate.

By examining hidden mechanisms and breaking the cultural *Omertà*, I am running the risk of generating resistance and confronting denial. This is the cost of ensuring that a French culture worthy of its name will still exist in the next decades. General timidity has made it lose ground, and the time has come to go on the attack, by preserving what deserves to be and changing what hampers it. For this to happen, a broader awareness must be achieved.

This book can only fulfill its purpose—to facilitate a collective evolution—if it involves the intelligence, experience, wisdom, and questioning of many. In order to find the right balance between a profusion that would be rich in emergences and a rigorous focusing on crucial issues, I first chose to write a cyber-text. This medium made it possible, after making a first version of the text available on the Web, to take into account readers' observations and questions so that this individual work would become a collective one. For those who

prefer the book form, the electronic medium is complemented by a traditional publication; the printed book will be updated on a regular basis in subsequent editions that will include the changes made to this text, which will remain available free of charge online.

I know of no precedent to this approach, but I think that it will bring an interesting result. Let readers be the judges of this.

This adventure does not end with the printed version of this book and its direct extensions (comic book and English version). Since the cyber-book will remain available in addition to the printed version, I invite readers to e-mail their comments, personal testimonies, suggestions, criticisms, and questions to [pbaudry@wdhb.com](mailto:pbaudry@wdhb.com)<sup>ii</sup>, or to directly express them on the [www.pbaudry.com](http://www.pbaudry.com) website, and to indicate whether they wish that their names be mentioned. This cultural laboratory will thus remain active, and the knowledge the French have of themselves will continue to grow.

## CHAPTER 1

# CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

My interest in the study of the cultural differences between the French and the Americans arose more than twenty years ago from the surprising realization that my American spouse and I were more different than had first appeared. This revelation, trivial for a couple, occurred through time, in France for the first few years, and then in the United States after we moved here. It involved differences that went beyond the divide between men and women, and beyond ordinary otherness. What was at stake was culture. Our children also taught me much, both about my native culture and about my adopted one, by behaving on an everyday basis like the little Americans that they were becoming.

I also encountered this emergence of difference through surprises in my practice as a psychoanalyst in Paris, with a few of my patients who happened to be American, then later as a senior executive in North America. I encountered it again while interviewing many expatriates and bi-national couples. I also use it as an auxiliary tool with the French business executives—several thousand of them through the years—who take part in my Learning Expeditions and Strategic Expeditions® management or strategy seminars in the United States and elsewhere.

Surprise—“this great mechanism of the new spirit,” according to Apollinaire—plays an essential role in attaining an awareness of cross-cultural issues. By being open to surprises, you allow yourself to achieve a non-knowledge that facilitates the discovery and elaboration of new knowledge. The surprising realization that an observed behavior does not fit the behavior that had been implicitly

i In this book, the term “Americans” designates the citizens of the United States of America.

ii Or, as an alternative, to [pbaudry@aol.com](mailto:pbaudry@aol.com).

expected constitutes a precious opportunity to wonder why you had been expecting something else. What is the underlying model? Where does it come from? Is it necessary? What does it tell you about your native culture? Many writings on cross-cultural issues mention such terms as “invisible obviousness,” “hidden dimension,” or “cultural surprise.”

Beyond surprise, cross-cultural observation is revealing of our frame of reference, which would otherwise remain hidden, and which often surfaces on the occasion of misunderstandings. Such was the case of the “savage” who arrived for the first time in a Western airport, hit a glass door, and declared, “I didn’t know the air was so thick here.” Certain cultural misunderstandings, even between nations apparently as similar as the Americans and the French, are just as comical, as in the case of a French CEO who had asked me to assist him in his buying of a small company in Texas. The meeting began, and his counterpart started to present his objectives. Right away, the Frenchman requested an interruption of the meeting and asked me, “Why is he telling me all this? It must mean his objectives are just the opposite and he wants to cover up something!”

Cross-cultural study is not a new discipline: even if it owes a lot to such modern authors as Edward T. Hall, Ruth Benedict, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Geert Hofstede, Fons Trompenaars, and Joseph Campbell, the contributions of the likes of Descartes, Pascal, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, Stendhal, and Tocqueville should not be forgotten.

Realizing that others do not operate in the same way as we do can be painful, especially when those others are foreigners—as Victor Hugo wrote, to travel is to be born and die at every moment. It reveals the national dimension of our identity. Since this dimension is largely implicit in France, it remains largely out of our reach; we are not even aware that we are clinging to it. Such a situation is favorable to all sorts of defensive attitudes, the most typical of which consists of proclaiming that others are wrong without realizing that they are merely operating in a way that is consistent with their own system of reference, which is different from ours.

The attitude of most French media toward the Clinton-Lewinsky affair is revealing of such a behavior. The strangeness of cultural difference generates anxiety in those who are confronted with it because it does not validate their own identity. This strangeness was exploited in order to reinforce the idea that our own cultural norm was the only right one, and that Americans were hypocrites, liars, etc. By choosing to present this affair only as a matter of lust, the French press deliberately ignored a question that was more important for Americans: how could it be explained to children that the President could commit perjury without being liable to imprisonment as an ordinary citizen would be? This facile ostracism made the French lose an opportunity to reflect upon the meaning that different practices had within two different normative and institutional systems, each of which with its own logic and integrity; on the contrary, in the eyes of many people, it had the result of implicitly justifying the superiority of their own culture over another one.

When we grant a supposedly universal validity to our own cultural norm, which allows us to appoint ourselves as the judges of the other system, we commit a real transgression, a kind of crossing through the mirror, which amounts to a regression. Conversely, when we acknowledge that there is a coexistence of two—perhaps irreconcilably—different systems, with all the difficulty and even pain inherent in this recognition, we gain in maturity by accepting otherness, which is to say loneliness at first, and, eventually, bonding. A systematic use of such an approach makes it possible to talk of “cultural development,” in the way one talks of “personal development” or “organizational development.”

Exposing children to cultural difference—within bi-national families, bilingual, bicultural, or multicultural schools, or through stays abroad that provide them with the opportunity to reflect upon their own culture—amounts to cultural development. Trying as adults to reflect upon our own culture through the mirror of another one, by careful observation that avoids at the same time uncritical admiration and wholesale rejection, also amounts to cultural development. Both of these enhance not only personal development but also

international harmony, as the initiators of the rapprochement between France and Germany well understood.

But cultural development also has a collective dimension. By collectively reflecting upon the hidden aspects of our culture and escaping from the isolation that made silence possible, we can make those hidden aspects that are not—or are no longer—desirable become explicit. We can then allow ourselves options that until then had not been available to us because discussing them or even realizing their existence had been prohibited. We can become aware that we tended to only use a few notes of the cultural keyboard, and always the same ones; we may then venture to try to play other notes, so that we can create together a richer and more fruitful symphony.

But before we can do this, we must confront phenomena of denial and resistance, which the change curve clearly illustrates.

### THE CHANGE CURVE

The concept of the change curve was first developed by the Swiss author Elisabeth Kübler-Ross<sup>i</sup> in her study of life's terminal stages. It was then adapted to the business world by the American consultants Cynthia Scott and Dennis Jaffe<sup>ii</sup>

It states that those who experience a triggering event, such as the announcement of bad news or, more generally, the intrusion of elements that are dissonant in relation to their own frame of reference (in the sense of Feistinger's theory<sup>iii</sup>), tend to go through a four-stage process. To make things easier, this process can be considered as a sequence.

The first stage is denial: it consists of a refusal to acknowledge the triggering event or to take it into account. This mechanism, which can last a few seconds or several years, is healthy if it does not endure. It makes it possible to distance oneself from the triggering event and to protect oneself from it ("No, this can't be; there must be a mistake"), while progressing toward the next stage.

The next stage is resistance. It consists not of refusing to see but of preventing the triggering event from applying to oneself ("We

already know it"; "It's too expensive"; "It's unworkable"; "It's being studied"; "We're already doing it"; "It's an American thing"; etc.)

Then comes what is not a stage but a moment: a realization. It consists of an intuitive understanding of the triggering event, which does not necessarily amount to accepting it as such, but amounts to grasping its general shape, its *Gestalt*.

Then the exploration stage can occur: experimentation with possible changes in one's perspective or practice (creativity, problem resolution, etc.)

The last stage is engagement, in which renewed energy makes it possible to progress on a new path, to motivate those around us to manage change, etc.

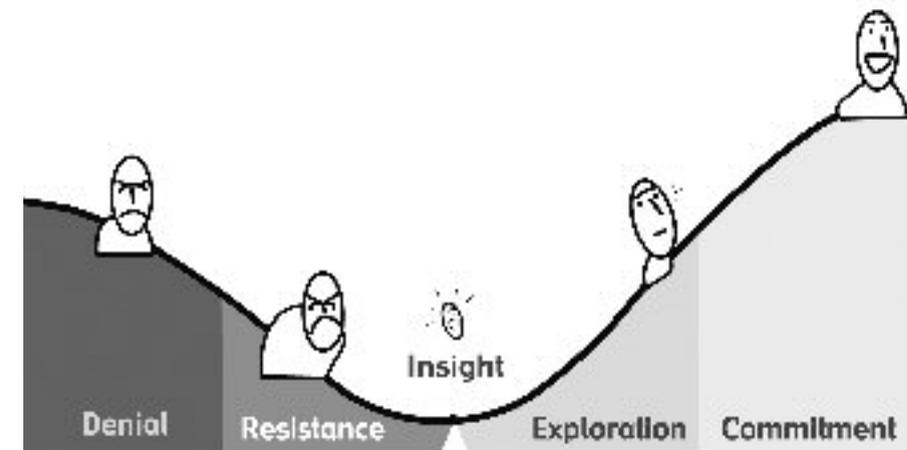


Figure 1. The Change Curve

I recognize the fact that the real world is more complex than this very simple model suggests, that reversals and leaps forward do occur, and that several different curves usually overlap because multiple triggering events are juxtaposed. However, it seems useful to

me to begin by referring to this concept of the change curve, in view of the stubborn denial and resistance that are bound to be generated by cultural confrontation, which is the topic of this book. This presentation has the advantage of situating resistance within its dynamic context: no longer exactly a denial; not yet a realization, but getting close—or not.

## SEVEN LEVELS OF CROSS-CULTURAL AWARENESS

Cultural development can be articulated into a sequence of seven levels of cross-cultural awareness.

### 1. IGNORING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

This is in fact the base level, that of ignorance or denial: we do not notice that another culture is different, we—often implicitly—hypothesize that, on any given point, that culture is similar to our own. The resulting hidden misunderstandings are more serious than disagreements would be because the latter could at least be dealt with.<sup>iv</sup>

Whereas it is easy to go beyond this level in our interactions with Asian cultures, which we expect to be different from ours, we run a greater risk when facing Americans who “look like us,” and vice versa. Bi-national marriages also involve this problem. Cultural differences and the fact that at least one of the spouses does not live within his or her native culture add an extra level of complexity to the normal difficulties involved in the evolution of a couple; the difficulties of cross-cultural experience, which are already significant—but manageable—in the workplace, are exacerbated at home. Recognizing the difficulties (escaping denial), conceptualizing them, making them explicit, sharing them, and finding ways to resolve them—in particular, whether or not outside help is involved—all occur in different ways from one culture to another. Once the members of bi-national couples have discovered how enormous the differences between the two of them really are, many wish that the rules of the games had been explained to them in advance.<sup>v</sup>

Americans frequently remain stuck at this level, for lack of prepa-

ration for interaction with foreigners. The relatively harmonious character of the relationships between different ethnic groups in the United States can lead Americans to the delusion that the same is true outside of the country, and that American know-how applies everywhere. However, foreigners can only operate in an efficient and harmonious way in the USA because they submit to American norms, which are very reductive in that they do away with a large part of the contextual resources of the diverse cultures of the world. Moreover, American ideology leads them to regard the American system as the best in the world, “the best mankind can hope for,” as Abraham Lincoln said. Therefore, when different practices are encountered they must be replaced as soon as possible with American practices, which are *a priori* assumed to be superior.

This ignorance, whether willful or not, is one of the sources of anti-Americanism in the world. It sometimes has comic effects. Euro Disney was at first a fiasco, going as far as prohibiting the consumption of alcohol on the site—in France! Those “Yankees” also believed that the contracts they had signed with various subcontractors and suppliers (including penalties for lateness, in a country where everyone is late!) were intended to be abided by. But this ignorance can sometimes have disastrous consequences. Iraqis living in the United States usually respect the American norm; Americans, on the other hand, by behaving in Iraq according to American mores, have made many serious mistakes involving cross-cultural sensitivity; the consequences are there for all to see.

Interviewing executives of French companies with subsidiaries in the United States, and vice versa, has also made me realize that this type of ignorance goes beyond mere differences between the cultures of specific companies. National cultural phenomena are also involved.

However, ignoring cultural differences can constitute an advantage. Some immigrants have something to gain by venturing into the virgin linguistic and cultural territories of their adopted country. They are unencumbered by the emotional baggage carried by their mother tongue, which allows them to start from scratch, skipping the

emotional blocks that are related to the country where they spent their childhood.

## 2. RESTRICTING OURSELVES TO CRITICISM OR PRAISE

The regressive reaction induced by the undermining of our identity in contact with another culture can be expressed either by uncritical admiration ("Those Americans, they really know what they're doing!"), what Americans call, "Going native"<sup>vi</sup>, or by knee-jerk criticism ("Those Americans, they're all so naive!") This level marks an improvement over the first one, because this time differences are noticed, but we cannot go very far by restricting ourselves to knee-jerk criticism or unbounded praise. It is difficult to avoid expressing the differences between two cultures in terms of the superiority of one over the other, which constitutes a dead end because it makes it impossible to move on to the next level<sup>vii</sup>.

Those who return to their native country after living abroad for several years sometimes experience reverse culture shock<sup>viii</sup>; the reactions of incredulity or annoyance of those around them upon hearing frequent allusions to the other country soon lead them to tone down their references to it. This can help them with their integration of the two cultures, which would have been delayed by too continual and explicit a proclamation of the difference between them. Those who have become in some way "foreigners in their own country" tend to seek the company of others who also have a cross-cultural experience, in order not to exchange "veteran" stories but to share common references, when people who have only one culture seem too one-dimensional.

## 3. EXPLAINING ANOTHER CULTURE IN TERMS OF OUR OWN

This constitutes significant progress: it involves an attempt to understand another culture, instead of ignoring it, rejecting it as inferior to our own, or venerating it. But this third level is limited by the fact that the interpretive tool is not the right one. When we try to understand another culture by the yardstick of our own, we are soon beset by misunderstandings or even misinterpretations, all the more so because

different cultures often happen to coincide in certain specific areas, which appears to legitimate this approach. The irreducible fact that we are encumbered by our native culture is a major obstacle to the understanding of another culture and requires a heightened and constant awareness<sup>ix</sup>. The surprises we experience are there to remind us that, without even realizing it, we constantly elaborate hypotheses about other cultures, and that these hypotheses can be wrong.

## 4. UNDERSTANDING A CULTURE FROM THE INSIDE

Understanding a culture from the inside happens through osmosis, as a result of an extended immersion, or when someone who is close to us and already immersed in that culture helps us to decipher it. The courage that is generated by vulnerability, combined with the effect of surprise, leads expatriates or immigrants to the realization that they are beginning to "think the way *they* do" and forces them to confront conflicts between the values of their native and adopted cultures. A precise understanding of the humor of another culture, which is to say of a dividing line between implicitness and explicitness, is often indicative of a transition to this level.

## 5. SEEING OUR OWN CULTURE FROM THE OUTSIDE

Only when we have observed another culture from the inside, can we return to our native culture and perceive what until then we had taken for granted as necessary and obvious. Newly opened eyes can see new options unfold in front of them. One of the goals of this book is to help readers achieve this greater freedom.

## 6. COMMUNICATING ACROSS CULTURES

When we have achieved a mastery of the previous levels, it becomes possible for us to view things from the perspective of others, for instance from that of our spouse within a bi-national couple, of our partners in a deal, or of our colleagues in a multinational company, so as to fully communicate from one person to another, transcending

the obstacles created by cultural difference.

Of course, there are other ways to communicate across cultures without this long detour, for instance in emergency situations or when fundamental human dimensions are involved, as during the first stages of a relationship between lovers, but what I am describing is a total communication that integrates processes of empathy, which is to say the ability to identify with others, feel what they feel, and take their implicit codes into account. Since implicitness has a less significant place in American than in French culture, as we will see in the next chapter, this understanding of the other is, *prima facie*, easier to achieve for the French than for the Americans. Because of this, the French have a larger responsibility in the attaining of a mutual understanding.

At this sixth level, meta-communication (communicating about communication), becomes possible because we realize that the difficulties we have encountered may have a cultural character, and we are able to discuss them in terms that are compatible with the other person's culture, allowing a resolution to be found.

Finally, by understanding the different cultural sides of our own identity, we can achieve what could be called a "cross-cultural condition," in which reconciliation between cultural elements that had until then been contradictory may become possible.

## 7. MAKING CULTURES EVOLVE

The ultimate level of cross-cultural awareness is the level at which it becomes possible to act upon a culture in a conscious manner in order to change it. Rather than theorizing on this point, I prefer to present opportunities for a heightened awareness and, hopefully, for subsequent emergences through this work and through the seminars and lectures that I have been giving.

It should be noted that what I have written about national cultures can also be applied to different situations of otherness, in particular within couples or professional cultures (engineers *vs.* sales force), organizations (plant *vs.* management) or companies (small *vs.* large,

private *vs.* nationalized, or just between one company and another). An extensive managerial literature exists on these topics and I will not duplicate it here.

Although moving from one level to the next constitutes progress in personal development, we must realize that it also involves a certain loss of innocence. In the end, there is no turning back: once we have become multicultural, we can no longer return to the lost Eden of native ignorance....

## THE DIFFICULTIES OF CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON

Cross-cultural comparison faces fundamental difficulties that make it a risky—although necessary—enterprise.

Because of the very importance that the cross-cultural method used in this book attaches to surprise as a means of bringing out underlying cross-cultural hypotheses, this method can lend itself to the accusation of being anecdotal, subjective, non-replicable, and, worst of all, non-scientific. I must acknowledge that this criticism, which often originates in resistance to cross-cultural awareness, is partly justified. I accept full responsibility for the subjective character of my approach, although I hope to collect a few shreds of universality through the—subjective—reactions that this personal perspective will spark in readers. But I submit this work to them in the hope that a concert made up not of a single voice but of many will make up by the expression of many interwoven subjectivities for the lack of a single and self-contained approach that would claim to be scientific. This is why my first choice was to write a cyber-book.

As the very title of this book indicates, I intend to discuss *the* French and *the* Americans. Yet, attitudes and behaviors have a very wide range of variation, both in France and in the United States. It is well-known that there are enormous differences between natives of Lille and Auvergne or of Brittany and Marseille, or among Latinos from Texas, Inuits from Alaska, descendants of early immigrants living in New England, Blacks from Chicago, and Jews from New York, and that the differences among members of each of those sub-groups

are almost as large. In order to make the task more manageable, my main focus will be on the norms of French and American cultures, which is to say on what makes one a “normal” person in each of those countries. The reason for this choice is that norms are more compact than attitudes or behaviors. A Latino from Texas or an African-American from Chicago may have fairly different behaviors but still have been instilled with the same values, at school or by watching television, and thus aspire to a similar “normalcy” in order to be “good” Americans. The same is true of French people—although the question of the range of distance from the norm is a more delicate one in France, because the French norm is implicit and fluctuating. In any case, comparing one norm to another is easier and provides clearer distinctions than comparing one behavior to another. I will attempt to do the former.

In addition to ethnic or regional differences, the diversity of social statuses complicates cross-cultural comparison. The multiplicity of the behaviors of a given person in different contexts, devoid of any apparent continuity and increasingly fragmented, does not make this enterprise any easier.

Another difficulty involves the evolution of cultures. The particular time when the comparison is made is significant because cultures evolve, each in partly different directions and with different speeds. The American norm, which was originally the WASP<sup>x</sup> norm, is also evolving under the combined influences of Latin American immigration, the breakthroughs achieved by various black cultures, and the increasing influence of Asians<sup>xi</sup>. But this evolution is relatively slow, in particular because of the great stability of American institutions and their focus on processes, which strongly restrict the range of deviation from the WASP norm, in spite of the importance of non-WASP immigrants in terms of numbers. As for French culture, it has been heavily influenced by American culture for more than fifty years, in a kind of complex dance in which attraction and repulsion or love and hate are tightly interwoven. Nevertheless, when I am told in response to my description of a cultural difference between the Americans and the French, “True, but this has changed a lot here lately,” I try to make

a distinction between actual evolution and resistance to a comparison that is sometimes perceived as criticism....

The very concept of cross-cultural comparison is open to questioning. As Raimon Panikkar wrote<sup>xii</sup>, “Cultures are mutually incommensurable. The fact that we all belong to at least one culture precludes the possibility of any external ‘neutral’ point of view from which other cultures could be evaluated or judged; we always remain dependent on the language and truth criteria of our own culture.” Moreover, one cannot rely on what the members of a given culture state about their own culture because their criteria of evaluation only make sense from within their internal logical framework and do not necessarily match those of another culture.

If, in spite of all the problems listed above, we insist on comparing American and French cultures, we will have to speak of averages, not always very distant from one another, and involving a broad statistical spread. If it can be said that, in general, Americans are more some way or other than the French are, there are in fact significant overlaps between one Gaussian curve and the other and it would be easy to find many counter-examples where those curves overlap. This will lead us, in order to provide a better understanding, to oversimplify things that would need a more nuanced approach.

Despite all of these difficulties, it is intuitively clear to us that it is possible to talk of “the Americans” and “the French” if we identify national differences that are constant enough and if we choose the adequate level of graininess or “zoom” for this enterprise to be meaningful.

Finally, another difficulty must be faced when describing in a linear text a complex reality in which each element is tied to many others. Some concepts will have to be explained before others that are tied to them by circular causal relationships. Readers will probably need to take some time to reflect upon their reading in order to be able to reconstruct as a whole what is described as a sequence.

- i Kübler-Ross, Elisabeth. *On Death and Dying*. Scribner. New edition. 1997.
- ii Scott, Cynthia D., & Jaffe, Dennis T., *Managing Change at Work*. Crisp Publications, Menlo Park, 1200 Hamilton Court, CA 94025. 1989. See also *Managing Personal Change*. Same publisher. 1989.
- iii Feistinger, Leon. *Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. Stanford University Press. 1957.
- iv "The difficulty with cultural differences is that they lead to misunderstandings rather than disagreements. And while disagreements can be identified and so dealt with, when it comes to misunderstandings, most people don't even realise they're happening, or worse, they misinterpret them as being perversely intentional or the result of such flaws as crass stupidity, lack of commitment, dishonesty..." Charles Gancel & Chilina Hills. *Intercultural Management - Pitfalls and Solutions*. <http://www.icmassociates.com/html/article/pitfalls.pdf>
- v But then, would they and could they have understood them?
- vi Many first-generation immigrants to the United States are more patriotic, and even jingoistic, than American-born citizens. In France, this phenomenon is mostly found in the second generation of immigrants—perhaps because they are aware of the difficulties of assimilation that their parents experienced.
- vii In order to read this book in the most fruitful way, readers are advised to abstain from constantly wondering which of our two cultures is superior to the other. It will of course be possible to later reintroduce the—legitimate—question of preference, but from the perspective of a genuine choice rather than of parasitic resistance.
- viii As Descartes wrote in *Discourse on Method*, "It is good to know something of the customs of different peoples, in order to judge more soundly of our own, and so that we might not think that all that which is contrary to our own ways be ridiculous and contrary to reason, as those who have seen nothing have the habit of doing. But ,when one employs too much time traveling, one becomes, finally, a tstranger in one's own country."
- ix Those who were raised as genuinely bi-cultural children can probably avoid this pitfall.
- x White Anglo-Saxon Protestant.
- xi Thus, in 2002-2003, 41% of Berkeley's undergraduate students were Asians and 31% were Caucasians.
- xii <http://www.alliance21.org/caravan/fr>.
- xiii I have chosen a psychoanalytic perspective for some of the analyses in this book. I am aware that many readers are not familiar with the details of this approach and that it may even seem suspicious to some. I want to make it clear that, unlike a few of my colleagues, I do not regard this perspective as being the only legitimate one.

Only by combining a multiplicity of approaches can one hope to understand phenomena as complex as those related to culture. Moreover, I am aware that this approach runs the risks of approximation, non-verifiability, and even arbitrariness. But this does not invalidate the whole discipline, which has a useful role to play on this topic, because unconscious phenomena cannot be ignored when studying the shared mental representations that constitute an essential part of what is called culture.

Readers with a scientific, business, or literary background might find reassurance in knowing that my own background is similar to theirs, but I would not want to give in to the temptation of tribalism.

On the other hand, some psychoanalysts may find it surprising that I am referring to the theories of the School of Palo Alto, in particular in the central chapter of this book on schizophrenia and culture; they may consider these theories to be incompatible or at least incongruous with the teachings of Freud and Lacan. Let us avoid dogmatism. It is true that Gregory Bateson, Don Jackson, Paul Watzlawick, and others among their colleagues and disciples at the Mental Research Institute did not attempt to fundamentally situate themselves within the Freudian tradition. Many psychoanalysts probably consider the concept of paradoxical injunction to be manipulative or at least excessive as a therapeutic modality in dysfunctional family systems. I have chosen not to apply it in my own practice. However, this concept does not invalidate the rest of a very valuable theoretical corpus, in which I have found a coherent and pragmatic view of schizophrenia, an eminently difficult issue that has generated confrontations among researchers and therapists for several generations. If we set aside the more controversial aspects of their practice, we can recognize that the theoreticians of the School of Palo Alto have emphasized the systemic aspects of mental illness or, more generally, of the dysfunctions of human systems, whether they are natural or organized ones, and I believe that it is possible to extend their work by taking culture as a whole as an object of study. This does not involve any incompatibility with the Freudian approach, which is mostly intra-psychic. Some of the phenomena being studied are the same, but perspectives are different and, I believe, complementary. Rigidly clinging to one school of thought or another and claiming for it an exclusive hold on truth would not help anyone and would make research impossible.

For a brief presentation of the School of Palo Alto, see <http://www.cric-france.com/activite/manif/pw/textes/paloalto.pdf>

## CHAPTER 2

# EXPLICITNESS

Explicitness is the American way. Words equal things. The map is the territory.

To be able to assimilate within a mere two centuries, in a country as large as Europe, more than two hundred and eighty million foreigners, many of whom were not proficient in the English language, a particular culture has had to develop: in order to be able to act in an efficient and timely manner, people need to be able to ask for information without being judged on the very fact of asking questions or on the way they ask them, and to expect straight answers, stated at the same level as the questions. In addition, the founding fathers of the American nation chose to take the opposite course of the British royalist culture, with its vertical structure and its abuses. To that purpose, they set up a system of checks and balances, which is to say a set of procedures whose goal was to prevent any one of the three branches of government from exercising excessive power; that system rests upon a high degree of transparency, and therefore requires a continuous effort to ensure explicitness. Thus, starting from the British culture, which strongly leaned towards implicitness, American culture has become one of the most explicit on the planet.

By contrast, French culture, which is older, does not seem to favor the assimilation of foreigners. It can thus afford to judge people based on the questions they ask (on their nature and quality, mode of expression, contextual relevance, the level of proficiency that can be inferred from them, etc.,) to fail to answer at the level at which the questions are asked, to respond with critical or mocking innuendos, or even not to answer at all. Thus, foreigners will be made to feel that they must somehow earn the right to be admitted into the French culture, through a gradual mastering of un-stated rules. They will be allowed—bit by bit, and at their own risk—to understand that

culture from the inside, and later to behave like the natives themselves, including by failing to make the rules explicit for the uninitiated. I will later return to this sadistic behavior—please take note of it if the use of this adjective has startled you—because it seems to me to play a central role in the French culture. It is experienced by Americans (and most especially by American women) upon their arrival in France as extremely disconcerting.

The French insistence on judging others, in particular their intelligence, by the yardstick of the questions they ask, is worthy of examination, since that insistence reveals more than the mere, “*intelligere*.” In fact, the French seem to be alone in calling “*intelligence*” the ability to decipher their code without any outside help, and in admiring that ability, not in too explicit a way, however, and using innuendos in the same way as fencers use their foils<sup>i</sup>.

American culture is a binary one. Within its context, a statement must be either true or false. Americans are quite uncomfortable with nuances of gray, whereas the French thrive and even delight in the oceans of ambiguity that they purposely preserve. In fact, Americans are mentally wired in such a way that, when placed in a situation of uncertainty, they will create a new sub-category within which a statement will be either true or false. If that result has still not been achieved, a new sub-sub-category will be created, and so on, until the final taxonomy is a completely binary one.

That heuristic path will be articulated on two types of questions:

- 1- Ones regarding legitimacy, such as, “Is the situation at hand legal?”; “Are the actors involved legitimate?”
- 2- Pragmatic ones, such as, “What is there to gain?”; “What aspect of the situation is already known, and what already-tried solutions can be applied to it?”; “Am I competent?”

Each question-and-answer pair constitutes a module, which may later be re-used in order to clarify other similar situations. This allows for an important learning experience and greatly enhances innovation by making it possible to focus people’s energy on the only aspects of reality that are worthy of it, thus saving a consider-

able amount of time. All the more so because Americans, unlike the French who aim to distinguish themselves by leaving a personal trace of their existence, usually have no compunction about re-using modules originally designed or already used by others. The tree-pattern thus produced by the application of the module concept to every field will, of course, constitute an ideal foundation for reasoning in computer science, for highly divided distributions of neighborhoods within cities, for legal approaches, for the glorification of expertise, or for organizations based on the Ford system of production.

### IMPLICITNESS

Unlike the American way, the French way leans toward implicitness. For the French, words are different from things, and signifiers from signified. The French regard what is too explicit as naive, not to say dumb, or worse.

This discrepancy between what is stated and what is meant is not trivial. It is, it seems to me, a requirement in French discourse. The gap between what is meant and what is actually said leaves room for allusions, shared historical references, in other words, for a bond, for complicity even, for poetry, for desire. Above all, that gap leaves communication open to misunderstandings and disagreements, forcing the participants to pay close attention to the means of relating, at the expense of content.

The French tend to listen intently and to hear much more than what is being said: “Why is he the one saying this? Why is he saying it this way? Why is he telling me? Why now? What isn’t he telling? What is he hiding? What should he have said? How is he wrong? How is he trying to fool me?”

This way of listening, which is the counterpart of a particular way of speaking, helps to develop among the French a mostly contextual grasp of words, in which the content of what is said is affected by what surrounds it. Hall<sup>ii</sup> called French culture “*context-rich*,” whereas American culture is “*context-poor*,” since its meanings largely amount to its contents.

Thus the French dedicate much attention to their workplace environment; they speak with their hands, decorate their cities with large numbers of monuments, design indirect commercials, use understatement and paralipsis. Americans, on the contrary, are willing to work long periods in windowless offices, are liable to build only one road to connect point A to point B, mention the price of a restaurant dish in front of their guests, leave power lines above ground, use short sentences or impose the same grid pattern upon San Francisco's twenty three hills as they would upon any flat city. For the French, a ballot can have many meanings besides what is written on it, whereas Americans would not consider for a moment voting for candidates they would not want to win.

The reason why French was for several centuries the language spoken at European courts was not because it was the most precise one, as has been claimed, but that it was the one that allowed its speakers to be imprecise in the most precise way. French makes it possible to say what is not yet so, to describe specific nuances of gray in the progression toward an agreement, and to express the intermediate steps that imply one would not be entirely opposed to a particular decision....

The clarity of the French language, which was so highly praised by the writer Anatole France, is the result of an overt and insistent effort that goes against the spirit of French culture. The fact that engineers, physicians, business people, scientists, etc., insist on using the right word, is remarkable in that it makes up for the natural fuzziness of the culture, just as Descartes' Discourse on Method, in 1637, came to govern French thought because that thought badly needed "the right rhythm," as Boileau wrote in 1674 about the poet Malherbe. Yet all that is no more than a whitewashing, a protecting reversal, as is often the case in cultures that tend toward implicitness. Whether the French actually are rationalists, as they claim, is very much in doubt. As we shall see, French law is based on a formal cause-and-effect logical reasoning. That reductive formal character often takes precedence over the real world, allowing individuals and their subjectivities to evade responsibility. Repressed tendencies have a way of reappearing....

### NUANCES OF GRAY

Implicitness brings with it a heightened perceptiveness<sup>iii</sup>; one needs to see not only what is there, but also what is implied, what could be there. During his three stays in Paris between 1906 and 1910, the young American painter Edward Hopper adopted the subtleness of that city's nuances of gray. It took him about ten years after returning to the United States to get used once again to America's rawer, bolder hues<sup>iv</sup>. The work of Mary Cassatt, the only American painter who was a "true" impressionist in the French sense of the word, also shows the influence of the implicitness of French culture. Americans are fascinated by Seurat and his Pointillism. They see in it an artistic practice that, while close to that of Impressionism, unlike it, utilizes the pictorial device of separating things into discrete entities, which amount to tiny processes, thus making art less mysterious and more intelligible.

Oil painting sets found in France make it possible to recreate the whole range of the palette with a mere ten or so color. In the United States, such sets would not make sense; American sets offer a larger range of pre-mixed basic colors, similar to the ready-mix that characterizes American cuisine. By the way, American cookbooks are much more detailed than their French counterparts, since they do not rely on the assumption that readers already know how to separate egg whites from yolks. In the same way, French road signaling is often incomplete, which causes much grief to foreigners coming from countries with less implicit cultures.

### SIMPLICITY AND COMPLEXITY

As a result, the French tend to be attracted by complexity, Americans by simplicity. It can even be said that one of the strong points of American culture is that it knows how to create value through simplifying what is complex and turning it into a process, as in trade (McDonald's or Disney) and management (job descriptions, compensation systems.) As a member of the board of a French-American school in California, with a faculty equally divided between French

and American teachers, I have noticed that it is impossible to offer students a unified curriculum in mathematics. Students attend a French math course taught in French (in a  $n$ -dimension space, with  $n = 3$ ), and a different course in American math in which they start with piling up matches, then go on to counting them; theorems are there to be used, not proven. Those two approaches have different benefits. The French tend toward the highest level of abstraction possible<sup>v</sup>, in a kind of contempt for the real world that is also displayed in the behavior of their elites, whereas Americans tend toward the most practical level, busily ignoring theory. In France, engineers are expected to be cultured persons; in the United States, engineers are technicians, competent but restricted to the practical aspects of their fields, consistent with the etymology of the word, engineer<sup>vi</sup>.

## LYING

Lying is not the American way. Of course, this does not mean that Americans do not lie. It means that it is deemed more normal and preferable to tell even an unpleasant truth than to lie, albeit out of politeness. This truth-standard has radical legal consequences: witnesses and defendants testify under penalty of perjury, incurring at the federal level a five-year prison sentence if they are convicted of lying. When French people on their first trip to the United States have to request a visa, they make fun of the apparently ridiculous questions asked on the form, of this one in particular: "Do you use illegal drugs on a regular basis?" or, better yet, "Do you intend to assassinate the President of the United States?" If I did, they think, I'd certainly not tell them! In fact, the purpose of those questions is to be able to indict the author of the statement with perjury, in case the lie can later be proven; in addition, the fact that several charges can be brought against a defendant makes it possible to drop some of them in a plea-bargaining process that will save taxpayers the expense of a trial. In the same way, applicants for U. S. citizenship, after having answered, in English, questions about American institutions, are asked, "Do you speak English?" Their formally stated answer, which obviously is "Yes," will later make it impossible for

them to claim that they did not understand a given legal clause because they did not know the language. Unlike its French counterpart, the American legal system, does not rest on the default assumption that the law must be known by all. Therefore, in order for guilt to be legally assigned, it is generally necessary to show that there was criminal intent, and thus that the defendant knew the law.

The American way of telling the truth leads to what appears to the French as more confrontational relationships, especially in the workplace. As a rule, American employees are more likely to tell their boss when they disagree with decisions s/he made, and s/he will not consider those disagreements as crimes of *lèse-majesté*. This cultural difference is often a source of misunderstandings within French-American couples, at least until the French spouse has adjusted to the American way (the converse adjustment simply does not happen—although this may just be a personal impression.)

Americans must answer the questions they were asked, and they must not answer them with other questions or change the topic under discussion. This tends to ensure that speakers who lie by omission will be forced to account for their omissions. In addition, interrupting other speakers is not acceptable. The resulting conversations seem relatively flat to the French, because they are less winding, less rhythmic, and above all less challenging at the level of interpersonal relationships. Respect for the process of alternating speakers, as well as a kind of de-personalization of speech, are the American counterparts of the French tendency to interrupt and personally challenge speakers.

The new eagerness on the part of Americans to attempt to think out of the box reflects their growing awareness that, in a time of increasing complexity, their insistence on keeping their eyes on the ball makes them lose in scope what they gain in keenness. Conversely, the French tend to find pride in avoiding even looking at the ball, since they are the undisputed masters of verbal dribble, evasion, reversal, negation, contextualization, cross-questioning, induction and generalization.

## HUMOR

Humor is located at the border where implicitness crosses over into the realm of explicitness, revealing the fact that an implicit assumption we had made was wrong. Since the border between what is implicit and what is explicit is not located in the same place in both cultures, humor does not work in the same way in both. Thus, jokes that made perfect sense when heard in the original versions of American movies or television series fall flat in their dubbed French versions. The reverse is difficult to observe, given that Hollywood has convinced U. S. authorities, out of protectionism, to rule that foreign movies must be subtitled rather than dubbed<sup>vii</sup>.

In the American way, everything can be quantified. Dichotomies, in which everything is either true or false, favor precise measurements, whereas implicit and contextual cultures are more consistent with fuzziness. I remember running out of gas when the gauge of the first company car I used in the United States read empty. I could not understand what was happening: to my French gaze, that reading meant that a good thirty miles' worth must be left in the tank. A wide variety of statistics are provided during baseball, football and basketball games, and Americans, even those who are relatively uncultured, memorize them<sup>viii</sup>. In this land of the quantifiable, more is better. The French are always surprised by the excessive amount of food served. Subtlety is not the American way.

Innovation is experienced differently in implicit and explicit cultures. Innovating amounts to foregrounding what was only part of a background until the innovation occurred. In order to innovate, one must recombine existing elements in a novel way—as opposed to inventing, in which entirely new elements are created. To innovate, the relevant elements must first be identified, therefore separated from each other into discrete elements, and must be named, operations that are more consistent with explicit cultures.

Implicit cultures, such as the French and Japanese ones, are more oriented toward the past, explicit cultures toward the present and future: avoiding assigning names makes it possible to preserve what

exists as is, thus preventing the emergence of the new. Finally, explicitness makes it possible to codify processes of innovation. Innovation is thus considered as something that can be managed rather than as something that goes without saying or should be left to the personal talent of innovators. Processes of innovation integrate it into the collective realm, and the various constituents of innovation provide the basis for a distribution of roles within a team. For all those reasons, it is not surprising that, leaving aside occasional strokes of genius, the Americans would be more productive than the French in matters of innovation as measured, for instance, in terms of the numbers of patents granted, as well as of the financial development of those patents.

## THE DOLLAR

The dollar is the universal unit of measurement. You can deduce with very little effort from a conversation the dollar value of the person you are talking to: references to neighborhood, size of the house and loan, a few words on investments and cars—just add it all up. This dollarization of everything turns into commodities what, in French culture, would be thought of as unique and priceless, and makes valuations, comparisons and exchanges possible. In this context-poor culture, financial valuation immediately provides meaning. Such a display appears childlike to the French. Yet it is not unlike what can be observed at Parisian dinners, even if displaying one's power, connections and culture is considered more proper there than displaying one's wealth in conversations.

During my first trip to the United States, in 1966, a banner in front of the Smithsonian Institute advertised, "Come and see our \$5 million painting," without indicating what the painting was. One of the attendants made this clear for me, "Not everybody knows who Leonardo da Vinci is, but everybody knows what five million dollars is." Try this: How long will it take for the people sitting next to you before they use the word, "dollar?"

### BODY PARTS

The dollar takes its place between the real world and our perception of it, and, through its mediation, makes it possible to describe and designate the real world. In the same way, for Americans, bodies are not experienced directly, through primary perception, but as a set of juxtaposed body parts, each with its own purpose. Each of those parts can be worked on separately, through activities such as body-building; plastic surgery is there to repair those body parts, in the same way as mechanics maintain cars. Those body parts, seen as external to the core of one's personality, are regarded as a set that can be extended through the use of fake nails, false eyelashes, or hair extensions. Diseases are seen as something that is juxtaposed to the individual—you are not a cancer patient, you have a cancer—as an object somehow external to the self, and thus easier to designate. Stickers are affixed to drivers' licenses to indicate that the drivers' organs are to be donated upon their deaths. Surrogate mothers lend their uteruses for a fee, and this can be freely discussed without seeming to infringe upon the biological mothers' core personalities.

Tattoos are not perceived in the same way at all in France and in the United States. For the French, they amount to a change in one's being; they are an integral part of the self, so much so that tattoo removal may be accompanied by psychological counselling because of the significant alteration in the body image that is involved. For Americans, tattoos are nothing more than objects that happen to be on the self and that have certain characteristics, such as irremovability. In the same way, make-up is experienced differently in the two cultures, as a retouching of one's essence, or as a mere element in a set. Metaphorically, this allows us to grasp the difference in perception of the real world between implicit and explicit cultures. In the former, reality clings to your skin, you are at one with it, it is not separate from you, and you are not separate from it. In the latter, reality is divisible, it runs its own course, and you too exist as a subject confronting it.

Since one's being cannot be reduced to the sum of its parts, an integrative layer must be added; this is the role of national ideology and

religion. They too function as the culture's body parts. Foreigners are stuck by the patriotism and nationalism of Americans, and not just in times of war. Churches of all kinds, lined up along Main Street, offer their services to prospective customers, and their volunteers come door-to-door to encourage newcomers to join them; if business is good, church buildings that have become too small for their use will be sold with the help of specialized real estate brokers, and replaced by others that belonged to less successful congregations. *Sic transit gloria mundi...*

### CULTURAL CAUSALITY

American's preference for bipolar distinctions reflects the Protestant tendency to Manichaeism, and raises the difficult question of causality in the field of culture. Is it possible to isolate an event, a primary historical turning point, from which a cultural characteristic that until then was secondary, originated and lasted? Or should educational relationships and the transmission of a heritage across generations be considered as the primary factors? For example, the fact the Pilgrims had to run into debt for many years in order to pay for their journey from Europe to the New Eden can be regarded as the founding historical event from which Americans' propensity to run into significant debt originated; in the same way, the loss of several million men during World War I marks the starting point of the contemporary "maternalization" of French society. Conversely, particular attitudes toward weaning or toilet-training, preserved across generations, take a significant part in shaping national characters, and in the end find their expression in institutions. But what are the sources of those particular parental attitudes?

The ninety-five theses Martin Luther posted on the door of his church have shaped Protestant thought and can be regarded as a distant cause of the dichotomy between Good and Evil, which has evolved into dichotomies between True and False and between Stated and Un-stated. But the role of toilet-training as one of the mechanisms through which explicit culture is transmitted across

generations must also be considered. As we shall see in the next chapters, Americans are weaned earlier than the French, but are toilet-trained later. For this reason, they are less prone to the sadistic retention that, among the French, will later evolve into a culturally typical passive-aggressive attitude. This helps to explain the highly critical character of the French. This example shows the conjunction of a historical trigger with a mechanism of transmission, allowing the relevant cultural characteristic to become ingrained.

### CRIES AND WHISPERS

I have so often seen French audiences smile upon hearing me mention the difference between French implicitness and American explicitness that I have to wonder about the meaning of that reaction. I believe it has two explanations: tacit agreement with the secret that has been revealed; and liberating effect that comes from stating what until then had remained un-stated, as a matter of—un-stated—rule.

With only a slight exaggeration, we could say that France, the industrialized world's number one user of psychotropic and anxiolytic drugs, not to mention alcohol, favors chemical straitjackets over verbal ways of dealing with psychological difficulties. The French like to mock what they consider to be an excessive reliance on psychologists on the part of Americans. For them, such behavior would amount to an admission of madness. This belief on their part betrays a Manichean logic, according to which people are either "normal" or "nuts." The excessive character of this dichotomy seems out of place in a culture that values nuance. Such a dichotomy makes it possible to do away with a whole set of intermediate statements, and to leave it to pills and those who prescribe them to bear the burden of the un-stated.

The Newspaper *Le Monde*<sup>x</sup> published a column titled, "Facing Depression," with this conclusion, "French culture plays a significant part in the reluctance on the part of patients, as well as of those close to them, to face depression by calling it what it is[...] The Americans and the British have no such qualms. Years ahead of us, they dared

to publicly use the word, cancer, and to discuss that disease. In the same way, they do not hesitate to publicly state what ails them, or to accept it when a patient does so [...] As long as the French remain prisoners of avoidance behavior when confronting depression, that pathology will remain under-diagnosed and under-treated. This is a surprising paradox in the country that holds the world record in psychotropic drug use."

Elsewhere, the same newspaper remarked that France, unlike the United States regarding the Vietnam War, has for the past forty years failed to conduct a single study on the impact of the violence in the Algerian War on its victims as well as on its perpetrators, and has offered no psychological help to its traumatized veterans. In the United States, on the other hand, many services have been made available to post-traumatic stress syndrome sufferers in public spaces such as supermarkets, where they can be heard and can begin a healing process.

Those differences in standards and practices are not restricted to the extreme cases of the outcasts resulting from these two atypical wars. A few years ago, Nancy Reagan announced on American television, "I have had an addiction to pills, but I am getting treatment." Even though things have been changing in France, we are not about to see Bernadette Chirac, the President's wife (assuming she were in the same situation) give this kind of statement on the evening news...

The silence of individuals contributes to this collective silence, and makes it possible, through a kind of collective neurosis that could be called "cultural neurosis," to ignore the perversions and dysfunctions of our cultural system, thus precluding their resolution<sup>x</sup>. Neither French nor American culture is exempt from cultural neurosis, but the form it takes is not the same on either side of the Atlantic. French culture is not entirely implicit, nor American culture entirely explicit. America was partly built upon the genocide of the Native Americans<sup>29</sup>, and the psychological repression it entailed has found its outlet, as would an underground river, in the glorification of violence. Thus the graphic visual expression of violence and its imaginative evocations are found everywhere in American culture,

especially in the movies and on television. We shall return elsewhere to the role played by American courts in this respect.

Psychoanalysis has a different place in French and in American culture. If Jacques Lacan was right to claim that the unconscious is structured like a language, and if the radically different nature of implicitness in French and in American culture is taken into account, it then becomes obvious that psychoanalysis cannot be regarded in the same way in the two countries. Its understanding is not the same because the meaning of the words is not the same, because their degree of distance from the context is not the same, because weaning is not the same. The goal of therapy is not the same either. For American psychoanalysts, it is usually enough to seek a successful social insertion—in the patient's professional and personal life—while sometimes operating under the control of a health insurance company, which pays for a certain number of sessions, and is informed, on an ongoing basis, of the progression of the therapy. On the contrary, French psychoanalysts take great care not to be confined by outside restrictions and do not accept any involvement by an outside administration. The rebellious character of French culture also allows psychoanalysts to not rely on too constraining a nosography<sup>xi</sup> or on too strictly codified a practice. The shortest line between two dreams is a curve, the poet Cocteau said, a Frenchman's statement.

## DEATH

One of the defining characteristics of a society is its attitude toward death. Americans explicitly discuss diseases and death, they have mourning rituals that follow formal processes, and they easily and quickly let go, in order to go on with their lives. Once the mourning process is over, attachments disappear. It could also be said that, because attachments between individuals are weaker in the United States, where relationships between individuals have the form of juxtapositions, they are easier to come to terms with through verbal expression, and mourning processes are easier. In that culture, which is strongly focused on the individual, the death of a person belongs

to that person alone—at least, more than to those close to him or her, even if euthanasia is not (yet?) condoned. Everything takes place as if the first weaning had prepared Americans for the final one, as if, after the first mourning had been dealt with, other mournings were easier to accept.

It should not be assumed, however, that the denial of death is not present among Americans. Attempts to remain forever young, through the practice of sports or the use of plastic surgery, amount to attempts to resist aging and its final outcome. Cosmeticizing or even embalming the dead makes it possible to display them with an appearance that is as close as possible to their former one. Those close to the deceased eulogize them in public during the funerals, which are not so sad, because emphasis is placed on the positive aspects of the lives and personalities of the deceased. Cemeteries are located outside of town, and therefore are not very visible.

The French systematically avoid discussing death, and, through a kind of "verbal erasure," the "Grim Reaper" is rarely mentioned. Their deaths, as their lives, are part of their milieu rather than of their unique fates. Patients are the last to be told of their incurable illnesses, and whispers accomplish the ultimate robbery. Mourning processes are less standardized, and attachments are lasting, as they are for the Japanese. Physicians' anxiety when facing the unspeakable is evaded through the use of technical approaches, in a country where oncologists do not have to go through any training in the relational aspect of medical care<sup>xii</sup>. In both cultures, the accumulation of material goods amounts to an obsessive defense reaction against the idea of death, but this reaction is stronger in America, where money clearly works as a compensation, whereas the French operate more through sublimation. The difference is that Americans accumulate above all for themselves, whereas the French also consider the transmission of their estates—thus manifesting their fantasy of eternal life through the transmission of material goods to their descendants<sup>xiii</sup>.

## PUBLIC SPACE

The importance of explicitness in American culture is consistent with the Protestant idea that the community—and, as a consequence, the individual—has more to gain than to lose by making as much information as possible available to the public. Conversely, the French protect themselves against such dissemination, which they regard as excessive and potentially hazardous, for instance through their law on Information Technologies and Liberties. Americans see what they have to gain by sharing, whereas the French see what they have to lose by it.

Thus, every month, Americans collect, within gigantic databases managed by three competing companies, details about a wide variety of payments—or missed payments—of various loans made by over one hundred million households, making it possible to assign individual credit ratings. Through the use of credit reports, those ratings form the basis of subsequent decisions on the part of merchants and financial institutions as to whether or not to authorize loans to private individuals. This would be seen as an Orwellian nightmare for the French, who would regard it as an unacceptable intrusion into their private lives, whereas Americans see it as a way of ensuring that the cost of higher credit will be supported by unreliable payers alone, while sparing reliable ones. The French favor an opacity that is supposed to protect individual freedom, but in effect ends up causing a socialized distribution of the cost of credit, cozily lumping together reliable and unreliable payers<sup>xiv</sup>. Following the same logic, the French have chosen a distributive retirement system, whereas Americans have selected a system of capitalization.

For the Americans, finding the right balance between transparency and protection of personal rights is made easier by the fact it is possible to ask a very direct question, and that it is acceptable to reply that you do not wish to answer the question, without hurting the questioner's feelings. However, as we have seen, it would be considered impolite to completely ignore the question. Only in the upper reaches of society, among some diplomats or high level leaders, will more implicitness or avoidance be found. Since the

separation between individuals is stronger than in the French model, it is the responsibility of the questioners to ask their questions, and that of the respondents to agree to answer them or not. Avoidance behaviors, such as silences, denials, and lies, meant to avoid losing face, are less common and characterized than among the French.

In general, French people who first encounter the American workplace are somewhat taken aback by the directness of its interactions, for instance in confronting an employee whose performance is deemed inadequate. The same holds true of adjustments between spouses, which take place less often in public than is the case among the French—a surprising thing in a culture that values the public sharing of information<sup>xv</sup>. The French would be likely to call those interactions altercations, but Americans do not consider them as such. It is worth noting that those interactions cause little or no resentment, since their detailed and explicit character brings more closure than the cutting remarks and innuendos favored by the French. The American way leads to exposing innuendos and doing away with hidden agendas, which at first is very disconcerting for the French members of binational couples....

## SEXUAL HARRASSMENT

An online reader asked me how it was possible for sexual harassment to be present in American culture, which is supposed to be an explicit one. In fact, what characterizes sexual harassment for Americans is not its implicit but its covert character. The legal system aims at making it explicit in order to better proscribe it. The French criticize this system, but they have ended up emulating it. The resistance opposed by French men, and sometimes also by French women, against this exposure of male privilege for all to see, is significant, and we shall return to it. The hidden meaning of the French phrase, "the male gender has priority over the female gender," which supposedly only applies to the field of grammar, shows its full reach in this context.

Regarding the expression of feelings, explicitness is a cause of

misunderstandings and misinterpretations. For members of a couple, the American way consists of telling each other what they feel is at the root of an unsatisfactory relationship, as well as what they precisely wish for in a romantic relationship. On the contrary, the French way consists of resorting to innuendos and mockery in the first case, and to the art of implicit expression in the second. The Hite Report<sup>vi</sup> on Americans' sexual practices identified some fifty steps in the progress toward intercourse. Cultural difference in this matter is so great that the mere mention of this finding is enough to make French readers feel Americans are truly ridiculous. Even if only a few of those steps actually are explicit, nevertheless there are more of them than there are in French practice, which may lead to embarrassing situations, in a country where—surprisingly, for the French—when people say “no,” it actually means “No”...

Let us note in occasional that the very fact of moving to the next step in a relationship is considered in America as a movement toward marriage, which is obviously not necessarily the way French males see things...

To sum it up, let us say that, even if it may be difficult for the French to admit, when Americans say something, they probably mean it...

## CHAPTER 3

# INDIVIDUATION

I have observed French and (White) American mothers with toddlers, in school courtyards and playgrounds. The contrasts between French and American behaviors provide examples of the difference in the degree of individuation<sup>xvii</sup> between French and American cultures.

American mothers tell their children, “Go, have fun!” The children go and have fun, trip and fall, and come back crying to their mothers. The mothers briefly comfort them, and, without scolding them in any way, explain in a factual way what happened, and tell them what to do next time; “You can do it!,” they say; “Go, have fun!”

French mothers, on the other hand, start with a series of constraining commands: “Don’t go to far away”; “Don’t talk to strangers”; “Don’t get dirty”; “Bundle up, or you’ll catch cold,” “Come back in five minutes”; “Stay where I can see you,” etc.

French children go and play, trip and fall, start crying, come back to their mothers' laps. The mothers scold them and tell them, “Didn’t I tell you?”; “You never listen”; “You’re just like your father”; “Can’t you pay attention?” What they imply is, “You’re incapable.” The mothers then restrict the children’s allotted space even further, “Stay here now; no more running around.”

In both cultures, mothers, through their behavior, cause a psychological split within their children. In both cases, this split will be painful and will help shape the children’s characters, but in radically different ways.

In the American culture, mothers, through the “Go!,” “Go, have fun!” drive their children away. What is taking place is a kind of social weaning, even if the phrase, “have fun” gives it a positive feel, implicitly providing a worldview in which only the positive side of things is presented: it is clear enough that children will have fun, they are even ordered to do so. The real world is welcoming, and

there is no doubt that children will be easily able to handle it; no alternative worldview is offered. The whole interaction splits the situation between the mothers who will remain alone and the children who will interact with the real world. This will increase the children's experience and shape their characters beyond their immediate reaction to the mothers' behavior.

Let us note that, in the sentence, "You can do it!," "can" actually means, "must": making a mistake is acceptable, but only once; better do it right next time. In the process of learning through trial and error, errors are regarded as opportunities for learning, while faults or weaknesses are regarded as challenges. In the phrase "You can do it!" being only exists through doing. The self is born out of that phrase, "Do it." You are only worth as much as what you do, in this "can-do" culture. If you stop doing, you no longer exist—birth or degrees are not enough. Retirement cannot be a goal in of itself. Americans are compelled to have a successful life—or else they will be called "losers," a word that carries an extremely heavy weight in this culture, since it defines not only what you do, but also what you are.

French mothers also produce a split, but in their case it is a split between, on the one hand, the mother-child pair, closely dependent on each other, and, on the other, external reality, presented as inhospitable, or even dangerous. This is quite unlike the American mothers' sentence, "You can do it!" Children remain in a state of ambivalence, between the comfort of their mothers' laps and their own desire to escape from them.

A question will arise in the minds of American children, "Am I still loved, even though I have been weaned so early?" This will remain the primordial question in the minds of American adults, as shown by individual behavior (persistent worries about this question, a preference for sweet food, and a dislike of silence, which would generate anxiety and must immediately be filled with words or Muzak...) as well as by the attitude of the United States in the foreign policy arena. Female American tourists, when bullied by the infamous Parisian taxi drivers, infer that the French dislike Americans. They should be aware that those drivers are just as discourteous with French cus-

tomers. When American women say, "I love you," they expect an immediate reply, "I love you too," otherwise they will wonder—and inquire—if there is a problem. The reaction of the State Department to France's decision to deny American planes permission to fly over its territory on their way to bombing Colonel Ghadafi showed the same misgivings regarding the attitude of its ally. In the same way, after the United States lost its seat at the U.N.'s Human Rights Commission, The New York Times had this title, *The Whole World Hates Us!* Before American troops entered Baghdad, Donald Rumsfeld talked of "conquering the hearts and minds" [of the Iraqi people.] We all know what came of this, but the original—or at least stated—intent is worthy of notice. In a Los Angeles Times article titled, "America Is Not an Island"<sup>xviii</sup>, Paul Kennedy, from Yale, advocated "a leadership that would be defined by a broad vision, a perception of our shared human condition, a conviction that we have as much to learn from others as we have to teach them, a leadership that would speak to the weak and the oppressed all over the world and would encourage the United States to join other powerful and privileged nations in order to help those in need." "If this were to happen," he concluded, "then we would keep the promise of America, and we would probably be surprised to see how much we really are loved."

Stanley Hoffmann, from Harvard, wrote, "Past hegemonies, from Rome to Great Britain, tended to be quite realistic [...]. They wanted to be obeyed or, in the case of France, admired. They rarely wanted to be loved. But as a combination of high-noon sheriff and proselytizing missionary, the United States expects gratitude and affection. It was bound to be disappointed: gratitude is not an emotion that one associates with the behavior of states."<sup>xix</sup>

For the French, the basic question is not, "Am I loved?" The French are more likely to be overly loved, hampered as they constantly are in their hope for autonomy, and overprotected. For them, the basic question is, "Am I able to be independent?" And for the rest of their lives, they never stop wavering between the cozy nest of their mothers' laps, which are sublimated into the group, the company, and the nation, and their occasional attempts at asserting for themselves and

others their own rebellious independence. From de Gaulle to the “French exception,” from defiance of the driving code to tax evasion, they display a behavior that seems incomprehensible to Americans, who call it, “Gallic,” in reference to “those French people whose erratic movements are a mystery to us.”

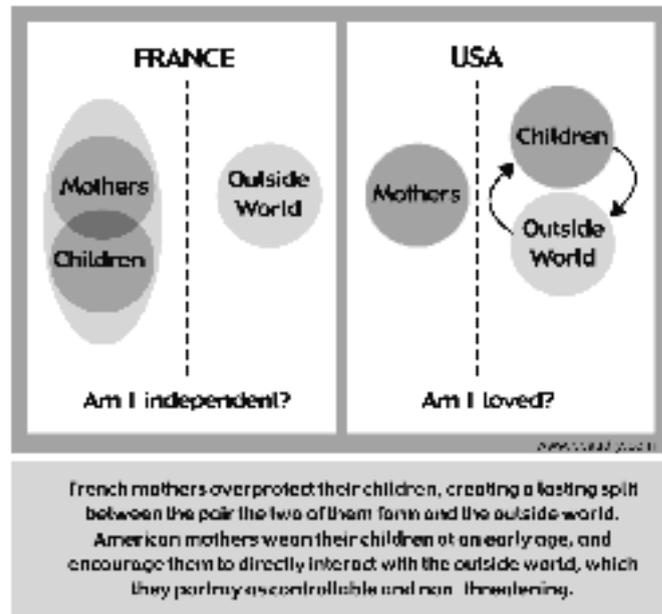


Figure 2. Mothers, Children, and the Outside World

It is typical of French drivers to flash their headlights to signal a stranger driving in the opposite direction that “daddy”—the cop—is waiting at the next turn. This is a way for them to protect their kin against the institution, which is experienced as a sublimation of overly dominant and possessive parents. Conversely, American drivers are encouraged to call a toll-free number to report unruly drivers. American whistleblowers are protected by a special status and receive financial rewards for reporting felonious behavior in their companies or offices to the authorities. What is considered snitching in France is regarded as an exercise of civic duty in the United States, since Americans do not tend to resent institutions for being too harsh

on them—no more than they found their parents’ authority over them too constraining when they were children. On the contrary, the Protestant ethic commands that institutions be supported and reinforced by obeying the laws that serve the common good.

French misgivings over snitching were already present in the mid-18th century, when the Catholic Church collaborated with the French state in demanding that parishioners tell the courts what they knew about cases, through “monitoires,” which were, to some extent, the counterparts of American subpoenas, except that this procedure met with great resistance on the part of the French people and was eventually abandoned. On the other hand, Americans support the principle of the subpoena—even though any one of them may some day be forced to testify against his or her will—because it provides a moral foundation to the whole legal system.

The founding gesture of the American nation was an act of rebellion against the arbitrary nature of monarchic decision-making. Americans display an a priori trust in their system, which is meant to prevent abuses of power, and they are intent on exercising their constitutional duty to monitor the honesty of their elected representatives. When Protestant congregations ruled, the behavior of every individual was under the control of the community. “Congregations entrusted secular people to enforce discipline. No spiritual authority could release the community from its collective responsibility toward God.”<sup>xx</sup> In “New England States, the old structures of European guilds were absent and [...] political institutions rose from religious institutions.”<sup>xxi</sup> Those institutions were strongly influenced by Protestant congregations.<sup>xxii</sup> They attached great importance to the moral purity of their members. This view of institutions as a good thing is to a large extent an ideological construction, since American identity is partly expressed through a belief in democratic and functional institutions. In this context, the word, “democratic,” is understood as meaning, “respectful of individual rights.” Americans seek equity, whereas the French demand equality. These two terms are more different than they appear. The principle of fair and equitable treatment applies to individual actions, whereas the principle of

equality, which is, of course, associated with fraternity, is independent from individual performance and has a lesser tendency to create differences between individuals.

The French are bound to waver between two poles. The first is an excessive tendency to belong: life-long employment, civil service status, medical coverage, unemployment benefits, guaranteed employment beyond age fifty, free education, etc. The growing disintegration of this system is sorely regretted by its beneficiaries, for reasons that go beyond the mere loss of supposed advantages. The other pole is a rebellion that is bound to be ineffective, since people have no intention of drying up the breast that has been feeding them and that they have never really wanted to abandon. Romulus and Remus did not send the she-wolf away, and two hundred years after the French Revolution, even with a left-wing president in power, the presidential palace of the *Élysée* was still called, "the castle." Although the American Revolution was inspired by France, it was an act of transformation; the French Revolution, on the other hand, turned into a bloody rebellion that led to an endless neurotic repetition, befitting people who are forever torn between belonging and breaking away.

#### OUR ANCESTORS THE GAULS<sup>1</sup>

Such a wavering reflects the contrast between the two armies that faced one another two thousand years ago at Alesia, during Caesar's seventh campaign, in 52 B.C., and the merging between the Romans and the Gauls that occurred as a consequence of the Roman victory. Although there were four times as many Gaul reinforcements as there were Romans, the Gauls were not coordinated, and they fought without a battle plan. In *The Gallic War*, Caesar wrote memorable remarks about the Gauls' inconsistency and lack of organization. He did mention the "exactness" of Vercingetorix, the Gaul leader, but his term should be translated as "harshness," almost as "exaction."

Our ancestors, the ancestors of the French people, are not the Gauls alone. If that were the case, we would only recognize our rebellious side. Six years later, our first general was exhibited during

Caesar's triumph in Rome, before being miserably strangled in his cell, at the age of twenty-six. His defeat foreshadowed others, such as the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, the rout of 1940, and the endless second-place finishes of Raymond Poulidor<sup>2</sup>. Praised be those who bravely face defeat! We love Cartouche<sup>3</sup> and Bernard Tapie<sup>4</sup>; while we have never fully accepted our Roman heritage. We did allow Hugues Capet<sup>5</sup>, Colbert<sup>6</sup>, Napoleon and de Gaulle to shape our nation in depth and for the long run, but never without some reluctance. It could even be said that the French resemble the Greeks, while Americans resemble the Romans. It is unclear whether the French are merely incapable of abiding by rules over a long period, or whether, at a deeper level, they find it difficult to accept victory, since self-doubt is at the core of their personalities.

How were marriages between Gauls and Romans experienced, during the first centuries A.D., for them to leave such a lasting and indelible mark upon us? We keep wavering between Gaul and Roman, Villon and Descartes, Rimbaud and Colbert, engineers and street performers, joke and rigor. Those two dimensions coexist, or, rather, struggle within us, each one trying to control the other. We keep wavering between an extension of the domain of the law and an increasing failure to abide by the law, regulation and laxity, procedure and wangling, taxation and tax evasion, centralization and local autonomy.

In my opinion, the bipolar core of the French originates in the tension between Gaul and Roman. The many secondary splits that are at work within them are in some way mere aftershocks of that original split. Louis-Bernard Robitaille wrote<sup>xxiii</sup>, "In France [...] everything is split in two opposing sides: North and South, butter-based and oil-based cuisines, industrial workers and farmers, Montagnards and Girondins<sup>7</sup>, nature and nurture, literary and math persons. Whatever the topic under discussion, be it the lyrics of the national anthem, reforming spelling, aiming or shooting in the game of boules, France always ends up split between two opposing and roughly equal sides. An inner split forever runs within every French person, and polar opposites face each other on either side of that

split. Backers of law and order lurk inside the minds of anarchists; supporters of the Republic like their leaders to resemble monarchs." Among those traditional splits, a special place should be reserved to the one between political Right and Left. Whereas Americans divide things as either true or false, ones or zeros, right or wrong, the French tend to view human groups as split.

According to Robitaille, those various splits are due to "the complex character of past history and determinisms." I will return to them in the chapter, "The Central Taboo of French Culture," in which I will try to show that they involve something hidden and much deeper, a core mechanism of a clinically schizophrenic nature.

#### APPARENT AND ACTUAL WEANING

Actual and apparent weaning are intertwined in both French and American cultures. French mothers show every appearance of having performed an early weaning. In fact, they are judged by those around them by the degree of precociousness of their offspring, and they are severely criticized by their family members and other mothers if their children are behind the curve. Infants as young as six months of age are given commercially produced food not unlike that of adults. Toddlers' clothes used to be designed as if for undersized adults, until specialized marketing established them as a separate category. Two-year-olds must be toilet-trained, as a requirement for admission to day-care centers, and evidence that toddlers have in fact not yet achieved it tends to be called "accidents." Nursery schools accept toddlers as young as two. Yet this apparent independence conceals an excessive attachment toward the children on the part of their mothers. This attachment is shown by their constant monitoring of toddlers, which will endure as the children grow older, and will cause more serious problems when they reach adolescence. French mothers cling to their children all the more because children are sent to day-care centers or nursery schools at an earlier age.

American mothers feed their infants whenever the infants express a need for it. They tend to breastfeed over a longer period than their

French counterparts, to start solid foods later, and to delay toilet-training until their toddlers actually are ready for it. Children only start school around age five. Yet this extended control of the mothers over their children, in fact, conceals an early social weaning, which is experienced as such by the children.

#### PARENTAL PRIDE

American children are encouraged to make their own decisions, and parents tend to be proud when the children make decisions that are different from the ones the parents themselves would have made. French parents, on the other hand, tend to be proud when their children make the same decisions they would have made themselves, and to be even happier when they (the parents) can keep making decisions for their offspring. It is therefore not surprising that the propensity to change would not be the same in French and American cultures. Adolescence tends to be less eventful for American teenagers, who have already been weaned, and for whom the question has already largely been settled, whereas French teenagers, who are called, "ados"—would that term stand for, "adored"?—are compelled to take advantage of this difficult transition to take up again their unresolved and excessive attachments, during a period of rebellion that their American counterparts have already experienced and solved around age two (the infamous terrible twos.)

As adults, the French tend to remain in close contact with their families—although their behavior has lately been changing in that respect. Americans tend to be less close, to meet and call their family members less often. Leaving for college, around age eighteen, signals entrance into the adult world, as well as a permanent physical separation from the parents, which is sanctioned by particular campus rituals (binge-drinking, etc.). The French counterpart of that transition is not found until the time of marriage. French people always remain welcome in their hometowns, and keep a closer connection to their families in case something bad should happen. Americans find themselves alone and must count on their own

resources, which they consider as normal. Their friends are, to a large extent, the ones they made during their college years, at a time when they had suddenly been severed from their families and had to create new attachments, perhaps the only time in their lives when they experienced nostalgia.

#### BONDS, INDIVIDUATION, AND EXPLICITNESS

To some extent, individuation is tied to the explicit character of American culture. In every culture, naming is a founding gesture of identity, establishing a distinction between what is and what is not. From Siegfried to Turandot, naming makes it possible to separate characters from their contexts and roots, and to give them their own existence—distinct from that of their parents. Notung also is the sword that makes things explicit and cuts through the continuum between being and nothingness, between one generation and the next; *il nome* institutes the otherness that makes love relationships possible between two beings that have already been differentiated. Conversely, implicitness extends relationships of fusion and prevents children from recognizing themselves as distinct entities. The prohibition against telling and the prohibition against becoming a separate being are one and the same<sup>xxiv</sup>. This prohibition is an absolute one for the Japanese, who forever seek in *amaeru* a return to the mother's breast<sup>xxv</sup>; it is a partial one for the French, who waver between their own identities and those of the groups to which they belong. Thus, words themselves are not entirely separated, and what is told never completely reaches what is meant.

This difference in individuation brings about a difference in modes of thinking, in ideation itself. This is a major point, which seems to have remained unexplored in the relevant literature—which makes sense, since we all assume that our modes of thinking are universal.

In France, it takes some effort to separate oneself from the world, to set up the distance that is necessary in order to examine facts. When I contrast the ways in which French and Americans report facts, I am struck by the personal involvement of the former—speakers

merging with reported facts to such a degree that those facts always end up distorted—and by the distance, even a kind of detachment, of the latter. It is as if an incomplete and delayed weaning did not allow the French to completely form the relationship of objectification, the separation between the self and external objects, the real world, whereas an early weaning led Americans to an excessive split in the continuum between individual and external reality. As a result, the French experience in a very negative way what they regard as an American excess of distance, seriousness, contract, and law, while Americans cannot grasp the French propensity to distort facts and break commitments, contracts, and the law; their amateurishness; and the lack of a fast and effective legal recourse. For the French, understanding amounts to relating. Their obsessive search for contexts is an attempt to establish and preserve bonds, to avoid creating splits that would painfully echo the lack of initial weaning. The bond between things structurally matches that between people, which is itself a replica of the bond that has been preserved with the mother; it is always in danger of breaking, and therefore deserves continual, even obsessive attention, even if that attention remains covert. A thing makes sense to the extent that it is related to the rest of the world. Individuals can become acquaintances, friends, or relatives; they are connected to the preexisting network, which confers existence upon them, not as separate individuals, but as belonging to something larger than themselves. The French tolerate neither isolated facts nor solitary individuals, both of which appear to them as odd: the former do not make sense, while the latter threaten the groups from which they seem to dissociate themselves. "I hate movement for it displaces lines..." Change disturbs the established arrangement of relationships, and any innovation is a potential threat.

#### COMMAS AND PERIODS

For Americans, understanding amounts to separating. They consider specific facts, isolate them, separate them, sever them from their contexts, and either create a new category for them, or place them within a category that has already been established with the precise

aim of differentiating them and separating them from the rest of the world. Individuals, friends, or relatives, are above all regarded as distinct beings with an individual existence, with which specific bonds can be established. There is a direct relationship between individuation and the explicit character of American culture. Americans expect words and concepts to be brought out in the open, separated, made explicit, rather than remain un-stated, concealed, inarticulate, and implicit. The use of short sentences, which was originally imposed by Calvin, then by the Counter-Reformation, does not merely express a wish for clarity. The juxtaposition of distinct ideas matches that of distinct individuals. Periods are to Americans what commas are to the French<sup>xxvi</sup>. The French thrive in analog setups, Americans in digital—binary—setups<sup>xxvii</sup>. The former write dissertations, whereas the latter answer multiple choice questions; the former lend themselves to unplanned encounters, while the latter fill marriage checklists on match.com. The French favor continuums, while Americans prefer thresholds.

Those for whom the primordial bond has not been broken have difficulty naming things, coming to clear and final decisions, acknowledging clear responsibilities, externalizing, abiding by contracts, starting things on time. Small transgressions in each of these areas amount to implicit attempts to preserve bonds, as does the use of allusions or historical references. The self is contemptible, especially because it breaks the gentle harmony of the undifferentiated collective. When describing external facts, Americans often use first-person phrases such as, "it is my understanding that company X is interested in...," "it is my opinion that...," or, "to the best of my knowledge..." Such phrases should not be confused with British expressions of uncertainty, or question-tags, such as, "..., I believe," or, "..., isn't it?" which are meant to lessen the impact of personal statements. For Americans, on the contrary, the purpose of those phrases is to situate the self within the reality under consideration: it is not certain that a given company actually is interested, but it is literally correct to say that such is the speaker's understanding of the situation. The self is in no way contemptible, it simply exists, and any

external element is described from that individual perspective, stated and recognized in its subjectivity. Omitting the "I," as the French do, amounts in fact to cheating, to attempting a connivance that, under a guise of objectivity and impartiality, presents as indisputable what is in fact subjective.

In spite of their sporadic subtleness, the French are more prone to asserting raw facts as if they were unarguable; this is a means to place themselves in the position of authority figures in relation to those they are speaking to. Because of the French belief in scarcity, according to which only one of the speakers can be right or in a position of authority at any given time, this assertion is likely to produce a confrontational reaction, "I don't agree with you at all." This apparent divergence of opinions threatens to undermine the relationship that is held so dear, and forces an adjustment in it, which then provides the protagonists with the quasi-orgasmic satisfaction given by friendship, or at least by the recovery of the lost bond.

Americans make a distinction between peremptory personal statements such as, "That's the way it happened," and statements of indisputable facts, such as, "I know for a fact that..." In French, "I know for a fact that..." is an extremely decisive and uncommon statement, which means, "I was there, I saw it, with my own eyes, I can testify to it under oath and penalty of perjury." You cannot rationally object to the fact that the person you are speaking with holds such and such belief or conviction; that is just the way it is. That said the object of that belief is either true or untrue. By emphasizing the personal character of their views, Americans avoid direct confrontations, and avoid threatening the relationship, whereas the French tend to exaggerate and personalize their statements, and then to repair damaged relationships. Oddly enough, Americans are better at preserving relationships, even though those relationships matter less to them than the tasks at hand, whereas the French, who place relationships above everything else, never stop agitating and challenging them, as if to ensure that those relationships still hold after barrages of criticism. After all, such criticism proves that the protagonists still exist for those around them, whereas they might

have dissolved through an overly extended process of fusion, which is at the same time yearned for and dreaded.

The omnipresence of the legal element in everyday life in the United States is consistent with that distinction between facts and perceptions or opinions. It seems to me that many of the statements that I heard from defendants or witnesses in French courts would not have been accepted by American courts without demands for details and a great degree of precision in the statement of facts. Conversely, a few years ago, I followed the debates of the U. S. Senate Commission in charge of investigating European state subsidies to Airbus. As a Frenchman, I found it amusing to observe the growing frustration of American Senators—almost all of whom were lawyers—facing a French leader who kept making grand proclamations in response to the factual questions they kept putting to him in an ever more precise and insistent manner<sup>xxxiii</sup>.

#### FUSION AND SEPARATION

Americans favor exchanges between equals and competition, whereas the French prefer fusion or counter-dependency. When the French are very good, they are so above all in relation to others, whereas Americans are so above all in relation to themselves. When Americans win, they do not regard their opponents as intrinsically inferior; they enjoy their own victory more than the others' defeat. On the other hand, when the French win, they position themselves at the top of a hierarchy, in order to compensate for an archaic dependency that they still experience as excessive. For Americans, competition is a temporary rivalry; for the French, what is at stake is a fundamental and final superiority, which is reflected in the hierarchical structure of social classes, degrees, status levels within companies and society as a whole, and genders. This need to appear as superior to others reflects the need to be admired, to be finally granted the mother's approval that has only ever been given on a revocable basis, since disapproval has amounted to rejection and has forced children to conform to the expected model, while teaching them con-

frontation and rebellion.

From the perspective of the French frame of reference, Americans are solitary beings, all the more so because the distancing, which could be called, "objectification," that they apply to every aspect of the real world, in particular to relationships and individuals, is contrary to the fusion that constitutes any close relationship in the French way. From within American culture, Edward Hopper has accounted for that loneliness in a convincing way. When visiting the Art Institute of Chicago, Americans spend more time in front of *Nighthawks*<sup>xxxix</sup> than of other contemporary paintings, fascinated as they are by this reflection of their own isolation. Reproductions made of that painting often cut off its left part, the emptiness of which is almost unbearable.

As for the French, they are group creatures and they care about others, either because of a need to belong, following herd instinct, or because they wish to distinguish themselves from others and reassure themselves of their own individuality. The French affinity for groups does not make it possible for them to easily adjust to competition, except when the competition comes from the traditionally opposing tribe, which has the advantage of being already familiar and therefore not presenting them with any real surprise. In the same way, since they prefer to remain cozily at home and to avoid confronting the unknown, the French are reluctant to go and see how others are doing. In addition, doing so would also amount to an implicit recognition on their part that they lack something, or even that they failed at something<sup>xxx</sup>.

Because they have been subjected to endless criticism since they were children<sup>xxxi</sup>, the French, while building armor around them, first internalize that criticism, and then project this negative attitude in their adult lives, which contributes to the reproduction of the critical environment that will make this attitude endure in the culture<sup>xxxii</sup>. At the same time, they seek refuge in a fusion-type group, whose members may only criticize each other, at least in public, through the ritualized form of jibes, while being expected to openly criticize non-members. This is an expression of a tribal behavior (Metz against

Nancy<sup>8</sup>; Centrale against Polytechnique<sup>9</sup>, unions against management...)) in which all seek protection within their own tribes. The weaker the distance between individuals within a tribe, the larger the distance between tribes, which causes confrontations between tribes that are difficult to understand from the outside. The main purpose of tribalism is not the seeming opposition to an antagonist tribe, but the strengthening of the bonds between members of the tribe that is produced by this artificial opposition. Moreover, tribalism reinforces attachments to the past, since tribal tradition aims at preserving the structure of bonds unchanged; it is therefore an obstacle to innovation and is more consistent with cultures that are turned toward the past. Finally, tribalism leads to emphasizing the contrast between belonging and not belonging to a group; although, in other respects, the French favor nuance, in relation to a given group, they only recognize two positions: either in or out.

French students belong to one class until the end of high school, whereas American students pick and choose the classes they take as early as the freshman year of high school, the way only college students do in France. This reinforces individuation and weakens tribal identification with the small group formed by the class. Instead, the object of identification tends to be the high school as a whole, in particular during athletic competitions. Yet, massive gatherings of Americans, especially during athletic events, seem to me to have more to do with gregariousness than with tribalism. Those gatherings are steps toward an identification with the very large group of the nation as a whole, which takes place at a later stage.

American social identity rests upon the individual and upon U. S. citizenship, whereas French social identity is based more on membership in intermediate groups. The United States is geared toward the management of individuals, France toward that of groups. Groups even tend to manage each other. Bosses and unions are inextricably united in this relationship of reciprocal opposition, intolerable yet so comfortable because it is so familiar. Thanks to it, each partner can be, in turn, dominant and dominated, and can blame the other while deriving secondary benefits from the situation without

having to change the rules of the game.

The French lack of individuation is manifested by the fantasy that each person owns part of the other and is in part owned by the other. This involves an incomplete individuation; since children have not completely separated from their mothers, dissociation from the group formed by children (and later, by extension, by peers) has not taken place either. It is as if French mothers were differentiated from each other, but the French children were not, whereas American children were differentiated from each other, while originating, at the fantasy level, from a single archetype of the mother.

The notion of ridicule, which is frequently used by the French when criticizing others, presupposes that one can claim the right to judge others, and therefore that one can somehow rule and own others. The English word, *ridiculous*, does not have the same connotation, and Americans, although they are very concerned with the norm, are more tolerant of deliberate differences in appearances, even if they do not tend to extend invitations to ladies with curlers and purple hair. Among the French, the intertwining of individual memberships lightens the anxiety caused by the fundamental isolation of the human being. The price to pay for it is the granting to others of a right of control and criticism that creates a constant need to protect oneself, while one also uses that right against others, as if preemptively.

#### DECISION-MAKING

Because it is authorized by a culture of explicitness, individuation allows Americans to clearly define the border between what is and what is not, whereas the tribal mode of operation of the French preserves the primordial syncretism. Thus, Americans believe that individual performance within a company can be clearly defined and monitored. The French regard it as an intrinsically fuzzy area, both because decision-making is neither clear nor final, and also because accomplishments can neither be clearly assigned to individuals nor accurately measured. For instance, every one knows the phony relationships involved in the rituals of "performance evaluation" within

French companies. For subordinates, the purpose of those relationships is to avoid any confrontation that would bring up the distinction between evaluators and evaluated. For their superiors, the purpose is to preserve a fuzzy area, which also allows them to easily change their minds or their decisions, reintroducing from the top down some capacity for organizations to be reactive, while reinforcing their own power. Professional experience acquired over many years has taught me to remain extremely vigilant and exercise careful judgment when the French executives that are my clients proclaim goals or values that are not applied in the form of concrete actions.

Contrary to appearances, the lengthy meetings favored by the French are not meant to make decisions—which Americans do much more quickly—so much as to resolve the many internal and external relational issues involved, in a symbolic, ritual, and implicit manner. Why else would people who claim to be so smart need so much time to make decisions that often are so poor? Additional factors may be involved: reluctance to take risks and to accept criticism may slow down the decision-making process; unwillingness to be held accountable for one's actions; the aesthetic and relational satisfaction provided by the problem-solving process; and the effort required to restart a discussion about the implementation of the decisions that were made; all these factors may lead to neglecting the implementation, itself regarded as unglamorous. Thus, Carlos Ghosn told the newspaper, *Le Monde* (September 2, 2003), "Renault is a company in which there is a culture of speech, more and more prevalent the higher one is in the hierarchy. I have been present at endless meetings, in which no sense of priority could be found. Once an issue had been debated, implementation, which was the most important step, was dealt with in a few minutes. In our industry, implementation is everything..."

Many Americans living in France resent the lack of preparation for French meetings. They feel that the work that is performed there should have been done earlier. Yet, to some extent, preparing amounts to committing oneself; hence a systematic lack of preparation (or, as an obsessive compensation, an overly rigid behavior.) True, the only purpose of many American meetings is to take

stock of the implementation of the tasks that were assigned to each participant, making it impossible for them to shirk their commitments. True, also, the agendas of American meetings generally are precise and well-enforced enough for their attendees to be forced to be well-prepared. In France, it is often difficult to ensure that the decisions made, the names of those responsible for the actions that were decided, and the projected dates of those actions, will be recorded. In the United States, the converse would be difficult. The endless stream of appointments some French executives and leaders have to keep makes it possible for them to be continually immersed in a whirlwind of relationships, without taking the time to slow down and more seriously prepare and follow up on those meetings.

#### ACCOUNTABILITY

Americans, because they are used to being fundamentally separated from others, regard accountability as a natural thing. The word, *accountability*, has no counterpart in French. Periphrases have to be used to express its meaning, although the word, *redevabilité*, has recently been coined, indicating that things are in flux.) Because they are accountable, Americans are awarded bonuses or public praise when they succeed, and suffer symbolic death when they fail. Someone who has just been praised may just as well be fired soon afterwards, since every assignment, every project, is distinct, discrete and separate from the last. In the final analysis, in the United States, individuals are held accountable, whereas in France, groups are, or someone else, or... nobody.

In France, it is difficult to assign praise because, unlike in the United States, it is usually difficult to determine who was responsible for obtaining a particular result. Praising someone opens the risk of antagonizing his or her lieutenant, the *secundus inter pares*. Moreover, doing so would amount to rewarding individuals rather than their actions. Once those individuals had been proclaimed to be good once and for all, they could no longer be blamed the next day. Therefore, praise will be withheld as well as criticism, and, in the eyes

of the leaders, subordinates will remain in the gray zone of uncertainty, non-recognition, even non-being. This reinforces the subordinates' identification with the tribe they belong to, because they find in it the comfort that the hierarchical relationship fails to provide.

Americans regard it as natural to suffer or benefit from the consequences of their actions, within the pre-established framework of contracts and the law. If they attempt to escape the negative consequences of their own actions, they still do so within a legal and contractual framework. I will later discuss the weakness and delusory character of the French legal and contractual framework.

#### INDIVIDUATION IN AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS

American individuation is expressed in the institutions that, in turn, reinforce it. In the United States, the separation of executive, legislative, and judicial powers is an absolute principle, whereas it only is a relative one in France, where the National Assembly can censor the Government, and the executive power can dissolve the Assembly. The lack of independence of the judicial power is so much taken for granted in France that, during the disastrous case that involved Executive Life, for many French decision-makers—including those in the upper reaches of government—it went without saying that the decisions made by a California Deputy State Attorney would be dictated by Washington, following negotiations held between France and the U. S. federal government. Some thirty years earlier, the French had already made a similar mistake, assuming that a mere Port Authority, located in the federal capital no less, would have no choice but to obey the will of the highest political authorities, following insistent French diplomatic intervention, and could not prevent the Concorde from landing in Washington. The belief in the subservience of levels of power that are regarded as subordinate rather than independent is deeply ingrained in the minds of members of the French elite. They tend to project their own feudal hierarchy onto the operation of American institutions. In the case of Executive Life, this belief came at great expense to French taxpayers. Yet, the highly tech-

nical character of the case, and above all the fundamental irresponsibility of the French system, made it possible to avoid assigning accountability for that result...

The importance of checks and balances, but also the individuation of official roles, is such, that in the U. S. A. it was possible for the California State Treasurer to sue *ex officio* his Governor in order to obtain payment of the amount that had been committed. Can we imagine the treasurer of the Bouches-du-Rhône suing "his" *préfet*<sup>10</sup>?

In France, it is customary for elected officials to hold several different offices at the same time. This practice, which allows politicians to control several different networks of power and influence<sup>xxxiii</sup>, has only recently started to be questioned. In the United States, on the contrary, this practice is illegal... The principle, according to which only one office can be held by one person, assigns to American elected officials the role of performers of processes, within formal frameworks that are scrupulously applied; those processes could just as well be performed by other officials, if those had been the ones elected in their place; since each one only holds one office; also, since each official has a clear awareness of his or her constituents and objectives, conflicts of interests are strictly limited. The concurrent holding of several offices places French elected officials, *intuitu personae*, in the crucial positions at the centers of networks within which they orchestrate the interactions between entities that are not meant to be too independent from each other; it creates connections, not through connecting processes, but through the personal involvement of the office-holders, which reinforces the essentialist character of the whole system.

The current movement toward a restriction of the number of offices that can be concurrently held is evidence of an evolution of French culture in the direction of individuation. As French society becomes more focused on performance, and therefore less essentialist, limiting the possibility to hold several concurrent offices becomes a logical step in clarifying the different roles that are held. Making and keeping commitments, even for a single term, now matters more and more, within a contractual framework. However, it will not be

possible to completely do away with the holding of concurrent offices, if one is to accommodate the emergence of a network-based economy, which increases the importance of nodes of communication. This can be done in a healthy manner, as the culture and its institutions become more contract-based, transparent, and accountable. Yet, as is often the case when cultures change, overt or covert backlashes are to be expected.

### BORDERS

What I have called the core of the American character, with its emphasis on the self, is consistent with a culture in which physical contact is avoided and the closeness expressed in French by the *tu* form of address is absent. Conversely, it may seem odd that people such as the French, who do not erect strong barriers between individuals, still display such mistrust toward all strangers. In fact, this behavior is a way for the French to counterbalance this very absence of barriers, by constructing a kind of armor intended to protect them from the continual criticism to which their culture exposes them. The French waver between two attitudes: a significant critical distancing toward others, and fuzziness regarding the border between individuals. They experience themselves either as entirely alien—and almost hostile—to others, or as closely interlocked with them, be they relatives, team members, coworkers, or fellow citizens. Americans do not hold either of those extreme positions because they are clearly aware of their individual identities. This is worth mentioning about people who tend to think in binary terms.

Because the French have not been completely weaned, they tend to project onto other individuals and onto institutions the fuzzy personal border they have established with their mothers. This generates situations of interpenetration in which each person seduces, cajoles, possesses, avoids, fights, criticizes, rules, and obeys the other. Since the French are accustomed to this continual interplay, it is not surprising that they would find American relationships quite dull, with their split and predictable individual character, and the way all

individuals take great care to remain at arm's length from others, within their own places and roles in relation to them. French people, upon hearing my description of Americans as I see them, often respond with, "Ah! We'd better remain as we are."

### "THE TRANSPARENT GLACIER, FLIGHTS UNFLOWN"<sup>(12)</sup>

By failing to wean their children at the right time, French mothers fail to establish the proper border between the children and themselves. This lack of border is extended over time by the symbolic absence of the fathers as separators. French mothers are omnipresent during the formative years of their children's personalities, interfering with their lives in an anxious, stifling, and even castrating way. It is difficult for them to be content with merely being, in Winnicott's words, "good-enough" mothers, namely with not being too good. As a result, children forever seek to define a space of their own, protected from what has been experienced as a transgression into their personal space, almost a rape. "The wound is alive deep in their hearts," and the French are quick to detect anything that would reopen the wounds left by past infringements. This is why they are oversensitive to any attempt to exercise control over them, and they take great care not to antagonize the authorities, by using such language as, "Mister Préfet<sup>11</sup>, I have the honor of requesting of your high benevolence, etc." or, "I have the honor of respectfully calling your benevolent attention to, etc." This also explains their need to protect their secret garden, through a strict separation between private life and work.

### CUTTING REMARKS

Stendhal explains in, *On Love*, "Pique, being an infirmity of the honor, is much more frequent under monarchies, and must make a much rarer appearance in countries where they have acquired the habit of judging actions by their degree of utility, as, for instance, in the United States of America."<sup>xxxiv</sup>

True, the French, heirs of a monarchy, sometimes unexpectedly make cutting remarks. Everything is going fine, and the people you

are talking to have lowered their guard, when suddenly, out of the blue, they fling unexpected and mean remarks at you, or hedged questions, tricks, snide statements such as, “you, the know-it-all.” This results in a need for more armor for next time, since this can happen at any moment, especially when you do not expect it. The unpredictability of this behavior makes it necessary to build around oneself an armor that will never be removed.

As for the authors of such remarks, they are reassured by the electric shocks to which they subject others, ensuring that they will not be the only ones with armor, and easily gaining the upper position in the hierarchy of the relationship, which at that moment happened to be getting too close to an equality that was experienced as threatening: Doesn't intimacy amount to shared vulnerability? Intimacy is frightening, and regaining a proper distance is reassuring. Of course, the continual repetition of this mechanism develops and preserves a culture in which it is forbidden to be weak, and, in particular, to admit to being ignorant, afraid, confused, or wrong. Since at any moment, anyone can turn into an attacker, pacts develop, mostly through complaining about designated scapegoats: all of us here are the victims of some other people (the government, the administration, the boss, the enemy tribe, etc.,) and we need an alliance to get them.

#### AMERICAN WOMEN

Being clearly identified as individuals, American mothers are not experienced as intruders in their children's personal space, and American adults do not feel a need to establish a strict separation between private life and work. For instance, French interns in American companies are routinely invited to their bosses' homes, whereas in France this would be likely to happen only if there were preexisting personal relationships with the interns' families. Traditional French companies, epitomes of mother figures, implicitly require that their executives “marry” the companies' causes, and this goes without saying. The presence of women in upper management, although it has come at a very slow pace, has started to undermine

this tradition, to the great displeasure of male executives, many of whom are still resisting this evolution.

French women tend to be caught in subtle power dialectics in order to preserve the illusion that the guys are the ones who make the decisions. It is interesting and significant that American women, who have stronger individual identities and are less entangled in hierarchical relationships with males than French women, are often regarded by French men as being too masculine. American men therefore tend to be regarded as weak, even though those men emphasize their masculinity as much as they can, and tend to consider Frenchmen as effeminate, fragile sissies—the Americans seeing themselves as rodeo riders versus graduates of the Saumur equestrian school. This distorted interpretation reveals how difficult it is for traditional Frenchmen to avoid replicating the pattern of relationship they had with their mothers. Displaying a typical ambivalence, French males waver between a feeling of belonging that verges on surrender, and occasionally blaming their mates for treating them like kids, giving them too much advice, intervening, in short, meddling in their own business. To preclude this threat, some men choose women that are below them or those to whom they assign an inferior position.

It is worth mentioning that younger French women are less prone to replicating the complicated traditional intermingling between men and women, which forces their mates to adjust to new models of relationships.

The lack of clarity of the borders between French individuals is expressed by a rejection of laws and contracts, as well as by a tendency to reject accuracy. Sometimes, on the contrary, through an excessive compensating rigidity, borders are overly marked. The omnipresence of the law in the everyday lives of Americans seems unbearable to the French, who experience it as a replication of parental commingling.

## FAVORS

The recourse to personal favors is yet another of those daily transgressions of the law and contracts, as Polly Platt brilliantly showed in the section on resourcefulness of *French or Foe?*<sup>xxxv</sup> She mentioned the common ploy of preemptively going and asking the suitable civil servants if everything is in order. I regard this act as a statement of allegiance. It engenders a personal relationship that later legitimizes the granting of small preferential treatments, or at least the elimination of potential obstacles, be they real or imagined, all made possible by the fuzziness of the law and the margin of arbitrariness that all French authorities grant themselves.

Favors must be considered as normal French modes of operation, even if—or, rather, because—they are not officially condoned modes of operation. The building of a French-type relationship (a Japanese-type one also, by the way) can be analyzed as a process of exchange of increasingly significant favors. Favors make obvious sense in a “personalist” culture, since they amount to the specific recognition of persons and their preeminence over others and the law. By definition, there cannot be equality before a favor. The fact that this constitutes a liberation from the equality principle reinforces even further the importance of the favor mechanism, to coin a phrase, that “ever more” that was so well described by François de Closets<sup>xxxvi</sup>.

Favors are the individual counterparts of the tolerance and arrangements allowed by Authority. When dealing with laws that often are unenforceable since they are too theoretical and inflexible, accommodations must be found. Civil servants, who represent the Law and the State, display their princely authority at its highest when they exercise their power not to implement regulations to the letter. By doing so, they show a connivance with the ordinary subjects of administrative authority, replicating a wavering that is typical of French fathers<sup>xxxvii</sup>, who waver between lax and strict enforcement of their own authority. If authority is to be tolerated despite its excessive rigidity, occasional compromises must be made. This allows its subjects to hope that the authority will be as accommodating next time, and makes it less necessary to rebel against it because

that would be less profitable (in terms of an implicit calculation of risks and benefits).

Thus the Law, by its excessive inflexibility, forces its agents to occasionally practice that connivance at every point of the hierarchical line of power. This blurs the borders between individuals- and creates constant tensions between two opposite attitudes: for those in the upper position in the hierarchy, between prohibition and repression on one side, and connivance on the other; for those in the lower position, between cheating, rebellion, and grumbling on one side, and submission and connivance on the other. The connivance I have discussed may result from an attempt at seduction initiated by either the upper or the lower side; in both cases, it amounts to an incitement not to fully be oneself, but instead to become the other, to some extent. This mode of operation, perpetuated over generations, ends up producing what could be called a “porous self.”

“NEVER QUITE THE SAME NOR SOMEONE ELSE...”<sup>12</sup>

Since the attachment to mothers and the place of fathers are not the same in French and American cultures, œdipal conflicts are not resolved in the same manner in both cases.

French mothers manipulate their toddlers, especially their sons, in order to prevent them from becoming too independent and growing away from their influence. Their proclaimed pride at seeing their offspring already so grown up and ahead of their age in fact conceals the opposite wish, which communicates a contradictory message to the children, “look grown up, but remain a child with me.” Pronouncements such as, “you’re incapable,” whether stated or unstated, imply that the children are not capable on their own, and that they need their mothers. (In fact, they will always need their mothers, since that inability is assigned to them as an essence, an irreversible condition.) “You’ve got a mind of your own,” clearly suggests that children should follow the minds of others rather than their own. At an unconscious level, matricidal fantasies, sometimes played out as illness (or, in a weaker way, through statements such

as, "you're getting to me"), enable mothers to keep their children under their control; for the children, escaping that control would amount to committing murder and taking on a burden of guilt with which they would be forever saddled. Sentences (or innuendos) such as, "after all I've done for you..," are meant to induce guilt in order to preserve the bond between mothers and children. Those sentences are complemented by unspecific and thus largely implicit criticism such as, "you've got some nerve!" which add the final touch, and cause the internalizing of a feeling of incompleteness and abnormality in the children.

By keeping the fathers at a distance, even when pretending to lament their absence, mothers ensure their hold on "their" children and trigger a direct reproduction of the same pattern in the next generation. This is especially significant with boys. The more they remain under their mothers' control and lack a male role-model because of the absence of their fathers, the harder it is for them to surpass their fathers in the oedipal conflict. In fact, French boys break out of that conflict through a counter-identification with their mothers, escaping into male chauvinism. What matters foremost is not to be a woman, and their male personality is constructed in part by a fear of homosexuality<sup>xxxviii</sup>.

As Christiane Olivier accurately noted in one of her remarkable books<sup>xxxix</sup>, "It costs the man no small effort to get to the point where he can shake free of the woman he has loved best [...] and who has loved him best. [...] In the old days there would have been grandfathers, uncles, cousins—any number of male images to break up this dangerous one-to-one. Nowadays, the all-powerful mother lives with her son who satisfies all the longings she had long ago, makes up for the father who was never there and the husband who has gone away. The little boy is there, so he must pay for them. After all, a woman has to get a man wherever she finds him: too bad if it's in the cradle!"

When they reach adulthood, men tend to behave in the way their own fathers did, leaving the home to the women and children, thus allowing the pattern to be reproduced.

With their daughters, mothers do not find the accomplishment of their sexual identity, and they confront them with a kind of absence of desire that, ironically, leaves more freedom to the daughters. It is well known that girls are more precocious at school. Yet the absence of the fathers during their daughters' early childhood also leaves marks on the latter. As Christiane Olivier wrote, "The lack of a male gaze during the childhood of girls makes them the slaves of this gaze for the rest of their lives... And the absence of their own image in the mirror that the mother provides prepares women to accept every image that will be presented to them; they will put on any disguise if only others agree to play the hide-and-seek of desire with them."<sup>xxxx</sup>

American fathers, who are more present at home (when they are not divorced,) more naturally create a separation between sons and mothers, and more readily provide models for their sons. American culture, in which men are more assertive in their male role than their French counterparts and yet less misogynist because their own fathers were more present, and because they had less of a need to escape their mothers, makes it possible for the Oedipus complex to be resolved in a healthier way. Having closer relationships with their daughters, they make it easier for them to emerge in a balanced way from the latency stage. Over the last decades, American women have taken on a more masculine role. Men have lost their preserve and have moved ever further into the male side in their search for masculinity. Contemporary American English neutralizes masculine forms into politically correct ones such as, chairperson, instead of chairman, and he or she. American men do not recognize their feminine side. They are overly specialized in transmitting masculinity to their sons and asserting the law in relation to their male and female children.

This situation is complicated by the American practice of divorce, which has now come close to constituting a norm. Divorced fathers are generally excluded from the home, which results in the same consequences described above for the French model, at the precise time when, conversely, French fathers seem to be taking a stronger interest in their offspring, in a readjustment that should prove very healthy in the long run.

## MOTHERS' ANXIETIES

The early weaning of Americans is based on the un-stated belief that everything is going to be all right when the children are left to their own means to face the real world, outside of the mothers' space. First, children are expected to know how to manage. "You can do it" in fact means, "You must do it," and the children are compelled to succeed. They are allowed one mistake, but no more. Every failure is redefined as an opportunity for learning. But this belief that everything is going to be all right is also based on the predictability of the outside world: if Junior encounters an obstacle, institutions will operate well enough for those obstacles to be overcome without irreversible harm—in other words, individual action, which is central in American psyche, is based on a contextual element that is taken for granted: the proper operation of institutions. Those institutions are not expected to rescue individuals, but only to implement in a consistent way the role that was assigned to them.

It should be noted that American mothers are far from being exempt from anxieties, but they have trust in the predictability and consistency of the operation of the outside world, within a space they do not control when their offspring are left there, on their own. The neighborhood works as an extension of the home, and even of the mother; the doors of neighbors' homes are open. The same rules have currency there. Neighbors consider it their duty to be good neighbors, and they feel some amount of responsibility for the neighborhood's children; the neighborhood is an extension of the mother, as the school will later be.

A number of Americans books and movies stage this separation anxiety, for instance by presenting a child who becomes an orphan at an earlier age, but then manages to get out of trouble in spite of various perils; so-called action movies transpose this formula into a supposedly adult world—an adolescent one, in fact, since its characters have not been able to sufficiently distance themselves from their childhood, during which the attachment to their mothers was prematurely broken off. The reiteration of those simplistic stories is not merely a weakened rehashing of great myths of humankind such as

the Iliad and Odyssey: Americans need to be constantly reminded of this imaginary model because, through mental projection, it allows all protagonists, mothers and children as well as the adults the latter will become, not only to accept their separation anxiety as normal, but also to reaffirm the belief that everything is going to be all right, given certain conditions (personal effort, courage, respect for the rules) that reinforce the positive role played by institutions and the law, and develop individuals' superegos.

Life is presented as the voluntarist accomplishment of a sequence of beneficial processes, in spite of the risks involved, converging toward a happy ending, which is a metaphor of the reaching of a satisfactory adulthood in spite of a difficult beginning. Of course, this individual perspective also matches historical reality, which has become mythical: a heroic separation from the British Crown, and a success achieved through persistent individual effort, in a context fraught with obstacles, yet institutionally favorable, since those institutions were created by the people themselves and not by some external ogre. In short, American mothers are supported by a symbolic Father, whose benevolence, consistency and strength make an early social weaning possible.

The myth, according to which one gives birth to oneself, developed in this context: in the same way as the nation claims it created itself, everything seems as if children had created themselves: "Take your destiny into your own hands"; "Pull yourself up by your own bootstraps"; Self-help, self-esteem, self-defense, self-confidence, self-service, self-parenting and self-control are available to self-made men. The mothering deficit turns into a deficit of being, and is immediately made up for by an escape into action, and, soon afterward, into excessive ownership.

On the French side, it is in no way certain for the mothers that the environment will be stable, predictable, and safe, so that they may entrust their offspring to it. On the contrary, the outside world is perceived as dangerous, and this view is imposed upon the children: they are not told, "You might get hurt," but, "You're going to get hurt." Such a definite statement amounts to a curse. There is no

salvation but by me (as is the case with “Our Holy Mother, the Church,” which is no coincidence.)

## Joachim du Bellay

### The Regrets (1558) Sonnet IX<sup>13</sup>

*France, mother of arts, mother of arms and laws,  
 You gave me suck from your abundant breast:  
 Now like a lamb crying for what is lost  
 I fill the rocks and forests with my call.  
 If at one time you admitted I was yours,  
 Why are you silent now, why are you cruel?  
 France, oh France, answer me mercifully:  
 But the echo only brings back my own words.  
 I am left to wander among the hungry wolves,  
 Winter approaches, I feel its breath is cold  
 —It rasps, and sends a shiver down my back.  
 Your other lambs are not without pasture,  
 They fear no wolves, nor wind, they are secure:  
 Yet I am not the worst of the flock.*

## Stéphane Mallarmé

Will New and Alive, the Beautiful Today... (1887)<sup>14</sup>

*Will new and alive, the beautiful today  
Shatter with a blow of drunken wing  
This hard lake, forgotten, haunted under rime  
By the transparent glacier, flights unflown!*

*A swan of long ago remembers now that he,  
Magnificent but lost to hope, is doomed  
For having failed to sing the realms of life  
When the ennui of sterile winter gleamed.*

*His neck will shake off the white torment space  
Inflicts upon the bird for his denial,  
But not this horror, plumage trapped in ice.*

*Phantom by his brilliance captive to this place,  
Immobile, he assumes disdain's cold dream  
Which, in his useless exile, robes the Swan.*

- 1 French elementary school textbooks used to begin with this phrase.
  - 2 Champion cyclist.
  - 3 18<sup>th</sup> century bandit.
  - 4 Self-made businessman and politician, whose behavior has sometimes been questionable.
  - 5 Founder of the longest-lasting French monarchic dynasty.
  - 6 Minister of Finance of King Louis XIV.
  - 7 Opposing factions during the French Revolution.
  - 8 The two main cities of Lorraine, in Eastern France.
  - 9 The two most prestigious engineering schools in France.
  - 10 Head of the executive power of a département (such as Bouches du Rhône,) who is appointed by the French government.
  - 11 Mallarmé. *Selected Poems and Prose*. New Directions. 1982. Translated by Patricia Terry & Maurice Schroder.
  - 12 Paul Verlaine. "My Recurrent Dream." *Selected Poems*. Oxford U. P. 1999. Translated by Martin Sorrell.
  - 13 Du Bellay. *The Regrets*. Manchester: Carcanet Press. 1984. Translated by C. H. Sisson.
  - 14 Mallarmé. *Selected Poems and Prose*. New Directions. 1982. Translated by Patricia Terry & Maurice Schroder.
- i Both of those cases involve indirect relationships with the real world, through the mediation of objects that make it possible to attack and protect oneself without having to rely on one's bare hands.
  - ii *Beyond Culture*. Anchor Press/Doubleday. 1977.
  - iii I will revisit this point in appendix 3 below, with an attempt to provide a mathematical model.
  - iv According to Sophie Lévy, curator of the Giverny Art Museum, in *Le Figaro*, April 13, 2004.
  - v Doesn't the very fact of representing France as a hexagon require some degree of abstraction?
  - vi The Middle English word, *enginour*, comes from the Old French word, *engineur*, which comes from the Latin word, *ingenium*, meaning natural ability. Originally, an engineer was the operator of an engine.
  - vii More typically, Hollywood produces remakes, which is a way of Americanizing foreign movies. Americans do not feel comfortable in exotic surroundings. It is as if, in response to having been thrust into the real world too early during childhood, they have developed a rigid attitude toward anything that had not already been made familiar to them through Americanization.
  - viii Upon their arrival in France, Americans keep asking quantitative questions (about prices, distances, dates) in order to restore the measurable reference points now lacking.

- ix March 4-5, 2001. This column was written after the chapter above.
- x Yves Berger writes in *Le Dictionnaire amoureux de l'Amérique* (Plon, 2003) that the word, "genocide," is inappropriate in this case, because the United States never deliberately planned a systematic extermination of the Native Americans. Their demise was caused by diseases brought from Europe more than by aggression on the part of the British or Americans. Let readers be the judges of this.
- xi Methodical description and classification of diseases.
- xii Martine Laval, in a private conversation.
- xiii The joke, "He who has the most toys when he dies, wins" accurately reflects the personal character of this process of accumulation.
- xiv In the same way, French real estate owners overwhelmingly choose a system of joint ownership, while their American counterparts prefer single-family units.
- xv This probably is a British legacy.
- xvi Hite, Shere and Hite, Sherry. *The Hite Report on Male Sexuality*. Bookthrift Co. 1990.
- xvii According to Karl Jung, individuation is "the psychological process through which human beings become 'individuals,' with unique, indivisible personalities, complete humans."
- xviii Cited in *Le Monde*, March 5, 2002.
- xix "Mais pourquoi n'aime-t-on pas les États-Unis?" ("Why don't they like the United States," *Commentary* 96, Winter 2001-02.
- xx Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, cited by Philippe d'Iribarne in an important article, "La légitimité de l'entreprise comme acteur éthique aux États-Unis et en France" ("The Legitimacy of the Company as an Ethical Actor in the United States and in France,") *Revue Française de Gestion*, September / October 2002.
- xxi Troeltsch, Ernst, *Protestantism and Modernity*, cited by Ph. d'Iribarne in the article quoted above.
- xxii Bellah, Robert, et al. *Habits of the Heart*. University of California Press. 1985. Idem.
- xxiii Robert Davies. *Et Dieu créa les Français*. 1996.
- xxiv The primary cause of some difficulties in learning mathematics may be separation anxiety, rather than a lack of ability to deal with abstraction.
- xxv According to Dr. Takeo Doi, *amae* is a condition Japanese men yearn for, a kind of return to the mother, and a condition of ultimate comfort to which one can completely abandon oneself, recalling a stage of development prior to the acquiring of social competence.
- xxvi The practice of American punctuation not only favors periods; it also separates sentences from each other with double spaces, in order to clearly mark the break between them. French favors long clauses joined by commas that postpone the closure of the sentences, as if that separation also were dreaded. Even French (Azerty) keyboards make it less easy to use periods, which require pressing the Shift key...
- xxvii Language clearly reflects this opposition: Americans say, "how far/how close?" whereas the French

- say, "at what distance?" Americans ignore nuances along the continuum of the real world, only dealing with clear-cut choices at its far ends, whereas the French prefer to avoid those choices, following the saying, *in medio stat virtus*.
- xxviii In the business world, this behavior harms the French, who are viewed as amateurish and not trustworthy. This can even cause legal problems when statements they made are taken literally.
- xxix 1942.
- xxx The company executives who take part in my itinerant seminars are, of course, a fortunately increasing exception to this rule.
- xxxi Lawrence Wylie, an American anthropologist who studied a village in the South of France, found it fascinating to see how often children were told, "Stay straight," "Keep your hands on the table," etc. He felt those remarks would have been inconceivable in the United States. He was also struck by statements made during parent-teacher conferences: "Isn't my son lazy?" or "He won't make it anyway; he's too dumb," etc. He wrote some very funny pages in which he expressed his reactions of surprise, of repulsion even, to the French way. Those reactions are as informative on the French as on the Americans. Cited by Michel Berry, *École de Paris du management*.
- xxxii As Alain Finkelkraut said, "the issue is not what kind of world we will leave to our children, but what kind of children we will leave to our world.
- xxxiii On this topic, see the work of the French academic, Jeanne Becquart-Leclercq.
- xxxiv *On Love*. London, England. Chatto & Windus. 1928. Translated by Vyvyan Holland. P. 129.
- xxxv *London, England*. Culture Crossings; Skokie, Illinois. 1995.
- xxxvi Grasset. 1984.
- xxxvii And of French mothers also, of course, when they take on their role as authority figures.
- xxxviii American boys, who have been embraced by the Father at an early age, also resist too strong a homosexual identification, but in a more primitive manner, because this takes place at a pre-œdipal stage.
- xxxix *Jocasta's Children*. London; New York: Routledge. 1989. Translated by George Craig.
- xxxx Opus cited.

## CHAPTER 4

# CRITICISM

The contrast between two children's tales reveals a crucial difference in attitude between the French and the Americans. Monsieur Seguin's goat, in Alphonse Daudet's *Letters from My Windmill*, ends up devoured by the wolf because she chose to eat away the rope that kept her tied to her field and venture into unexplored pastures. Why wasn't she content with her lot, which was not so bad, instead of going to see if the grass was greener elsewhere? For Americans, the counterpart of this tale is *The Little Engine That Could*, which tells the story of a little locomotive that, despite its youth, took it upon itself, on its own to go and free the train loaded with toys that was stuck over the hill, thus bringing happiness to children.

Americans always look first on the sunny side of things; they see the glass half-full; they see what they can do if they really want something—a theme that is hammered all through their education. Where there's a will, there's a way.

In situations where potentially contradictory interests face each other, Americans wonder if both protagonists might possibly end up winners: a win-win situation, or, in its Californian variant, a win-win-win situation—I win, you win, and everyone else (the company, the system, the planet, etc.) also wins. The American tendency to first see the positive is the result of a belief in the abundance of resources. It reflects the territorial expansion of the United States, which was viewed as limitless during the conquest of the West and was followed from 1893 on by an upward expansion ("The sky is the limit") when skyscrapers took over.

### BARGAINING

Americans do not like to bargain; they are prepared to pay the requested price straightaway. They have no qualms about others

making profits, even significant ones. The French insistence on getting discounts, whether in an official or personal capacity, is indicative of underlying cultural traits. In a first analysis, it shows an obvious focussing on a static perspective, "what is gained by one is lost by another," as opposed to the pursuit of what is considered a creative solution within a dynamic perspective, "Let's work together to enlarge the size of the pie." I have had many opportunities to notice the peculiar French capacity to demonstrate against all logic (for instance against the recorded fact that other cultures have found creative solutions) that, in a given situation, the pie is what it is and there is nothing that can be done about it. Americans, on the other hand, consider it as self-evident that a creative solution exists and is worth seeking. But there is more to this.

First, getting a discount is regarded as a "game." What is at stake in it then, since the addition of this playful dimension clearly shows that the purpose sought is not only the financial value of the discount? Besides the enjoyment of the hunt, the word "game" also involves the pursuit of a hierarchical relationship: what is at stake is not only money but also power, which can be expressed as, "I got what I wanted," but also as, "I fooled him." More than the thing itself, what must be "gotten" is the other person.

But what is involved is also the degree of closeness in the relationship. Deal-making is experienced as a kind of tango, *mano a mano*. It provides an opportunity to seduce, intimidate, do or request what appears as a favor, cajole, and even give the illusion of merging with one another, all the while preserving an acute awareness of the distinction between the self and the other. In this dance, the borders between individuals become blurred; this is precisely why Americans<sup>i</sup> are ill at ease with bargaining; in addition, their eyes are focused on the ball and they are not interested in dancing. Besides, for them deal-making is guided by a win-win ethic, largely based on the concept of fairness—a word that has no exact counterpart in French—and respect for others; on the other hand, until the relatively recent publication of, *Getting to Yes*,<sup>ii</sup> by the Harvard negotiation team, the main purpose of French courses in deal-making was to

teach how to con the other party in the deal; this attitude, which originates in ancient rural traditions, is still very prevalent in the French business world, at least to some extent.

### THE CRITICAL FRENCH CULTURE

Henri Rochefort wrote in *La Lanterne*, "France has thirty six million subjects, subjects of discontent excluded." The French first notice the negative aspects of any situation. What is wrong with what others said or wrote? How are they trying to con me? What do they want from me? What am I going to lose? In this context, the American tendency to emphasize the positive is regarded by the French as ridiculously naive. The purpose of this attitude of rejection is of course to preserve negativism.

The French perceive strangers primarily as threats. By extension, to some degree they perceive others as strangers. Americans, on the contrary, regard strangers as opportunities for mutual enrichment. The notorious French reluctance to smile in public in the presence of strangers is consistent with this attitude. It is as if smiling had a cost. The French, or at least the Parisians, justify their typical sullenness with statements such as, "I don't know him," or, "I'm not paid to do that." When meeting their neighbors in the staircase of their building, they are more likely to say, "Excuse me" than, "Hello." This is a way of avoiding a familiarity that could become intrusive, since, if a relation were to develop, backing away would be implicitly regarded as impermissible. Americans, on the other hand, can say that they would rather be alone without making the other person feel forever rejected.

In French schools, the top grade is never given. This suggests a remnant of belief in Original Sin, according to which no one is entitled to receive the top grade; it also manifests the power of the teachers: for them, recognizing perfection in a student would amount to releasing that student from their hold<sup>iii</sup>. Anyway, since teachers believe that they and their students cannot both be right at the same time, there is no way students could be right... The range of grades assigned is broader in France than in the United States, where they

mostly range from A to D. Beyond the higher degree of discrimination allowed by the 0-20 range, it is noteworthy that more grades are available to the French to indicate degrees of failure, as well as broader opportunities for arbitrary grading—which reinforces the hierarchical aspect of the relationship. Teachers and school administrators, often actively supported by school psychologists, tend to designate students as bad elements confronting an institution that is necessarily good and fair, that cannot be wrong—whereas in fact it does not know how to admit being wrong. This pressure exerted on students causes a selection between those who toe the line and those—a minority—who are capable of preserving their ability to create and dissent.

At the cost of a tremendous waste, the French school system rests entirely upon the idea of failure, through a sequence of exclusory steps along the painful ascent of a pyramid, the highest points of which are the *École Normale Supérieure*, *École Polytechnique*, *HEC*, or *École Nationale d'Administration*. A “brilliant”—they all are—Inspecteur des Finances recently confessed to me that he felt some bitterness at not having been valedictorian. This is a sick and noxious system, one in which people situate themselves mostly based on their failures.

I know a Frenchman who went to school in the United States and then went on to medical school in France. He told me that everyone there emphasized how difficult medical school was, how unlikely he was to succeed, why things would not work out, how incapable he was, and so on. He failed two years in a row, as predicted. Since he still wanted to be a doctor, he went back to the United States (to Harvard, no less). There, he found a supportive environment, interested in analyzing his strong and weak points and helping him succeed. Doing so also involved a very large amount of work and no complacency, but was in a context in which the fact that he would succeed was taken for granted, the entire energy of the school being dedicated to success. He is now an oncologist in a highly renowned medical center and he has stayed in the United States.

I have attended many classes, on every level, in both countries. In the United States, primary school teachers organize “show-and-tell”

sessions on a regular basis. Children present a topic of their own choosing in front of their schoolmates. It may be their teddy bear, a trip they took last weekend, a movie, etc. Teachers only make positive comments and give almost no criticism. This has of course a very significant impact in shaping the personalities of American children, who feel appreciated and gain self-esteem and confidence. But they will be relatively unprepared to face a systematically critical attitude, for instance when traveling to France, or if they are married to someone who comes from a different culture. Showing envy for his American counterparts, Charles Aznavour recently made some remarks<sup>v</sup> to the effect that stage fright is a specifically French phenomenon, not an American one anyway: in the United States, when performers appear on stage, they are presumed innocent until proven guilty, whereas on a French stage, they know their audience is watching for a mishap and will be unforgiving should one happen.

The sincere desire of Americans to take what others say into account and to seek win-win agreements lays the ground for the practice of lobbying. This is a surprising practice for the French, who tend as a matter of principle to do the opposite of what is requested of them, according to the win-lose principle. Americans have been trained all through their school years to speak in public, to clearly state what they want, and to respect the feelings of their fellow citizens. This benevolence can of course be exploited by unscrupulous politicians—which not all politicians are, far from it, especially at the local level. I have had many opportunities to see that whenever a special interest group expresses a request, implementation of that request is given serious consideration. This is as true of homeowners associations as of Mothers against Drunk Driving, or tobacco corporations—even though the latter are being sued by several States.

#### EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE

As the corny pun by Jacques Lacan’s disciples, “la co-naissance,” suggests<sup>9</sup>, learning is for the French an essentially maternal process; uncompleted weaning creates a continuum between the context and

object of cognitive acquisition. As a consequence, this acquisition is not only cognitive but also, to a significant degree, emotionally charged. Cartesianism, Rationalism and other “isms” attempt to conceal this fact. However, children’s attraction to a particular subject, and sometimes to their professional vocation, is often due more to their having had enthusiastic and understanding teachers than to the subject’s intrinsic interest. I have fond memories of the late Monsieur Poirier, my high school French teacher; of Maître Camil Seneca, from the Caïssa chess club; and especially of Claude Hagège, now a professor at the Collège de France<sup>b</sup>, who, when I was a student in *Math Sup* and *Math Spéc*, was a young linguist and knew how to communicate some of his curiosity and enthusiasm to the sixteen-year-old adolescent that I was. At the time I was reading authors such as Erwin Goffman and March & Simon, wondering how it was possible to see so clearly through social appearances; yet the seed had been sown; it took forty years for the fruit to grow.

But many French teachers do not enjoy what they teach and would rather not be teaching; yet, only the children are honest enough to say that (and they say it in a more and more violent manner). Some teachers do not like, or no longer like, children. They thus make the weaker students feel guilty, as well as the students who do not tone down their energy in order to adjust to the school system, even though other factors should be taken into account—which is prohibited, since institutions are supposed to be always right. Teachers—good and bad—find themselves isolated, and the monolithic and corporatist school system endures, unable to implement the necessary reforms, while the Minister of Education is routinely there to serve as a scapegoat.

As part of a Learning Expedition traveling seminar I was conducting on competency-based HR management, I took a group of French executives and union leaders on a tour of an American school. They were astonished to see that some parents were staying in the classroom to help the teacher after the class had started. They asked me with obvious concern if this was a special occasion. In fact, American parents, as well as children, feel at home in the school. American

teachers are not territorial in the way that is so typical of French teachers in “their” classroom. The operation of Madame Dupont’s classroom matches that of Professor Durant’s service in the hospital, or of Monsieur Duval’s executive office in the corporation. On the contrary, American students have rights akin to those of adults, which are posted as part of explicit charters that actually are implemented in those (rare) cases when a breach occurs. In this manner, what American schools provide above all is an education in civics. It is not restricted to specific courses on this topic, which would only make it easier to ignore civics outside of those courses, but through the consistent and deliberate application of the rights of every person, students included.

#### SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND REAL ESTATE

American schools do suffer from significant problems. But their main causes are external and lie in particular in an odd interdependence between school district administration and real estate. Americans, almost three quarters of whom own their home, most often a house, often change residence. They sell their home every seven years on average—less than three years in Silicon Valley, but rarely in Alaska or Idaho (“The Potato State”), and do not feel attached to the family home. Even the furniture is often sold as part of garage sales. Since interest on mortgages is entirely tax-deductible, and most real estate loans are paid over thirty years, buying is a better deal than renting. This also plays a part in ensuring political stability. If a family has put a 20% down payment on a \$100,000 home and borrowed the rest, and if the value of the home has appreciated by 10% at resale time, that initial investment of \$20,000 has now earned them a \$10,000 profit, amounting to 50% of the down payment. Conversely, if the value of the home has depreciated by 10%, that investment of \$20,000 is now only worth 100,000, amounting to a 50% loss. Since American families typically have a significant amount of debt, and since their largest asset is their home, it is easy to understand why they would be very sensitive to differences in real estate prices.

Prospective buyers of a home are provided by real estate agents with brochures about the neighborhood that include a record, covering several years, of standardized test results for the local schools. If test results go down, the neighborhood becomes less attractive, and real estate prices also go down. The majority of school board members (school districts usually include five to twenty schools) are parents, who happen to be owners of local real estate. As soon as they notice that test results are going down, they discharge the school district superintendent; his or her successor hires new principals, who in turn crack down on teachers (but cannot let them go, because they usually belong to unions). This happens more in privileged than underprivileged neighborhoods, since privileged parents are more watchful. Over decades, a split develops within the school system between a small number of very good public schools and a majority that are mediocre—or worse. This phenomenon is compounded by a decrease in teachers' compensation, since society as a whole has chosen to provide a better compensation to workers in other areas, such as Hollywood, the law, or Wall Street. The result is not a pretty picture.

#### DON'T DO THIS, DON'T DO THAT...

In France, children are seen by adults as being “just” children. From the start, adults consider that children are not what they should be and must be given shape. Children gradually internalize the endless criticism to which they are subjected, which ends up undermining their self-confidence and spontaneity. For young children, this always involves a period of confusion, which is rarely accurately diagnosed—this is one of those things that cannot be noticed from within a culture. In particular, since French physicians are themselves engaged in hierarchical relationships but are no more aware of it than their patients are, they do not suspect how deadly the constant pounding suffered by the ego of children is.

Because of the constant criticism to which French children are subjected at home and at school, the core of their personalities, their self, is constructed of doubt and could be described as relatively porous.

This leads children to protect themselves against external aggression by building a behavioral, relational, and bodily armor, which hardens their “skin.” They keep a distance from others in order to protect themselves, unless their self merges with a group or another person. They yearn for this merging, and yet they are afraid of it because the others are not necessarily prepared at the same time to share and accept vulnerability, and a change of attitude on their own part, which could happen at any moment, would reopen painful wounds. This merging, so aptly described by Montaigne in the case of his friendship with La Boétie, can be represented as the interpenetration of two cores. Americans, endowed with a strong self, do not need a thick social armor; their interactions with others are easy, but do not reach the core. They are viewed as “superficial” by the French.

Figure 3 is a very schematic diagram of this difference between French and Americans.

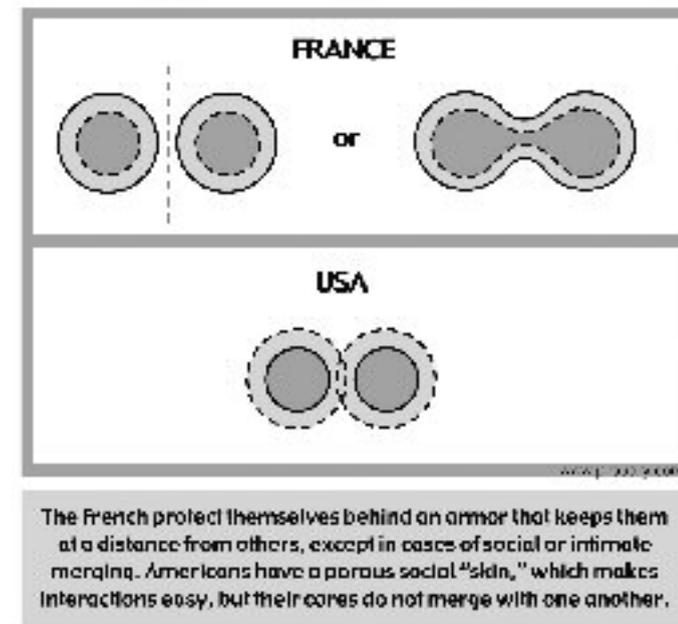


Figure 3. Personal core (self) and social armor

Because the French are criticized at school when they do not know something but are not praised when they learn it, they understand from an early age that they should never admit that they do not know something: "Of course, I already know that." "That's nothing new." It is odd that a culture that is so reluctant to change would reject something because it is not new. The French are forced to learn things of no direct concern to themselves, over a wildly extended school day, in classrooms where they are expected to remain without moving for eight or nine hours in a row—which results in an unruly letting off of steam in the schoolyard; they are relegated to vocational schools if they do not show a capacity for abstraction compatible with the absurd preeminence assigned in France to mathematics; they are conditioned to value intellectual knowledge alone, to believe they already know everything and to undervalue practical abilities and know-how.

Always on the verge of a mistake, which would be mercilessly pointed out by adults who have been damaged by the same system, children learn never to confess. As Talleyrand declared after the assassination of the Duc d'Enghien, "It is worse than a crime, it is a mistake!" You are responsible, but not guilty<sup>#</sup>. The lack of personal accountability is part of the French system. Failure to abide by the law makes it possible to pass the buck to others. Where else but in France could the National Assembly consider granting amnesty to itself?

Napoleon was not the only one who understood that the best defense is a good offense. The chronic dissent and systematic disagreement that are so typical of the French, as opposed to other peoples, are a way of preempting the aggression that will inevitably come from others if you do not shoot first. Whereas Americans react to aggression by giving explanations or excuses, or pulling back, which leaves them quite vulnerable when under attack from the French, the latter react to aggression by counter-aggression. It is thus to the advantage of the French to launch preemptive attacks—preferably at the level of general principles, which has the advantage of allowing the attackers to remain as far as possible from the facts—and then to quickly raise the level of hostility of the argument. Thus, they very

soon resort to verbal abuse, directly targeting their opponents as persons rather than focusing on their actions. Dispassionate discussions of concrete problem are difficult to hold after four-letter words have been hurled at you. Verbal abuse is consistent with the French way of personalizing and essentializing issues. It makes it possible to avoid discussing actual situations. Dominating others matters more than resolving problems<sup>vi</sup>. Since everyone is exposed to reification by abuse on the part of others, armor is an absolute requirement.

It is very difficult for the French, especially for Frenchmen, to sincerely apologize—to show genuine contrition, as opposed to merely providing polite excuses. False excuses in the French mode are not understandable by Americans. Thus, when a French husband tells his American wife, "I am sorry, but..." she replies, "You are not sorry at all, so why do you say that you are?" The French phrase, "I am sorry," which indicates emphasis rather than actual sorrow, is understood literally, in the explicit American way. Americans learn as early as grade school that a sincere apology ensures immediate forgiveness, after which what was done can be left behind. Depending on the thickness of their armor, the French are moved or annoyed by the ease with which Americans, including American men, provide genuine apologies.

Armor can even be used in situations where no threat is apparent. Thus, the French word "*merci*" ("thanks") has a similar symbolic origin as the Italian word "*grazie*" or the Japanese word "*arigato*;" by using one of those three hyperbolic words, one requests "*grâce*" ("mercy") for being unworthy of the gift one received. The purpose of, "*Il n'y a pas de quoi*" ("thanks are undeserved"), as a reply to "*merci*," is to avoid remaining in moral debt<sup>vii</sup>. As a response to "*Thank you*," it is unlike the English phrase, "*You're welcome*," which complements the thanks offered, instead of denying it. When an American child gives some good news to another, the latter replies, "*Good for you*." This phrase has no French counterpart; its translation, "*Tant mieux pour toi*," would always imply opposite innuendos, which would be deciphered as such, since statements are rarely taken at face value.

### ESSENTIALISM

French criticism is essentialist. What is criticized is a person rather than an action. This provides a kind of release, especially for those in positions of authority (such as parents, teachers, and leaders of any kind). It allows them to take revenge upon the weak for criticism suffered when they themselves were still in a position of weakness. To make sure criticism cannot be appealed, what better way than to criticize persons rather than their actions? Nothing those persons will do from now on can change the fact, "They are no good." This system is a very stable one, since those who have suffered criticism (that is, anybody when young) are hurt and eager to avenge themselves, and since they have been exposed by those who dominated them to an apparently acceptable mode of domination. This explains to some extent why certain leaders, which can be found at any level, are so toxic to those around them. One last noteworthy point: in essentialist cultures, it is natural to be racist. The very fact that you have a particular nature or background (be it race, gender, school, or age) exposes you to being judged as good or bad, and nothing you can do will change it.

### THE OTHER SHORE

Systematically negative and critical attitudes result from a belief in scarcity, which is often present in old countries that have suffered raids, food shortages and starvation, and where a defensive rural mentality has developed over a long period. A French nursery rhyme says, "The neighbor has bread, but it's not for us."

Beyond this historical and environmental explanation, it may be that, at a more personal level, infants' anaclitic depression is experienced in opposite ways in American and French cultures, resulting in unflinching optimism in the former and chronic pessimism in the latter. This depressive stage, related to the loss of the object of love, takes place during the so-called mirror stage, when infants realize that they are distinct from their mothers and emerge from the completeness of the symbiotic state. My hypothesis, which will need to be validated,

is that the behavior of American mothers, who are highly individuated, reinforces the infants' separate identities by letting them reach the other shore on their own, whereas that of French mothers preserves the symbiotic state. Thus, American children later do everything possible to prevent a return of the depression that was caused by the transition from the first to the second stage. On the contrary, French children, who have been kept in the delusion of symbiosis and of their omnipotence, and who have been prevented from fully experiencing the painful separation from which identity originates, later experience their confrontation with the actual limits of their identity in a more painful way. The latter prefer to return to their mothers' lap and to non-individuation, which their mothers will be all too happy to provide. This crucial princeps incident combines with the feeding of infants<sup>viii</sup>, weaning, toilet-training, and the later resolution of the Oedipal conflict in shaping to some extent the national character (allowing, of course, for significant individual and generational variations that do not in of themselves invalidate my thesis).

The depressive attitude of the French later constitutes in itself a kind of safeguard against melancholy, in the clinical sense the word has in psychiatric terminology, namely major endogenous depression, a particularly intense moral suffering accompanied by excessive feelings of guilt. According to Freud, the only difference between melancholy and mourning is that the former also involves a self-esteem disorder; those affected turn upon themselves accusations that are in fact meant for the lost object of love (originally, the mother) in a kind of archaic narcissistic regression<sup>ix</sup>.

### HAPPY ENDINGS

The quasi-inability of Americans to lose in competitions, which involves much more than mere self-confidence, as well as the absolute requirement of happy endings in American movies, and the fundamental hypochondria of the French, suggest that those highly typical attitudes are deeply anchored in the psyche.

When Americans lose a competition, they very quickly leave it

behind and engage in the next—"There is always another game," and "Tomorrow is another day"—redefining defeat as an opportunity for improvement, since depressive attitudes are not allowed. In the case of a collective defeat, whoever has been designated as accountable (whether an athletic coach or the C.E.O. of a company) is generally dismissed and replaced in short order; this ritual sacrifice makes it easier to overcome failure at a symbolic level—as well as at a real-world level—by installing a better leader, or at least one better able to make radical decisions reversing the mistakes that were made and to mobilize the people's energy because he or she has no ties to the past. Americans are always prepared to trust their leader, as the Iraq War has shown.

One of the strong points of the United States is that every failure is an opportunity to increase the general cultural orientation toward the future, in which Americans invest much more than in the past. Conversely, the cultural attitude of the French when facing defeat reinforces the general orientation toward the past by lending weight to the idea that victory is unachievable anyway ("It's always the same thing," or "It was lost from the get-go"), and hitting on the self-doubting core of the French, which has been shaped by endless criticism. Often, pretexts are mentioned ("We were not given what we needed;" "it's all because of the referee;" "the software was defective;" "the weather wasn't right;" "the equipment wasn't up to par;" "the regulations were unfair," etc.), making it possible to escape official accountability for the defeat. Accusing each other and projecting failure onto others cause teams to split into factions that find fertile ground in the naturally tribal culture of the French.

## EQUALITY

The French obsession with Equality is one of the elements of a losing dynamic because it causes energy to be invested in limiting the success of others instead of using it toward one's own. A simple mathematical demonstration, using Game Theory, shows this to be a losing strategy over the long term. At a psychological level, paying more attention to

others with a view toward limiting their successes, rather than to oneself with a view toward succeeding, is evidence of the porous character of the borders between individuals and of a confusion between different identities, that is to say, of a lack of individuation.

Americans are able to invest more in their own success because they have a clearer idea of their own identity, as distinct from (although not primarily antagonistic to) those of others. Since they waste little energy in trying to counter the Other (except in situations of direct opposition), they can establish alliances with others, increasing the chances of collective and individual success. The French, however, by seeking protection within groups and expressing their wishes as collective demands, find reassurance in placing themselves within an oppositional logic; this can bring short-term gains through the mediation of the groups they belong to but is not the most successful strategy, either for the individual or for the country as a whole. The French tribal antagonism between Left and Right, which is a remnant from an earlier age, prevents the gathering of energies toward solving the real problems France faces, whereas Democrats and Republicans, who are more focused on the tasks at hand, are often better able to place the interest of the country above partisan antagonisms. The same could be said of many other countries, which increases the relative disadvantage of the French, who preserve their fundamental resistance to change.

## "NO ONE WINS WITHOUT ANOTHER LOSING"

Laughter in the morning means tears in the evening. Grasshopper or ant. Cheese or dessert. The belief in scarcity expressed by such sayings is an arbitrary one, just as much as the opposite belief in abundant supply, which is typical of Americans. In real life, there is abundance as well as scarcity within specific situations. What is arbitrary is the systematic expectation of abundance or scarcity.

Belief in scarcity is expressed by such syllogisms as, "There won't be enough for everybody; therefore, some of us will be losers; therefore, if I make others lose, I will gain from it." The French assume

that what one owns has been taken away from others. Ownership must therefore be challenged or denied. The French and the Americans have different attitudes toward want. Americans stand on the side of envy, the French on the side of jealousy<sup>x</sup>.

The French view Americans' smiles as stereotypical, or "commercial," which is even worse. The latter word is significant in its implication: "They're smiling; therefore they have something to sell me; therefore, they have something to gain, and I have something to lose."

The ethnologist Raymonde Carroll<sup>xi</sup> noticed that in their homes the French protect themselves from the gaze of others by using curtains, with which most American houses are not equipped. Americans count on the fact that passers-by will abide by the norm according to which one shouldn't look inside other people's homes; in addition, if they are seen by others, they do not feel that something has been taken away from them. The mayor of a village in Northern Morvan, in the Massif Central region of France, once showed me an old house I was interested in, located on a hillside along a pretty valley; I noticed it had no windows on the river. I told him I would have some made. He scolded me and replied, with an affectation emphasized by his stoutness, ruddy face and local accent, "Young man," (I was forty-five at the time), "let me tell you something: once a window has been made, it never gets unmade." True enough: following 14th century thinking, when you see what happens in your neighbor's house, he can no longer protect himself (I had not yet discovered that, in this case, he happened to be the neighbor).

One aspect of this attitude is a distrust of profit, which tends to be associated with "profiteers," and of private enterprise, which, since it enriches some, is viewed as necessarily impoverishing all others, as opposed to the public sector, which is viewed as the only defender of the collective good. It is hilarious to see how distraught French tourists visiting the United States are when they discover they must pay a dollar in order to get only seventy cents-worth of stamps from (privately owned, no less!) vending machines. Their conception of the State makes them regard as anathema the idea that those damned machines could be a source of profit for third parties at their own expense, as if

the machines were no different from Coke or Pepsi vending machines, "It's not about those thirty cents; it's a matter of principle!"

In 2002, I attended one of the sessions of the so-called *Sentier* case at the Paris Court. It was amusing to see how prosecutors and court were alternating between blaming the defendants for having made too much money and for having made too little, thus getting banks in trouble. The same is true of the sharing of information: there is more to lose by letting others obtain information about you than there is to gain by obtaining similar information about others using the same process. This is nowhere close to a "ouine-ouine" (win-win) situation, as Claire Brétecher, author of *Les Frustrés*<sup>e</sup>, wrote.

To sum up, Americans believe in a "both" principle, whereas the French believe in "either/or," which often turns into "neither/nor." Those two cultures manifest symmetrically opposed positions. Americans are concerned with maximizing their gains, whereas the French are with minimizing their losses.

## STATICS AND DYNAMICS

Americans think in terms of dynamics, the French in terms of statics. For Americans, who from an early age have been thrown into the real world by weaning, progress exists because you are part of it; it is not an alien reality that is separate from you and unreachable. For the French, who have been kept within the mother's realm, progress and crises are external things, which exist no matter what they themselves do. In the first case, what matters is producing, working at expanding the size of the pie. In the second, sharing already-existing wealth is enough, since the size of the pie is unchangeable—regardless of the levies that are taken from it—or shrinking, following a depressive dynamic.

Once thrown, one might say expelled, into the real world, Americans will not be stopped. From then on, they are part of an endless and irreversible dynamic (of which work is a major part) that only death will stop, as if they were riding a bicycle: balance is only ensured by movement, and stopping would amount to falling. To say

that when engaging in an action they underestimate the risks involved in it has no meaning outside of an external, static point of view. This is precisely the point of view of the French: since they have generally never detached themselves from the mother, they have only intermittently engaged in motion; this is why, before acting, they ponder at length over every action, in a hesitation similar to that of a swimmer who would be afraid to dive and would mentally dwell on what could happen once he is in the water.

Because of this, and therefore for defensive purposes, the French develop a propensity for abstraction, an ability to form mental representations of actions ahead of time, in a word, to theorize. Americans, on the other hand, develop an ability to learn from their actions, especially from their failures, so as to do better next time—since there is always a next time—whereas for the French a single event (or its anticipation) is enough to develop a theory based on it, and that theory will from then on be used as an excuse to avoid acting. It is therefore not surprising that the French favor passive sentence constructions, whereas Americans prefer active verbs and the present indicative tense, or the indicative in general, which accounts for the real world; they have a hard time grasping the subjunctive, an unreal verb mood so frequently used in French, which expresses doubt, a typically French gray zone.

Retirement has an entirely different meaning in the United States and in France. American law prohibits age-based discrimination, making it possible for workers to work as long as they are able to. The French are often reluctant to work during their working years, as if under duress, until they have reached the haven of retirement they have been yearning for. As a humorist wrote in a comic<sup>xii</sup>, “Fun’s over,” the schoolteacher says on the first day of nursery school, the mother on the first day of junior high school, the teacher on the day of the senior year’s final examination, the sergeant in the Army, the boss on the first day at work, the father on wedding day... and that emblematic phrase, “Fun’s over,” is found one last time on the character’s tombstone.

## TOILET-TRAINING

Toilet-training procedures are significantly different in the United States and in France. When attempting a cross-cultural psychoanalysis, as I am, this cannot be ignored. However, such an attempt involves specific difficulties when dealing with an implicit culture such as the French, in which such things are precisely supposed to remain unstated. The mechanisms that prohibit discourse on this topic are varied (ranging from politeness and embarrassment to scatological references), and the absence of an existing literature on the topic leads me to present my ideas as hypotheses rather than certainties.

French mothers tend to wean their children reluctantly, as late as possible, and always in an incomplete manner. In the same way as Japanese mothers, but to a lesser degree, they resort to an induction of guilt in order to keep their children within their own realm. They usually soon move on to toilet-training them, and the process is completed by age two, sometimes even by one. This is earlier than what is customary in many other countries, particularly in the United States, where children are toilet-trained around age three. For the children, this forced march overlaps the weaning process with a more powerful *gestalt* that is substituted for it. Because this phenomenon affects every child in a similar manner, it contributes to the development of a national character—in spite of significant individual, generational, ethnic, and regional variations.

Instead of letting children control their own bowel movements when they are ready for it, as American mothers do, or of establishing such a degree of symbiosis that the mothers can anticipate their children’s bowel movements, so as to avoid any waiting and discomfort on the part of the children, as Japanese mothers do, French mothers project onto their children the anxieties they were themselves subjected to when they were the same age and demand the gift of bowel movements before their children are ready for it. The children’s need for independence, frustrated by the imposition of this compulsory gift, is then expressed through a sadistic retention, which is experienced by both parties as a refusal of the symbolic gift, generating a circular process of frustration between mother and

child. The increasing distancing that results from this process amounts to a kind of weaning, but on an anal mode instead of the appropriate oral mode.

In my opinion, this is the primordial source of the belief in scarcity: since each party assumes—at a pre-verbal level in the case of the child, of course—that only one of the two can be satisfied at any given time, it becomes necessary to frustrate the other in order to gain satisfaction. Children can only be the losers in this game, since they are unable to escalate the process to the extent that the parents can. The first imprinting of parental violence is then performed, as well as the first refusal of rules<sup>xiii</sup>, law, order, and cleanliness. (It is not by coincidence that France is the only developed country where dogs' excrements are tolerated on sidewalks, in a grumpy but nevertheless real consensus). Obsessive compulsions of a perfectionist type arise at this point, as well as the earliest manifestations of hierarchical power, along with a lasting refusal to accept the dominated position in power relationships. This is also a source of the French lack of empathy, their inability to put themselves in the position of others in order to take their feelings into account. It is one of the bases of the French mode of violence (whereas the American mode of violence is much more explicit, and is situated within a context of juxtaposition with others, in a dynamic of male competition).

It is noteworthy that French Swiss mothers also toilet-train their children very early, perhaps the earliest in the world, but their situation is different because Swiss children are weaned very early, and therefore the overlap I mentioned above does not take place. French Swiss children already have a strong enough concept of the self to not be somehow still stuck to their mother by the time she presents them with the potty, and they experience toilet-training in a situation in which otherness has already been established. This results in a well-known propensity for cleanliness, including in the city, as well as a stronger than usual sublimation of bowel movements into money, which, as everyone knows, has no smell.

American mothers are determined to wean their children early<sup>xiv</sup>, too early in fact, generating in the latter a lasting anxiety that they

may not be loved. They are not as bonded to their children as French mothers are, and they have more distance from them. This is why they do not demand that self-control develop as early and why they allow toddlers to feel free to experiment, play, and have fun. The phrase, "*faire chier*,"<sup>d</sup> has no literal equivalent in English—on the other hand, American slang significantly includes the phrase, "it sucks," along with such variants as "sucker," which are obvious allusions to weaning. Ironically, in a society entirely focused on adult performance, the reason why young Americans accept the rules as they are presented to them, as an exchange, a give-and-take, rather than as an imposition, is that American mothers do not force their toddlers to perform.

This is an early precursor of the win-win principle, an intolerable one for the French because it returns them to the primordial frustration of the sadistic retention described above. The naivety that others attribute to Americans relates back to this primordial state, before toilet-training was imposed along with the frustration that came with it. In a way, what the French say to the Americans is, "Go ahead, keep your win-win delusion. You'll find out the truth when you've grown up—grown up like us, that is, us, who know there's always a loser." The French blame the Americans for not giving up their illusions.

#### WHO MAKES THE DECISIONS?

The locus of control is different in French and American cultures. This has important implications for the organization of society as a whole, particularly influencing who gets to make the decisions in a given situation. French mothers rule over their children and make decisions for them, forcing them to behave in the particular way that suits the mothers, regardless of the children's wishes. Yet, as we have seen, children do not wish to remain too long within the mother's realm or to be toilet-trained. As a consequence, they rebel, and frustration starts escalating. Conversely, American children are regarded by their mothers as self-contained beings and are allowed to implement their own self-control and enjoy the satisfaction it brings.

Having been toilet-trained in the same manner, their mothers do not experience the satisfaction of their offspring as occurring at their expense, which would amount to a belief in scarcity. This reinforces the win-win mechanism. Children experience the production of bowel movements with satisfaction and without any particular problems in relation to those around them. This production is eventually sublimated as productive work and financial gain. At first, American mothers, or at least WASP mothers, only react with encouragement and praise, before leading their children toward the desired behavior in a gentle yet consistent way. This attitude will also be that of teachers, then of superiors, when they wish to modify a behavior. They begin with praise, even if it is to be followed by direct and hard criticism—but always focused on the actions performed, not on the person who performed them.

Many French readers will interpret the sentence above as evidence of American hypocrisy. This deserves attention. Recognizing that, from within American culture, this use of praise is in no way viewed as manipulative forces us to question why the French view it as such. Could it be a reminder of the way they viewed their parents' attitude as manipulative during toilet-training?

The French take pride in performing their assignments in an uncommitted manner, making sure to show no indication that they were forced to "produce." When they do produce, they do so while leaving secondary evidence, akin to bowel movements, which expresses their resistance and means that they are quite capable of not doing what they were told—so there! Thus, instructions are not always followed; occasional safety violations occur; resumes include spelling mistakes; car tanks are not filled up until the gauge is on empty; dates are missing from signed documents; door bolts are installed backwards; hot water faucets are blue; additional forms are required; people come slightly late to their appointments; tax statements are not entirely accurate; nail polish flakes away a little. Or, conversely, everything is perfectly done, in a kind of obsessive over-compensation that is only the flip side of the same coin.

But, some will say—and one could not really be French without

saying, "but," precisely in a kind of reaction of anal opposition, though not necessarily a misguided one—this is an exaggeration; not all French people are amateurs, and those who are are not so all the time! I heartily endorse this worthy objection, marveling at seeing that such an untidy country would still be able to operate, willingly or unwillingly. I would also mention the logic of honor<sup>15</sup>, which always leads you to do your best, and even more, in a heroic posture, in spite of hierarchical pressure, thus proclaiming that you are a better guarantor of the common good than the authorities (the parents) are, and that you are capable of performing accordingly. This attitude combines the satisfaction provided by the gift (the work performed) with resistance to parental pressure, while making it possible to praise oneself for the heroic action performed. It makes it possible not to be dependent on the boss's praise, which would be experienced as sour milk and as a manipulation reminiscent of toilet-training. When in charge of French people, the best strategy is to challenge them to do impossible things—"impossible is not French," so goes the saying. They will go to extremes to show you they can do those things anyway. After the catastrophic storm of Christmas 1999, EDF, the national utility company, even based an advertising campaign on this theme, recognizing the degree to which evocations of dedication and sacrifice touch something close to the heart of the general public. The problem, of course, has to do with lasting power, or "regularity," to borrow a term from laxative commercials.

#### "MAIS BON"

The French constantly say, "*mais bon*." Now that I have realized this, I can no longer ignore it—this is a negative corollary of the attention paid to cross-cultural issues, and it involves an obvious risk of contamination for the readers, who have now been given fair warning. Semantically close to "*quand même*," ("anyway"), "*mais bon*" indicates a rebellion against adversity, a French form of micro-heroism, "We're not going to let it get us down" (in the French sentence, "we" is concealed as "one"). After making critical statements that lead nowhere, and which they know to be largely contrived, yet

bound to meet with the approval of the addressee, the French get away with this flip-flop, this resourceful trick, which enables them to get back on their feet as if by magic. That one was close! "It almost got us down..., 'mais bon!'"

Everyday phrases, especially understatements, are very telling: "There's nothing to complain about," as if the normal attitude were that there is always something to complain about... An endless string of French phrases give implicit evidence of the highly critical character of French culture and its negative perspective, what Americans call a negative outlook on life: *comme quoi, décidément, comme d'habitude, je n'vous dis pas, c'est pas si mal que ça, tu vas pas encore, on a beau faire, une fois n'est pas coutume, ç'aurait pu être pire, y a rien à redire, c'est toujours pareil, regarde-moi ça, vous m'en direz tant, on est bien peu de chose, qu'est-ce qu'on déguste, d'abord, un tu l'as vaut mieux que deux tu l'auras, n'empêche, il l'a pas volé, tout de même, faut pas s'étonner, toujours ça de pris, on aura beau dire, pas d'jaloux, faut pas désespérer, on peut pas lui en vouloir pour ça, à quoi bon, y a pas d'secret, on n'est pas les plus à plaindre, toute vérité n'est pas bonne à dire, faut reconnaître, ça s'rait trop beau, on s'refait pas, bon courage...*

## PRODUCTION

It is not surprising that attitudes toward employment would be different in American and French cultures. In France, the lack of weaning during the oral stage, followed by forced production ahead of the anal stage, leads to an essentialist attitude in which production is subordinated to belonging. As in Japan, where weaning does not take place at all<sup>xvi</sup>, the expectation of life-long employment is the sublimation of a permanent state of belonging to the mother. The endless demands of French wage-earners, in particular through the interruption of production constituted by strikes, make it possible to express resistance to work while glorifying belonging. Conversely, Americans do not consider that they own their jobs, and they give production at work precedence over belonging. Since they were weaned earlier, they are less faithful to their employers. Since they

were toilet-trained without conflicts, they are not reluctant to produce. American society rewards work as a contribution made to it. This contribution can be analyzed not only as a symbolic gift, but also, for people who are more individuated than the French, as a contractual exchange (of work for money) between two parties (employer and employee) that exist independent of each other. For the French, the lack of weaning is sublimated into a symbiosis in which belonging has obvious benefits, and employees—unconsciously of course—expect to be fed *ad vitam æternam* by their employers, independent of the work performed (or not performed, as in the case of payment for strike periods). We find on one side a culture of belonging and status, on the other a culture of process and obsession with results. To sum things up, in France primacy at work is given to being, in the United States to doing.

## SMALL-SCALE THINKING

Having spent four consecutive months in France, which I had not done in more than fifteen years, in order to conduct some four hundred interviews for this book, I was forced to realize, *horresco referens*, that I was starting to think small-scale. Small-scale thinking: going to a bakery slightly further away because its bread is cheaper; working alone rather than in a team; calculating costs before returns; preferring annuities to profits; judging before listening; complaining instead of acting; limiting profits in order to limit taxes; preferring Poulidor to Anquetil<sup>e</sup>; cutting back on investment in order to limit risks; working less in order to leave less for the state; seeking subsidies before profits; giving more weight to the likely reactions of others than to one's own wishes; saving a cent rather than making a dollar; being afraid of failure, and ending up being afraid of success; preferring seniority-based to merit-based advancement; noticing first what is wrong with an argument, what is not possible in a project, what there is to lose in a partnership.

Small-scale thinking comes with the air you breathe, affects you through osmosis and clings to your skin without your realizing it. It

then takes you into a downward spiral of lack of vision and spirit; pettiness; loss of momentum; defensive attitude; complaints; criticism; and, soon, regrets.

There are notable exceptions: the kings' grand projects (Versailles, the Concorde, the TGV<sup>i</sup>, La Villette<sup>s</sup>, the Pompidou Center h, the Great Library<sup>i</sup>, etc.) Yet, as in the age of Louis XIV, the king spends and the people count their pennies.

Back in California, I am starting to think large-scale once again, to notice first what is possible, and to build things based on it. What a relief! It wasn't my fault; it was the culture's.

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- i Once again, this mostly applies to WASPs. On the subject of negotiation in particular, there are significant variations from one ethnicity to another.
  - ii Fisher, Roger & Ury, William. Houghton Mifflin. 1981.
  - iii "20 is the grade reserved for God; 19, for the teacher; the other grades are for the students." Heard in a private school by an internet reader.
  - iv Unidentified radio interview. July 2003.
  - v The French-American cross-cultural consultant Nathalie Monsaint compares the French to coconuts (hard outside, juicy inside) and Americans to mangos (edible part close to the outside, hard core inside). Personal communication.
  - vi As Edgar Morin explains, France has no culture of debate because it does not sufficiently respect others.
  - vii On the Japanese, see the very convincing chapter titled, "In Debt to the Past and the World," in *The Chrysanthemum and the Saber*. Ruth Benedict. Boston. Houghton Mifflin. 1946.
  - viii Depending on whether infants are fed on demand or at set intervals.
  - ix See Flaubert, Madame Bovary: "Tout lui parut enveloppé par une atmosphère noire qui flottait confusément sur l'extérieur des choses, et le chagrin s'engouffrait dans son âme avec des hurlements doux, comme fait le vent d'hiver dans les châteaux abandonnés."
  - x It is interesting that, contrary to the claim made by standard psychoanalysis, this issue of want applies to both genders in France.
  - xi *Évidences invisibles: Américains et Français au quotidien*. Paris. Le Seuil. 1991.
  - xii Unidentified. Personal memory.
  - xiii It is worth noting that what is rejected is a rule, and, as a consequence, a process, but not the law as such, which on the contrary ends up glorified and even sacrosanct in French culture (as long as it applies to others, of course).
  - xiv At the level of the relationship, since, having been toilet-trained and sent to school later than French children, they stay with their mothers longer.
  - xv d'Iribarne, Philippe. *La Logique de l'honneur: Gestion des entreprises et traditions nationales*. Paris. Seuil. 1989.
  - xvi For the purpose of this book, what concerns us is weaning as a relationship rather than in its literal sense.
  - # Allusion to a broadly publicized statement made by a member of the French government during a well-known criminal case.

## TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

- a "Co-naissance." "*Connaissance*" means knowledge. "*Naissance*" means birth. This pun suggests a spurious etymology of "knowledge" as "birth together." In this text, it should be read as a spike at the way some of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's disciples use language.
- b The most prestigious teaching institution in France.
- c Alternative to university: classes taught in some high schools, preparing college-age students for competitive examinations leading to admission to the most prestigious French engineering schools.
- d Literally, "to make (someone) shit." Equivalent to the phrase, "to be a pain in the ass."
- e Popular yet sophisticated comic.
- f High speed train.
- g Large Parisian park that includes the National Music Conservatory, a Museum of Science and Industry, an Omnimax theater and several performance spaces.
- h Large Parisian building that includes the National Museum of Contemporary Art, a center for music experimentation, a large library and exhibition spaces.
- i The French National Library, located in Paris.

## CHAPTER 5

# LAW AND CONTRACT

American law directly derives from English law, which is mostly based on common law (and, in areas not covered by the latter, on equity law). It thus relies on a very ancient tradition that considers the law as focused on the persons seeking justice rather than on the legal institution. It is a bottom-up law, anchored in the real world because it was built based on precedent on concrete cases that had to be resolved one by one. Although it was first proclaimed by the king and nobility, it is not a noble legal system: its validity derives from its concreteness. Its decisions are explicated, sometimes in great detail, by judges who speak in the first person and sign their rulings (or their dissents from the majority opinion) with their own names, in the same way as parents and teachers explain their decisions to children, even young children, thus making those decisions intelligible and acceptable and reinforcing the rational, predictable, and consistent character of the real world.

French law, which is partly endowed with a sacred character, is top-down. The legal institution plays a role akin to the role France assigned to "Our Holy Mother the Church"—France being of course the Church's elder daughter: no salvation outside it. Thus the clerks have appropriated justice in the same way as the clerics<sup>a</sup> had appropriated religion.<sup>i</sup> In the same way as the king rules by divine right, the French hierarchical system considers that "children have no right to demand that decisions be justified." In the French legal staging, the judge plays the role of an oracle, who does no more than simply reveal to ordinary mortals (those seeking justice) decisions that are indisputable because they preexisted his own deliberations, being already written in the Heavens where The Law abides. The perfect example of this is provided by the *Cour de Cassation*, France's highest court of appeal, which, demonstrating its imperial conciseness, returns rulings consisting of a single sentence, indicating that the

rulings go without saying, in the same way as in mathematics Euler's equation<sup>ii</sup> derives its power from its elegant terseness—both mathematics and law belonging to the realm of immanence<sup>iii</sup>.

The rebellion against the king's arbitrary rule, which was the founding event of the United States of America, also founded the equal right of the citizens under the law. The French heritage of 1789 proclaims that all citizens are equal. Article VI of the *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen*<sup>b</sup> states, "The law is the expression of the common will. [...] All citizens, being equal in its eyes, have equal rights to every dignity, etc." The original motto of the Republic, "Liberty and Equality, or Death," was softened by the addition of "Fraternity:" emphasis was transferred from the struggle against oppression to the protection that is provided by belonging to the group. This brings to mind the contrast between Protestantism and Catholicism: in the former, the relationship with God is an individual one; in the latter, it is a collective one. In the same way, the Constitution of the United States allows for the juxtaposition of the individual freedoms of persons who are primarily viewed as different from each other, whereas the French Republic rules the group (a report by the *Conseil d'État* states that "the isolated individual, universal, identical to others, is the only constituent of the people that is recognized under French law<sup>iv</sup>"). Accountability is individual in the United States, collective in France—with the consequence that, since everyone is accountable, nobody is. This infantilizing lack of differentiation forms the base of an unstated law of avoidance, since the law is in fact meant to allow people to disclaim accountability for their actions, despite solemn proclamations to the contrary, in particular on the part of the legal profession.

For the Americans, the law is the foundation of the contract. Devoid of a spirit of rebellion, they consider themselves committed by the obligation decreed by the law, which also applies to the legal system itself. For the French, relationships of subjection are intolerable because of ancient wounds that the Revolution was not able to heal. As a result, they are indomitably opposed to the enforcement of the law against them or the group to which they belong. In addition,

in the United States, the law is meant to be enforced, something that is generally unexpected by the French. In France, the law is no more than a posturing that only applies to others. It can be said that its importance lies above all in its symbolic value.

#### THE ENFORCEABILITY OF THE LAW

In the United States, laws are generally enacted following extensive consultations meant to ensure that they will be enforceable. Moreover, any citizen can request that his or her elected representatives sponsor or modify a law, and that request has a real chance of being honored. Every member of Congress is provided with a team of assistants whose role is to report the wishes of the voters in his or her district. Voters do not hesitate to write, call, or e-mail to express their wishes on any topic. Since terms of office are very short (two years in the case of Representatives), the first goal of every politician upon taking office is to be reelected. On average, over 90% of incumbents are reelected. Voters' opinions must thus be taken very seriously. This has an undesirable consequence: members of Congress tend to give priority to short-term decisions, to the detriment of more important long-term goals, since decisions aiming at the latter would be unpopular. In a way, the system suffers from an excess of democracy.

In France, no tradition requires an *a priori* validation of the acceptability or enforceability of a law. This is due in particular to the fact that prior consultations would generate such a level of resistance that the forced enactment of a law, decorated with the name of its author and draped in the dignity and glory of the State apparatus, is deemed preferable. It must be said that articles LVI through LVIII of the Constitution of 1793 had a provision that every bill was to have been the subject of a prior report that was to be transmitted to every local government. Yet, in the storms of the *Convention*, this provision was never enforced. Later, after a law has been publicly enacted, the real world comes into play: the decrees implementing the law are trimmed and delayed; insufficient funding hampers its implementation; public information is wanting; law enforcement on the part of the police,

monitoring services, or the legal system is inadequate; the law faces overt or covert resistance on the part of those who are “subjected” to it and wish not to be. However, as evidence of a significant change, it is worth mentioning the recent introduction of the possibility of first testing the enactment of a law on a regional basis, within a new context in which the need for decentralization is taken into consideration.

According to the OECD, France has the highest level of administrative regulation of twenty developed countries. The United States places 16th, ahead of Denmark, Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom.<sup>5</sup> There are four times as many laws in France as in the United States. As Montesquieu elegantly wrote, “Useless laws weaken necessary ones.” An excessive number of laws kills the law, making its complete enforcement impossible; in addition, each law must itself be excessive in order to account in advance for the avoidance and cheating that will hamper its implementation. Flat tax rates are raised because it is known that taxpayers will conceal part of their income; speed limits are also excessive to take into account “natural” overspeeding. *De facto* tolerance of misdemeanor creates a gray zone, establishing a fuzzy border between what is allowed and what is prohibited. Then a new law about highly excessive speeding is enacted, precisely providing that 25 mph above the speed limit constitutes the upper limit that cannot be exceeded—“But then, officer,” some will ask, “isn’t it still OK to drive at 26 mph above the speed limit?”

#### FLEXIBLE LAWS

The fuzziness caused by the non-observance of the law reinforces the French hierarchical system. Such statements as, “OK, I’ll let it go this time, but don’t let me catch you again,” clearly shows drivers that the police have the upper hand, with their arbitrary power to choose whether or not to implement the law. Some highly respectable French CEOs have lately ended up in prison, by decisions of judges who were abruptly returning to a strict enforcement of application of the letter of the law. Wasn’t there some justification for their claim that an increasing tolerance of certain practices had given them the

impression that the gray zone had grown larger than it used to be, in a country where corruption is endemic<sup>vi</sup>? The reform of the arraignment procedures was taken up again only a year after it had been enacted, increasing the maze of already-existing texts and making it more likely that lawyers would be able to use technicalities in order to contest rulings, thus reversing part of the reform and causing a fossilization of the system and a generalized inequity.

The law is supposed to be known by all, but this prescription is unrealistic. Users of the legal system are caught between this pressing obligation and the impossibility to honor it. In addition, *vox clamans in deserto*, they cannot legitimately rebel against this double bind. They find themselves, technically, in a paradoxical situation, in the sense of the theory of family systems<sup>vii</sup>. Every citizen sometimes needs the protection of the law. Yet the law is often fuzzy, unenforceable, and not enforced by the very authorities that are in charge of it, who sometimes exempt themselves from it.

The authorities’ failure to enforce the law cannot be a mere result of the preservation of an arbitrary power, of an accumulation of incompetence, or of insufficient funding. After all, if democratic ideology is to be taken seriously, the budget of the justice system is a reflection of the choices made by the citizens. There is in fact a consensus supporting the non-enforcement of the law, which increases the chances that any guilty party will remain unpunished. Conversely, in the United States juries have every incentive to award considerable amounts to plaintiffs, in the knowledge that some day they may themselves benefit from the same attitude. I remember a dinner in which a Parisian judge complained about having been fined for a parking violation and proclaimed *a volo* that he was going to contact So-and-So the next day in order to have the fine cancelled. And what should we make of the term, “*juge d’application des peines*,”<sup>d</sup> which designates precisely those whose function it is to prevent the strict enforcement of penalties?

Because of an excessive number of legal texts, of a forced ignorance of the law, of a lack of consistency in its enforcement, of a neurotic compulsion—sometimes camouflaged as a game—to escape it, by

resorting to cronyism if necessary, the French in fact live within a lawless world in which law-makers, law enforcement institutions, and citizens conspire to proclaim the preeminence of the law while acting as if the opposite were true, in a noxious and deliberate confusion.

In the United States, the law is meant to be enforced. It is stable; citizens are kept informed of it; illegal behavior is punished. I remember the astonishment of a French colleague upon receiving a fourteen-dollar fine for jaywalking, as well as the scandalized reaction of the cigar-smoking French CEO of a large company when the personnel of our hotel handed us a typed note informing us that it was obliged by law to call the fire department and that we would be charged for the deodorizing of the curtains of the conference room.

The French guffawed when the Enron and Andersen cases exposed the worst side of the American business world. Yet it only took six months for the justice system to sentence the Andersen firm, officially expelling it from the marketplace, and only eight to secure through plea bargaining the cooperation of a key witness and the denunciation of the third-highest executive of Enron, who was indicted less than a year after the case began. In December 2002, American legal authorities also negotiated penalties (precluding further appeal) amounting to 1.4 billion dollars with a dozen leading financial institutions, including Citigroup and Credit Suisse First Boston, for misleading the public regarding investments on the stock exchange; the entire case took less than eighteen months from the moment the investigation began. This was not a unique case. A billion-dollar penalty was also promptly enforced against crooked NASDAQ professionals in 1996. Conversely, it took fourteen years for only four of the ten main defendants in the Société Générale insider trading case to be judged, and only one of them, the billionaire George Soros, was sentenced, to a mere 2.2 million euros fine that did not even preclude further appeal; ten-year-long procrastinations delayed the resolution of the cases of the contaminated blood and of Crédit Lyonnais. In the latter case, repeated mentions were made of arson as a means used to destroy documents. The preparation of the Elf case took eight years, and no political leader

received a criminal sentence for it. The Panama Canal, Stavisky and *piastres* cases could also be mentioned.

In the dualistic American culture, the phrase, "breaking the law," applies to smoking in a non-smoking area just as much as to killing your mother-in-law. In the same way, the word "crime" is used in a much broader sense than in French—shoplifting is a "crime." If you tell Americans that what they are doing is against the law, they will apologize and immediately stop doing it. If you tell it to French people, they will laugh at you and insult you, and probably, using faulty reasoning, "show" you that you are the one who is wrong. This spurious reversal is significant because it shows that the concept of the law has not disappeared from their minds, but that they merely consider it as not applying to them, although they may still invoke it against others. Fictional resorts to the law or the authorities are actually common in France ("You don't have the right;" "I'll file a complaint;" "I'll sue you for libel,") which is laughable when you know how unreliable law enforcement and the legal system are. The insistence of the French on invoking grand principles at the slightest disagreement in everyday life, like their insistence on threatening with a libel lawsuit (or some other legal nonsense) anyone who contradicts them, relates back to an absent Father whose protective role is publicly claimed even though his absence is known to all.

In the United States, young children are taught to respect the law, through learning consequences, which is to say the graduated system of rewards and punishments that follow abiding by or breaking of the rules. The concept of consequences is tied to that of individual choice: children make good or bad choices and are led to believe that they are the ones who determine the positive or negative consequences of their choices. This reinforces at the same time their feelings of being in control, self-confidence and self-image. They are given prior notice of the rules. For instance, principles of behavior are posted in primary grade classrooms. Those principles are set and enforced in an unchangeable way that has been agreed upon by the parents and the school. The reasons why adults consider particular choices to be good or bad are explained, which endows the whole system with a

comforting rationality and develops the children's ability for reasoning. The system of consequences is graduated, so as not to traumatize the children; since it is enforced in a predictable and stable manner, it provides them with a strong feeling of confidence by clearly showing them where the limits are. Everything tends toward the construction of the children's identity based on what they do rather than who they are. Reinforcement through peer pressure is encouraged and is an integral part of the system, taking the form of denunciations as well as direct requests to modify a behavior.

Such a convergence is obviously intolerable for the French. In the French system of education, the authority argument ("Don't argue; do what I tell you to do;" "Because I said so"), which has an essentialist character, deprives children of responsibility, gives them a feeling of powerlessness, and keeps them in a state of dependence. This triggers an interplay in which the children's resistance is constantly confronted with a more powerful and opposite resistance, which amounts to teaching them how to rebel under the guise of teaching them how to obey. Moreover, punishments and rewards are not consistent, either over time or from one individual to another, and are not equal, either for similar types of misbehavior by the children, among siblings, or among fellow students. Consequences are not always known in advance, and the ones that have been stated are not always consistently maintained after their application has begun. What all this develops is the children's ability to evade authority, to take risks by breaking the rules and to use tricks to get out of sticky situations, rather than the obedience and discipline that constitute the official goals. The French fuzziness regarding limits generates anxieties and encourages children to disobey, in the hope of being clearly shown where the border between what is allowed and what is prohibited lies and of regaining the control that adults have taken away from them; this in turn justifies an escalation against them on the part of adults, sometimes going as far as violating the physical and emotional integrity of the children, through violence.

## INSTILLING REBELLION

An anthropological gaze, concerned with what actually takes place rather than with what the prevailing discourse claims to be taking place, soon discovers that everything is as if the goal were to teach rebellion and to pass on a model of domination of children. This model is replicated in the next generation, thus ensuring the preservation of the system in the culture. The law, whose official role is to protect and punish, is presented as all-powerful, although like a weak or absent father it cannot be circumscribed, known, or mastered. It is therefore both feared and struggled against, even though it is presented to lower-status individuals (including children) as an object of veneration, in double-speak typical of schizophrenic systems, which are extremely stable in spite of being dysfunctional. It is therefore not surprising that the children concerned would later contribute, as adults, to the replication of this system and would enforce it at their own level of authority or subjection, both as citizens and as authority figures (within families, schools, hierarchies, institutions), without being aware of it. In this context of great ambivalence, it would be interesting to analyze the unconscious motivations of those who have chosen legal professions and to compare those motivations with their overt actions and declarations.

In France, the fuzziness of the law and of its enforcement prevents the establishment of a stable norm of behavior. The French norm fluctuates. On television, politicians keep making prescriptive declarations such as, "When you are..., then you have to...." "It is unacceptable that..." or "because of his function, So-and-So should be in a position to know that...." Unfortunately, those declarations, each of which is intended to be irrefutable and final, are in fact contradictory. The logic of honor<sup>viii</sup> comes into play in an attempt to replace an inadequate law with peremptory prescriptive proclamations. We should not let those proclamations fool us: unlike in the United States, in France there is no unchanging norm agreed upon by consensus and to which one could refer in any circumstance in order to determine what is "normal"—which is literally the purpose of the norm. In an irony that lies at the core of French culture, the norm is

the inconsistency of the norm. Since French culture is implicit, the impossibility of discussing the norm preserves its variability from one situation to the next. In fact, this allows French norms to be context-dependent; the laws and principles that are needed in a given situation can be pulled out of a hat, under the pretense of referring to universal and unchanging principles. However, this does not prevent the French from claiming the heritage of Descartes!

#### THE OPERATION OF THE AMERICAN LEGAL SYSTEM

The French cultivate a feeling of omnipotence due to their self-proclaimed intelligence; nevertheless, it is very difficult for them to understand to what extent what they derogatorily call “American legalism”—because they would dread for it to be applied to them—is in fact a normal mode of thinking in the United States. When Americans meet someone, the first thing that comes to their mind is the legal situation involved. As for the French, their first thought is obviously not what laws are applicable.

Upon writing the last sentence, I realized that it would be interpreted by French readers from the implicit perspective of confrontation or avoidance, whereas for Americans, what is at stake is merely knowing what laws are applicable in order to be able to abide by them, be they laws in the literal sense, principles generally accepted within a particular profession, directions that were provided (“I have a job to do”) or rules of civility, which rest on clear, stable, and explicit norms. We should remember, even if this hardly seems plausible to the French, that Americans seek win-win situations above all and only resort to litigation when there is an obvious breach of contract.

Contractual practices have only been able to develop and endure in the United States because legal and paralegal institutions have always operated relatively well in civil cases. Small claims lawsuits are easy and speedy. Thus, Small Claims Courts are competent when small monetary amounts are involved (a few hundred or a few thousand dollars); no attorneys are involved, summons fees are minimal (only a few dollars), and cases are promptly judged (within one or

two months) by elected judges or appointed commissioners rather than by juries. Implementation of financial rulings is easy, prompt, and reliable. More important cases, involving up to \$25,000, are under the jurisdiction of regional courts (Superior Courts); Federal Courts and District Circuit Courts are in charge of the most important cases. In the two latter courts, decisions are generally made by juries, and the assistance of attorneys is mandatory. The (optional) practice of payment by commission, in which attorneys are granted 30 to 40% of the awards but nothing when cases are lost, has caused an exponential increase of the number of civil trials by giving ordinary people access to the legal system.

Class action suits, which allow a whole category of persons to benefit from the remedies and compensations offered to individual plaintiffs who share a similar situation, have reinforced the deterrent effect of the legal system. Thus, the Lucky Store chain of supermarkets was sentenced to pay a total amount of 4.5 million dollars to all of the Latino applicants who had not been hired by the company during the previous ten years, even though only a few of them had sued. Safeway, a competing chain, was sentenced to pay a total amount of several million dollars to be divided between all the customers who had bought steaks falsely advertised as being USDA certified. Of course, few customers came to court in order to be awarded a few dollars each, but the ruling had a strong deterrent effect, all the more so because the plaintiffs’ attorneys received one third of the award. This practice leads some attorneys to act as parasites (ambulance chasers), actively seeking victims of minor injustices in order to sue and pocket one third of the awards. The enormous amounts thus claimed by attorneys (one third of the fifty billion dollars awarded in the suits brought by some states against tobacco companies) will probably lead to reform because this inordinate accumulation of wealth weighs down on American companies of every sector. However, the fact that most members of Congress are lawyers delays this necessary change. As for the French legal system, it must be said that it has recently started to mend its ways by introducing plea-bargaining and even allowing lawyers to market them-

selves—for sordid financial reasons that have led to a sudden reversal of the proclaimed grand principle of discretion required of the professions. However, the French system is adamantly opposed to class action suits. “We’re not going to let John Q. Public bring suits in order to right the many ordinary breaches of the law!” This position is of course justified by appealing to grand principles.

Leaving aside the excessive practices discussed above, recourse to the legal system by ordinary Americans is easy enough, and awards—as well as penal sentences—are significant enough to have a deterrent effect and to ensure that citizens honor their word and abide by the law. Moreover, the courts play an important role in the formation of the American superego. Novels, movies, and television endlessly stage the judgment of citizens by juries of their peers, in a process of ideological reinforcement of the real world. It should be noted that, in general, the role of the judge is merely to ensure that the arguments are in keeping with the law. The paternal function of judgment is performed by juries, since ordinary citizens have taken charge of the position of the father instead of delegating it to an external authority that is supposed to emanate from them, as is the case in France<sup>ix</sup>. Americans, who are pushed out by their mother at an early age, learn to live under the gaze of the father and are reassured by the presence of a father who is strong and admired. They yearn to take his place, and they naturally do so when the right time comes. Since they have accepted symbolic castration, they accept the authority and the law, and they treat the person of the CEO of their company, or of the president of their nation, with great respect.

Americans are not more virtuous than others, but they are subjected to consistent processes of reinforcement of socially acceptable behavior, by their parents as well as by their schools, their peers, the media, and the legal system. A multiplicity of paralegal institutions, mediators, arbiters, institutions providing recourses of every kind (ombudsmen, commissions, consumers unions, the Better Business Bureau) provide them with the comforting knowledge that if a mishandling or breach of the rules or contracts were to occur, an effective recourse would always be available. Given this context, why

should they stray?

Anyway, Parisian attorneys would be well-advised to wonder why more and more contracts signed in France stipulate that they are subject to American law and to draw the proper conclusions, rather than to complain about this development, as the Paris area bar recently did.

Americans have so much trust in their law that they place it above morality, which is surprising for such an intensely religious nation (97% of the American people state that they are “believers”). Thus, what Americans call “business ethics,” which is now taught in business schools, is minimal ethics, lawyers’ ethics: anything that is not prohibited by law is allowed, dirty tricks included. There is even a whole category of actions that are made possible by loopholes in the law, which has failed to explicitly prohibit them. This confirms that Americans are not fundamentally virtuous but do nothing more and nothing less than follow legal prescriptions and prohibitions. The law serves as morality. As Tocqueville wrote in *Democracy in America*, “In the United States hardly anybody talks of the beauty of virtue; but they maintain that it is useful, and they prove it everyday.” Benjamin Franklin wrote, “If you appear to be a scrupulous and honest man, your credit will be increased.”

## FIREARMS

Thus, in the rule-based American culture, anything that is not specifically prohibited is allowed. Citizens are presumed to be free to act as they wish, and lawmakers and government only intervene according to the principle of subsidiarity in the same way as, in the children’s education, parents only intervene by default. Americans favor less government and rely above all on themselves, in particular to provide for their safety and that of their family. Hence, what appears from the outside as an odd attachment to the possession of firearms, often with tragic consequences.

In a best-seller<sup>x</sup> dealing with phenomena of social contagion, Malcolm Gladwell showed that in a particular Melanesian island no

teen-ager had committed suicide until a few decades ago. Then, from the time a first suicide occurred, the practice took root, and it has become as common as in the West. The author proposed the hypothesis that behaviors, even harmful ones, are only chosen if they belong to a thesaurus of "acceptable" practices (deviant or dangerous as they may be). Thus, certain hysterical conversions that were common in the age of Charcot<sup>e</sup> have been replaced by more socially acceptable diseases. It is as if sick or socially deviant persons drew from a list of diseases or behaviors that had been designated beforehand as socially authorized.

We may wonder if that is not also the case regarding the use of firearms in the United States. In Canada, ethnic diversity and rate of ownership of firearms are comparable to what they are in the United States. Yet, only about one hundred violent deaths occur every year in Canada, as opposed to more than eleven thousand in the United States<sup>xi</sup> (two hundred and fifty in France). It could be said that killing each other with firearms is not part of the lexicon of behaviors regarded as socially possible or even acceptable by Canadians, whereas for Americans it is part of the "normal" lexicon, not only because the Second Amendment to the Constitution of the United States allows them to own firearms, but also because using firearms has now been part of their tradition for a very long time.

#### CULTURE OF RULES AND CULTURE OF PRINCIPLES

In the principle-based French culture, in which parents experience themselves as all-powerful and superior in essence to their children, in the way kings are to their subjects, prohibitions come first, and permission is granted later. Eventually, of course, accommodations are found. The weak point of the American system is that it cannot rely on virtue or a moral sense. Only the law and formally established prior contracts matter, and outside of them anything is allowed. Failure to abide by the rules brings real consequences that are known in advance, strong, and enforced. The weak points of the French system is that its principles vary from one individual to

another, that they lack prior transparency and that, in the best of cases, failure to abide by them is judged in terms of honor—a highly malleable concept.

French law embodies the mental image—shared by all the participants in the system—of a father who wavers between the two polar opposites of tyranny and absence. Unlike the American father, he is not symbolically present, sane, and consistent. His role is invoked by statements such as, "Just wait till your father comes home;" sometimes a beating follows; other times nothing happens. On the other hand, American law embodies the presence of a father—a constant presence that induces in the French a genuine terror, leading them to a highly critical attitude toward the omnipresence of American law in everyday life, which they interpret in their own way as tyrannical.

However, they will have to get used to it because this expansion of the law, or rather of justice, is now occurring, step by step, in particular through the European Union: the principles of its incipient law largely replicate those of the United States. Reversals from the presumption of guilt to the presumption of innocence and from accusatorial to contradictory law are now under consideration. Discussions have begun on plea-bargaining, and even on presidential impeachment, depriving that function of its quasi-sacred character. Governance and the limitation of conflicts of interest are also being debated. The resignations of a few French judges and of a Norwegian-born judge, who were sickened by the vast discrepancy between words and deeds in the legal system, are indicative of a condition akin to the state of chaos that occurs when physical systems transition from one state to another before stabilizing. An expansion of the legal dimension of French society is unavoidable, as well as the progression in explicitness and individuation that goes along with it. But, for this extension of the legal dimension not to be dysfunctional, the father must recover his proper place in French society and in the unconscious of the French, which raises the issue of the relationship between men and women, and especially between mothers and sons.

## THE CONTRACT

Individuation and the existence of strong laws make it possible for American culture to be contract-based. The discourse on the conditions of synallagmatic<sup>xii</sup> contract<sup>xiii</sup> is the same in France and in the United States, but the intention and implementation of that discourse are different.

First, let us examine the discourse. Let us consider the case of a contract for the sale of goods or services. Two (physical or legal) persons, neither of which exercises undue influence over the other, and both of which recognize the same law, come to an agreement on the object of the sale and its price. The contract defines what is to happen when the terms of the agreement are met or breached.

Second, let us look at the implementation. Within the explicit American framework, no significant difference exists between this preliminary statement and its implementation. Both parties intend to abide by the law, by which they feel naturally bound. Individuation is expressed in legal terms by two concepts: that of “arm’s length,” a figurative expression according to which neither party can embrace the other in order to unduly influence it; and that of “conflict of interest,” which prohibits any legally “incestuous” relationship, or at least makes it mandatory to declare multiple affiliations and potentially conflicting loyalties. The parties come to an agreement on the contract before it is implemented, negotiating its components in great detail and in good faith. This obligation to negotiate in good faith (which is to say that actions must exactly match intentions, without any *dolosive* maneuver<sup>xiii</sup>) is written in the law and is almost always met. If there is disagreement on a clause, it must be expressed at the time the contract is under negotiation, not afterwards, as the French often mistakenly do in business deals with Americans. Once the contract has been signed, usually after careful legal consideration, it is meant to be implemented, and each party will ensure that it is. If one party fails to meet its obligations, the other will remind it of them, directly or through its attorneys, and will be quite prepared to go to court in order to rectify the wrong. It is worth mentioning that 95% of civil suits end in out-of-court settlements that are promptly

reached and that rulings in civil cases are generally much faster than in France<sup>xiv</sup>.

When we examine the French framework, the first difference appears: after the fact, what happens is not what had been agreed upon. Specifications keep changing, leading to a breach of the contractual agreement. As a result, deadlines are not met, and budgets are exceeded (but would they have been met, even without those changes?). Compensation for late performance has not been demanded. The product or services provided do not come up to expectations—in particular because of misunderstandings due to the fact that the original agreement was not sufficiently clear. Upon closer analysis, the central problem lies in the different intentions of the two parties. Contrary to appearances, from the beginning there was no contractual intention on the part of the French. “Let’s sign anyway, and we’ll deal with it later,” they thought. In the United States I have often heard this statement, “When you’ve signed on with Germans, it’s over; when you’ve signed on with French people, that’s when things start.” Indeed, when the French signed, they did not actually mean to meet the terms of the contract; either they were in an inferior position and hoped to be able to eventually reverse it, or they were in a dominant position and believed that, as overlords, they were not accountable to their vassals. “A prince never lacks legitimate reasons to justify his failure to keep his promises<sup>xv</sup>.” The act of signing is a symbolic celebration of the relationship between the parties. Bring on the champagne! “Let’s not deal with every detail now; we can always make adjustments later.” The good relationship currently enjoyed by the parties provides the opportunity for a virtuous denial, “Dear friend, we agree, we get along well. Should we let an untimely obsession with legal issues spoil this exquisite harmony?”

For the French, the breaches of contract that are bound to occur will provide an opportunity to redefine the hierarchy of the relationship, either by reinforcing it or by modifying it. “What?! I’ve known him for ten years; how could he do that to us?,” they will say, or, “I know him well; I’m going to take care of it,” or “OK, we’ll let this one

go, but he owes us one," or, "So-and-So, take care of it; have our attorneys contact him." In the French hierarchical mentality, if you are in a lower position, you will try to reverse the relationship; if you hold the dominant position (the French phrase "*donneur d'ordres*" speaks for itself), you will try to reinforce it. Nothing of the sort is stated at the time the deal is signed, but the assumption is there nevertheless. Such is the hidden beauty of implicitness!

Often, there isn't even a contract. "Isn't my word enough?" This vacuum will later generate all sorts of misunderstandings, which will provide an opportunity to interpret the intention and good faith of the other party, in other words its willingness to remain in the position that was assigned to it in the relationship. The absence of a contract or the illusion that a quasi-contract has been set up results in any number of incidents, which are experienced as so many betrayals. Americans consider that any statement made by one party amounts to a contract, in that the other party can legitimately base its own actions upon what was stated. French business leaders who have recently arrived in the United States frequently make the mistake of telling their collaborators, for instance when hiring them, such things as, "You're hired as a manager, and you'll be a director within two years," without realizing that such statements amount to contracts that can later be used against them (even if there were no witnesses). In the American culture, which is an explicit one, what matters, what commits you, is what you say. If your words go beyond your intentions, that is just too bad for you. You do what you said you would do. In the French culture, which is an implicit one, what matters is what you think. You do what you intended to do (and then again, maybe you don't). If others misunderstood, that is just too bad for them. Buyer, beware!

The legal concept of detrimental reliance posits that if others have based their actions on what you told them, you are accountable for the negative consequences if at the time you were aware of the risks involved and did not inform others of those risks (as a disclosure). Thus signs are posted in front of buildings, warning that, "Chemicals known by the state to be carcinogenic are present on the premises." It

is for you to decide whether or not you will enter a dry-cleaner's or a bar (there are still a few left), or even if you will take a job; you have been given fair warning; your responsibility is now engaged. In the same way, when you buy real estate in California, the seller must let you know in writing every known defect of the property; if you buy the property you become responsible for those defects, but if the seller has failed to inform you about them, they remain his or her responsibility.

When I present these examples during lectures given to French people, they never fail to interrupt me with such questions as, "But how can you prove that the seller was aware of that?" or "How could the staff member prove that he was promised that?" Those are legitimate questions, no doubt, but they are themselves worthy of attention, because their intention is culturally significant. The basis of this resistance, which takes the form of questions, is in fact the wish on the part of every normal French person to escape the consequences of his or her actions. The proof of what was promised would be impossible to provide, making it possible to escape accountability. In fact, a jury made up of six to twelve persons, depending on the state, will decide, after hearing both parties testify under penalty of perjury—rather than under oath of proclaimed honor, as in France, which involves no real consequences in case a lie were proven to have been made, in a culture in which lying is regarded as normal.

#### THE SOCIAL CONTRACT<sup>f</sup>

The French social contract is not so much the one Rousseau envisioned as is generally assumed. Rights are granted to a community (the Republic, the French Nation, etc.) rather than to individuals. As a consequence, every law or rule is perceived as a collective constraint more than as the necessary counterpart of individual freedom. In the United States, the social contract has an individualistic character (Bill of Rights). A set of rights was granted to individuals rather than to a community. The relationship to the law or the rule is therefore experienced in a more positive way<sup>xvi</sup>.

## RELATIONSHIPS AND CONTRACTS

Americans do not let relationships interfere with contracts. Even if you have been a client of the same company for ten times, you will not be given preferential treatment the eleventh time, outside of the terms of the contract. Your loyalty to the company may be rewarded with a price discount or some quantitative advantage, but if that is the case it will be officially stated, known in advance, and determined by contract. A hotel where over the past several years my company had often booked groups of senior executives once billed us for a late-cancellation at the same rate it would have charged new customers. This made me angry, which then helped me to realize that my extended business relationship with the hotel had led me to expect a preferential treatment, in the French way. With time, contractual agreements tend to take on a personal character, softening the harshness of the contract, which is experienced by the French as a necessary evil

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- i The Puritans' Church had neither hierarchy nor rituals.
- ii e<sup>st</sup> = -1
- iii For a development of these concepts, see the absolutely essential book by Antoine Garapon et Ioannis Papadopoulos, *Juger en Amérique et en France*, Odile Jacob, 2003.
- iv Public Report on the Principle of Equality. "Etudes et Documents," n° 48, 1996.
- v Cited in "L'audit de la France," *Les Echos*, March 15, 2002.
- vi "La France est-elle un pays corrompu?" ("Is France a Corrupt Country?") Grand dossier, *Le Monde*, April 7, 2002. See also the Index of Perception of Corruption provided by Transparency International's website, [www.transparency.com](http://www.transparency.com).
- vii Bateson, Watzlawick and the School of Palo Alto. See Chapter 9, "The Central Taboo of French culture."
- viii d'Iribarne, Philippe, *Op. Cit.*
- ix With the rare exception of the "cours d'assises" (Criminal Courts).
- x Gladwell, Malcolm. *The Tipping Point, How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. Little Brown & Co. 2000.
- xi According to *Bowling for Columbine*, a documentary by Michael Moore, 2002.
- xii Contract involving reciprocal obligation for both parties.

- xiii Deceitful.
- xiv The America justice system is also faster in penal cases because of the right to a speedy trial that is stated in the Constitution of the United States.
- xv Machiavelli, *The Prince*.
- xvi Nicolas Malo, personal communication.

## TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

- a The same French word, "clerc," means both "cleric" and "clerk."
- b Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen.
- c The National Assembly during the Revolutionary period.
- d Category of judges. Literally, "judge [in charge] of the enforcement of penalties."
- e French pioneer of psychiatry.
- f Title of a book by French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

## CHAPTER 6

### TASKS

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, when Americans meet one another, they share a common reference to the law. They meet because they have a task to perform together. One of them might be a supervisor in a store and the other a sales clerk; their task is to sell and to satisfy the customers so that they will patronize the store in the future. Or one may be a physician and the other a patient; their task is to cooperate in order to provide and receive health care. They will then establish the minimum relationship necessary to properly perform the task at hand, to the degree that is needed but not beyond. Once the task has been performed, they will end the relationship.

Americans consider relationships secondary, relative to the tasks at hand. Since tasks are temporary, so are relationships. The task of spouses is to do what is done between spouses: provide each other with emotional and financial support, have children, have fun together, and take care of their children<sup>i</sup>. Readers will have noticed the factual character of this description, which suggests that the concept of task does not have exactly the same meaning in French and American cultures. The same is true of the concept of relationship. In the latter example, if one spouse were to break the contract, for instance by cheating on his or her spouse, or were no longer able to meet the task (in financial or other terms), breaking the relationship<sup>ii</sup> would be considered the normal thing to do (whereas in France spouses generally “deal with it”). American couples are more akin to partnerships, juxtapositions in which each party commits itself within a contractual framework, but the individuals involved remain distinct from each other. In their mental image of the relationship, neither protagonist belongs to the other. Most conflicts are caused by breaches of stated obligations. French couples form new intermingling and inseparable entities into which the members merge and their individual character dissolves; to some extent each person

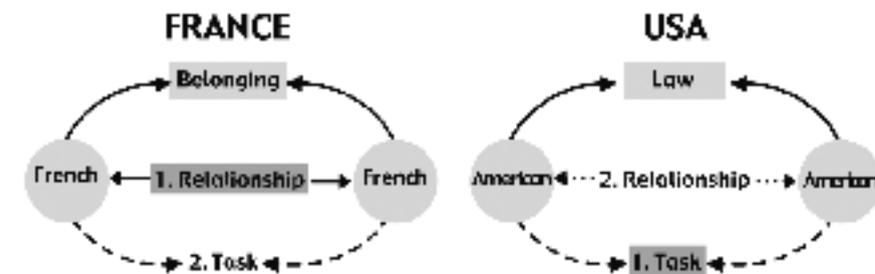
owns and is owned by the other. Conflicts are usually related to claims or denials of individuation on the part of one member of the couple. Divorce has a completely different meaning for Americans—the closure of a relationship when the task at hand justifies it—and for French people—the breaking up of a relationship that was supposed to be unbreakable.

The importance tasks have for Americans is part of the Protestant perspective, in which there is no redemption. Catholics consider that a sin can always be cancelled by absolution, which makes ordinary sins less serious. Protestants consider tasks (as well as words) to be serious things because their consequences cannot be undone. According to the Puritan ideology, America is a new Eden that was entrusted to a chosen people<sup>iii</sup>. This was portrayed by the painters of two generations of the Hudson River School, around Thomas Cole, then Frederic Church, and later by many others, including John Kincaid with his corny paintings, and by the composers Anton Dvorák with his *Symphony from the New World*<sup>iv</sup> and Aaron Copland with his *Appalachian Spring*—in a country that Stendhal called, “this country without music.” In literature, the recurrent theme of man’s encounter with nature on the frontier of civilization was portrayed by Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and Edgar Allan Poe. Nature can be mastered, and it is meant to be conquered and improved by man, through his work. Money earned through hard work is a sign of the success attained in performing God’s work. Money must therefore be displayed, contrary to the French attitude toward the despicable thirst for gold, which was proscribed since the time of Virgil; it must not be spent for earthly pleasures; after a portion has been given to the church, it must be reinvested in business, which is the source of capitalism.

#### THE PRIMACY OF THE RELATIONSHIP

When two French people meet, what they have in mind is not a reference to a shared law (if that were the case we would have heard about it!), or even to a law of any kind. They seek a possibly shared

belonging (local or regional origin, kinship, educational background...). Then, they establish a relationship, reinforce it, and carefully maintain it. Finally, if the relationship is good, they might perform a task together. I am exaggerating a little. But what is clear is that if the relationship is not good, you will never succeed in having the task performed. “We can’t do that because of the insurance”; “Prior agreement of the commission is required”; “A form is missing”; “I have to ask someone in charge”; “Come back at 2PM”; etc. For the French, the task is secondary to the relationship, and every relationship is supposed to last indefinitely—or at least that is the way they view it at the time, even if they may later withdraw from the relationship. Yet it is the French who accuse the Americans of being hypocritical and superficial in terms of relationships. The typically unwelcoming attitude of the French toward strangers is partly due to the fact that they expect any relationship to be enduring, whereas Americans regard smiling as harmless because they view any relationship as short-lived by nature.



For the French, tasks are secondary to relationships. For Americans, relationships are necessary to the performance of tasks and only last as long as is required by the performance of the tasks at hand.

Figure 4. Tasks and Relationships

## HONFLEUR

Strange things happen when French people meet Americans. In Honfleur, a small town in the Pays de Caux region of Normandy, I witnessed an encounter between a native and a New-Yorker who had rented a house there for a few weeks. The "*horsain*" (a local term that designates strangers to the town, bunching together Chinese from Hong Kong and denizens of Pont-L'Évêque, the nearest town) passed by the native and—stupendous event—"smiled" (footnote: it is reported that someone was seen smiling in the Pays de Caux in May 1473, but this has not yet been confirmed). Another encounter took place the next day, along with another smile, this time causing the native to produce a muffled grunt while turning away and looking at his shoes (this constitutes a sign of polite consideration in the local dialect). Let us skip over a series of encounters during which the American, naive as he was, put his rudimentary French to the test so as to discuss the weather—it was raining, of course. As we may have surmised, this assault caused a great shock in Honfleur. After a gradual escalation in the relationship, akin to a series of steps in a flexible response scenario, the momentous time finally came for the protagonists to discuss the health of Aunt Ursula and Uncle Wilbur.

The vacation came to an end. The American went back home. The natives never heard from him again. "I told you he was a shady character," they said. Betrayal! Woe be to the stranger! For them, a significant investment in the building of a lasting relationship had taken place, one that does not occur every day—or every decade—in Honfleur, and especially not with strangers. It has been known there for people to get married and, two generations later, for their descendants to still not be part of the family.

The behavior of that American was contextual since, for Americans, courtesy requires making small talk with your neighbors, as long as they are your neighbors, and nothing is expected once they no longer are. As I write, that Yankee is most likely talking about another Aunt Ursula and Uncle Wilbur with another native, in Pont-L'Évêque or Hong Kong....

## THE PROCESS

It is impossible to understand the behavior of Americans at work—and even in their personal lives—without understanding the concept of process. It comprises two stages: first, defining the operations to be performed; second, performing them. Definers and performers are not necessarily the same. Thus, some companies divide the management of human resources between HR Policies and Procedures, in charge of defining the rules and strategies relative to human resources, and HR Operations, in charge of everyday personnel management. This is also the case in many other areas.

In this "monochronous" culture, that is, in which only one thing is done at a time, processes are sequential: first, defining what is to be done; then implementing what was decided. Americans experience great difficulty when they have to define or modify a process while it is being implemented, whereas this is the normal procedure for the French. For instance, during the Clinton-Lewinsky affair, because of its unprecedented and consequential character, the Senate found itself in the very uncomfortable position of having to determine the procedure to be followed and implement it at the same time. Americans are obsessed with processes and try to define one for every situation, no matter how simple or complex it may be. Once processes have been defined they are relatively rigid and can only be changed by implementing a... modification process.

Processes make it possible for Americans to connect facts that would otherwise be perceived as isolated and separated from each other, whereas the syncretic perspective of the French, in which everything is already related to everything else, has no need for an extra layer of process, which would change the natural order of things in an artificial, even arbitrary manner.

## GEORGE W. BUSH'S ELECTION

George W. Bush's contested election in November 2000 provided an excellent example of the application of a process in the United States. Any ordinary person placed in that context would have soon

understood—sooner than the American people did, anyway—that there was no way to measure a micron with a carpenter’s yardstick or to count 357 votes with the obsolete voting machines that the underprivileged Democratic neighborhoods of greater Miami area had been able to afford more than twenty years earlier. Yet, for the American people, following the process that had been defined in advance was crucial. That process provided for a recount, but not for another vote, which would have been considered to be the normal solution in France. The heroic treatment Americans dedicated to a dying vote-counting process seemed hilarious to the rest of the planet. Yet, for ordinary voters, confronted as they were with vigorous attempts by both sides to redefine the process in mid-stream, it was very comforting to see that the process that had been defined in advance—a recourse to the Supreme Court as the ultimate referee—was actually implemented in a speedy and resolute manner.

Was it best, for a country that claims to be the champion of democracy in the world, to follow the process at all costs and have the highest judicial authority in the land reverse the apparent result of the election, believers in the big picture may ask? In a post mortem poll, the majority of the American people said that it was. After all, if they find psychological comfort in this hard line reverence for the process, that is their business.<sup>v</sup> The Supreme Court, which is still revered in the United States, should not be compared to the French *Conseil Constitutionnel*, which is still largely unknown by the public at large and has lost credibility because its president was implicated in the Elf scandal—even though nominations to the highest courts are often motivated in both cases by political considerations (based on Republican or Democratic partisanship for the former, on less clear criteria for the latter).

#### THE OMNIPRESENCE OF THE PROCESS

The *process* holds a central place in the mental organization of Americans, who tend to establish a process for every situation. This setting up of processes is founded upon a dividing of the real world

into modules (chunking), which is made possible by an explicit and dualistic culture in which everything either is or is not. The emphasis placed on content and the absence of a gray zone in the mental image Americans have of the real world make chunking possible, whereas implicit cultures emphasize the context and operate in an analog manner, in a continuum. There is no doubt that imposing an arrangement of modules onto a real world that is, by nature, complex cannot be done without oversimplifying things, eliminating many retroactive loops, and rigidifying things. This increase in the degree of graininess, connectivity and viscosity of things lowers their level of keenness, complexity, and instability. Oddly enough, therefore, the American mode of operation through processes, which is one of the strengths of the United States, is founded on a distortion of perceptions at the basic or primary level. What is perceived is not the real world but what you want to do with it. It is therefore important to describe it and to preserve and communicate its imprint, so that you and others may be able to use it. Mapping a modular grid onto the real world is very cost-effective because it makes it possible to reuse categories that have already been established during previous modular organizations, but that is done at the cost of a loss of spontaneity. A French mother, who had given birth to her second child in the United States, told me that the delivery process was so well-organized there and her role so clearly set that she had not been able to let herself go, as she had the first time she had given birth, in France<sup>vi</sup>.

This modular organization is based on a certain number of beliefs, and it requires stability, repetition, the ability to make substitutions, and pragmatic will. Our present purpose is not to analyze the relevance of these features, but only to show that they are culturally determined. In French culture, which personalizes things, leaving a personal mark matters more than diluting yourself into pre-established categories, even if those categories make collective action easier. The compulsive need of the French to distinguish themselves makes them despise everything they qualify as “clichés,” whereas Americans consider that having recourse to known elements frees you from the necessity to reinvent what has already been established;

this recourse is an integral part of the modular operation and of the process. In addition, the highly contextual—and therefore constantly fluctuating—character of French culture is not conducive to the reductionist approach that modular organizing constitutes. As a result, the French keep reinventing the wheel, and the rate of collective learning is low. In spite of the ponderousness of American processes, which the French find intolerable, Americans are faster in the long run because they know how to identify familiar territories and to apply the relevant process without antagonizing anyone. Americans proceed by identifying categories. For the French, acquiring new information amounts to giving it meaning through relating it to what is already known. As a result, the French become cultured, whereas Americans become specialized.

For a highly disciplined people such as the Americans, the advantages of resorting to rigid processes are obvious: tasks are rationally distributed, decisions are made first by strategists, then by organizers; all workers know where they are going and can dedicate themselves to their jobs with minimal inefficiency. The necessary resources, which are often significant, are allocated without conflict because there is no need to preserve a balance between different factions, and all energies are channeled in the same direction. The downside is that when the direction is not the right one, this results in full-force crashes. When they occur, a new process, often under the control of a new leader, then defines a way to start again. In times of constant change, when the ability of those who are in the field to perceive weak signals in real time can turn out to be decisive, this monolithic system can be dangerously ineffective.

For the Americans, professionalism is defined through explicit reference to a corpus of knowledge and practices generally accepted within a profession: one behaves in a professional manner. For the French, professionalism designates a consistent frame of mind expressed in a practice: one *is* a “pro.” Hollywood movies are a result of an excess of process: they are technically perfect but based on insipid scripts, directed with a high level of professionalism that lacks any kind of purpose, running the risk of being devoid of meaning. In

the same way, political correctness can be considered as an application of the spirit of the process: the expression of any opinion that does not fit within the generally accepted worldview must be prohibited.

Conversely, French culture is not conducive to the development of processes: the individualism of the French, their aversion to risk-taking and criticism, and their endless renegotiation of each person’s rank make it impossible to easily come to an agreement on the procedures to follow, and the directions coming from the top are often confronted with passive resistance at intermediate levels and active resistance at the grassroots. The French insist on preserving their dearly held personal freedom of action. In many organizations that I have observed, what the people in charge of implementing decisions actually do is entirely different from what the leadership asked. The sociologist Michel Crozier already observed this<sup>vii</sup>. Ironically, since those in charge of implementation are closer to the field (the customers, the market), some decisions made within this French Brownian movement turn out to bring fruitful results. The cultural inability of the French to consistently follow a predefined process without straying from it, even within financial, medical or engineering subcultures, endows them with a responsiveness that the Americans lack, and it can provide an opportunity in these increasingly chaotic times, but often at the cost of a great waste of resources.

## THE FORD SYSTEM OF PRODUCTION AND MANAGEMENT FADS

The omnipresence of the process, combined with the dualistic character of American culture and the focus placed on the task at hand, brings about the specialization that has logically given rise to the Ford system of production. Oddly enough, it is the awareness of the limitations of this system, when confronted by the constantly changing post-World War II environment, that has led the Americans to try to find a way out of it, after many attempts to adjust it through quality-enhancement programs, downsizing, elimination of hierarchical levels, and all sorts of automation programs. This was done through

excellence<sup>viii</sup> and empowerment, as well as through outsourcing and refocusing on core competencies, business process reengineering<sup>ix</sup>, reorganization into networks, integration of the chain of value, “webization,” and other management innovations. The primacy given to measurable economic results over organizational status quo and management dogma, along with a certain amount of transparency and the ability to clearly describe what is being done, has ensured a worldwide dissemination of management innovations and turned American practices into universal models, including the currently dominant trend toward creation of value for the shareholders<sup>x</sup>.

It should be noted that management fads play a part on both sides of the Atlantic, but they have different life cycles. Americans trust the experts, in particular academic ones, who are much more likely than their French counterparts to consult for businesses, or even to found companies or hold temporary leadership positions before resuming their academic careers<sup>xi</sup>. As soon as a new management approach (generally in the form of a new process) appears in print, if it is supported by a few successful implementations, many companies adopt the approach presented, which generates a new wave, in a sheep-like trend that is repeated by one fad after another. Organizations are founded to support the implementation of these approaches by sharing information and resources; hordes of consultants, either franchised by the founders or by the designers of applications of the new approaches, disseminate the corresponding practices, often adapting them to each business sector. Then, after a few years, changes in the field and the appearance of a new management paradigm give rise to the next wave. Meanwhile, the recommendations made by the original authors have actually been implemented over the long term.

In France, managements fads—generally imported from the United States—disappear as soon as a large enough proportion of the business elite believes it is familiar enough with them and has understood them; there is generally no serious long-term implementation (the quality movement being an exception to this rule) because of the prevailing cynicism, of the primacy given to knowledge over action, and of a distrust toward enduring processes—which are considered

by the top as being overly rigid because they do not allow for the sudden flip-flops that are typical of monarchic power, and by the lower level as constituting an unacceptable reminder of its dominated position.

### ESSENTIALISM

Within the essentialist French culture, you are judged based on who you are, not on what you do. You “are” by right of birth (nobility), by the social “tattooing” of diplomas, by the gaining of a title, or by statutory level. On the other hand, Americans judge individuals based on what they do. The better the performance, the higher the reward; the richer or better paid a person is, the higher is the performance expected from him or her. If the level of performance goes down, so does recognition; it is not intrinsically bound to a person, but only to his or her actions. In the United States, you start from scratch everyday. To a large extent, what matters is what you do today, not what you did yesterday (or the day before).

Unemployed French executives always look for positions at the same level as the ones they lost, even if very few such positions are available on the market, because the status they had reached is now part of their identity. This “pawl effect” increases the structural rigidity of the French economy. When, after some attempts, unemployed American executives find themselves unable to obtain a position similar to the one they lost, they have no qualms about seeking a lower one, since they know that their performance will later enable them to resume climbing the social ladder. This behavior ensures a greater fluidity of the labor market.

According to André Laurent<sup>xii</sup>, “Anglo-Saxons have a functional or instrumental conception of organizations, whereas Latins have a social conception of them. For the former, an organization is primarily a system of tasks and activities that must be coordinated, following which the people who can carry out those tasks and activities must be found. For the latter, an organization is above all a group of people, mobilized around a project, whose relationships must be managed.”

When there is a position to fill in an organization, Americans first define the job and then find the person who precisely fits the definition, after a systematic search. Since there is no need to seek someone with broader abilities than those stated in the job definition, applicants are only paid for the qualifications that are sought, which generates savings for the organization. In addition, a given position can be assigned to someone who might be considered as less talented (in fact, with a narrower qualification) than his or her French counterpart, which makes it possible for a larger proportion of the population to find appropriate employment. In the United States, there are no “menial” jobs undervalued relative to other jobs; any form of employment, no matter how humble it may be, is a source of pride, which is an important factor favoring social integration and national unity. The French choose someone to whom they are already bonded and let him or her shape the job depending on his or her personality, which generates stronger relationships and more flexibility, but a less professional attitude. The formal character of French job descriptions should not be taken too seriously, nor should bidding processes, the ponderous rituals of which often conceal choices already made at the upper levels.

## SIGNING

The French feel a need to imprint their names. They insist on “signing” their performance, and when in charge of repetitive tasks, they do so by making mistakes and breaching the rules or the established procedures; otherwise, they would feel anonymous, and this lack of recognition would be unbearable for them. This is obviously not a guarantee of quality or safety. The first concern of newly appointed French leaders is often to reverse the decisions that were made by their predecessors, in order to leave their own mark. The setting up of the *Vitale* card<sup>#</sup> was delayed by several years and cost much more than expected because the French insisted on designing the whole system on their own (and in a typically hierarchical manner), whereas they could have purchased a foreign design, for instance a Canadian one, which would have quickly met 95% of the goals, but

would have breached the perfectionist attitude of the French, and above all would have been at the cost of national pride.

In their handwriting, the French express their subjectivity by writing, in cursive, letters that vary widely from one individual to the next (and are difficult for Americans to decipher), whereas Americans use block lettering, as similar as possible from one writer to the next<sup>iii</sup>. French signatures on documents aim to be as personal and specific as possible, whereas American signatures aim to exactly and faithfully reproduce the signatory’s name. French signatures have to be unreadable in order to be personal. In France, they are a sign of differentiation; in the United States, they are a mark of identification. The signature of John Hancock, who was the president of the Continental Congress of 1776 and one of the signatories of the Declaration of Independence, only went down in history and remained in the American lexicon because it was unusually convoluted. Americans have no qualms about performing repetitive tasks as part of procedures that were defined in advance; this does not diminish in any way the impression they have of their own existence.

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- i Even though, in the chapter titled, “Love in the United States,” in *On Love*, Stendhal claims, “Their whole attention seems to be taken up with ordering their lives in a rational way and in avoiding discomfort; when at last they reach the moment of gathering the fruit of so much care and of such long-sustained habits of orderliness, they have no life left for enjoyment.” “It is as though the source of sensitiveness were dried up in them. They are just and they are rational, but they are anything but happy.” Op. Cit.
- ii Hillary and Bill Clinton constitute an exception to this rule.
- iii Christian Monjou, personal communication.
- iv Composed in 1893, while he was director of the National Conservatory.
- v In any case, there is something disingenuous about the French criticism of the American electoral system after Al Gore lost the Presidential election with over 50% of the popular vote: in March 2001 the French Right also lost elections to the Paris and Lyons city councils with 50.4 and 50.3% of the votes!
- vi It should be noted that in the normal American institutional and professional perspective, mother and child are considered as two separate entities from the start, which provides them with some amount of individuation from the earliest moment of life. Mothers soon leave the home and resume working as soon as possible. The very concept of bonding and creating an attachment presupposes the existence of two entities from the start, whereas the French view emphasizes unity. Processes can only take place through the arrangement of previously distinct components.

- vii *Stalled Society*. New York. Viking Press. 1973.
- viii See Tom Peters and Robert Waterman. *In Search of Excellence*. New York. Harper and Row. 1982.
- ix See James Champy and Michael Hammer. *Reengineering the Corporation*. New York. HarperBusiness. 1994.
- x On this topic, see my article, written with Hervé Juvin, "Entreprises en quête de sens," on the [www.pbaudry.com](http://www.pbaudry.com) website.
- xi See the article. "De certaines pratiques financières des universités américaines," on the [www.pbaudry.com](http://www.pbaudry.com) website.
- xii "Management et mondialisation. La gestion des différences culturelles dans l'entreprise," *Cahiers de l'ENSPTT*, September 1998.
- xiii It should be noted that French handwriting connects letters, whereas American handwriting separates them.
- # A country-wide system for automated payment of health expenses.

## CHAPTER 7

# RELATIONSHIPS

When arriving in the United States, French people are usually surprised by the status that children are granted there. They often regard American educational practices as lax, calling rudeness what Americans would call positive self-image. At the dinner table, children of all ages have the right to talk, and what they say seems to be taken as seriously as what adults say; their right to speak is taken for granted, not subject to the permission of adults. At school, students are considered—and consider themselves—as having equal status with adults. They may express their wishes at any moment. They have rights that are explicitly recognized and the exercise of which is viewed by teachers and parents as a learning experience in the use of democracy. Parents are always welcome at school, in particular as volunteer helpers.

It is as if the first goal of American schools were to socialize the students, to teach them the practice of democracy, to give them self-confidence and help them manage on their own in everyday life; helping them acquire what the French call "general culture" comes second; as a result, their general culture is at a very low level in the United States. Yet, at a given socioeconomic level, children seem happier there. In this country, which was built by waves of immigrants, the integrating effect of the school is crucial. Students are generally not required to repeat classes, in order to avoid separating them from their classmates; this is obviously not a guarantee of academic achievement, especially in underprivileged neighborhoods. In any case, children are constantly immersed in the idea that they are adults in the making, and not "just children."

French culture, which is focused on relationships, is in fact focused on hierarchical ones. For the French, saying that "someone is nice" ("*sympa*") means that he or she does not try to dominate you. Such

pleasantries as, "After you," "No, after you," "I couldn't," "Please, I insist," in the manner of Bouvard and Pécuchet<sup>a</sup>, show that each person knows that he or she could go first, that he or she knows that the other knows it, and vice versa, and that each person acts as if this were not the case. Who stands higher? Who is the more important one? The implicit character of French culture makes it possible to conceal these questions. Yet, just like the Japanese, the French can only situate themselves in relation to others through hierarchies. In both countries, this constitutes a remnant of feudality. The relationship between overlord and vassal is expressed by the exchange of protection for the loyalty implied by the allegiance to someone. This ancient contract is founded on who the persons involved are, not on what they do, and nothing that they can do is supposed to bring about a reappraisal of the contract. This implicit barter is still found today in French society, as an un-stated expectation of lifelong employment, total social protection, and of being taken care at every level by what Foucault called the prudential state. The problem is that when resources are no longer there to protect people forever from everything, the individuals who had invested in belonging feel betrayed. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing<sup>b</sup>, and later Jacques Delors<sup>c</sup>, unsuccessfully tried to educate the masses about this harsh economic reality; the masses just turned off their TV sets (zapping did not exist at the time).

I have known many French people who, upon arriving in the United States, soon found themselves in need of a hierarchical relationship and in search of a center. The French find American suburbia unsettling; they need a downtown, which they unsuccessfully seek in Los Angeles—whereas they find San Francisco or Boston reassuring in this respect. The horizontal character of the United States finds its topographical expression in grid patterns and a relatively even distribution of wealth over the territory of the nation, whereas the French hierarchical character is expressed by star-patterns and the concentration of wealth in the capital (a word that derives from the Latin "*caput*," the head). Every road leads to Paris, which is a metaphorical counterpart of the central position of the king. The city of Detroit, Michigan, makes it possible to observe a superimposition of the two

systems: the French first designed boulevards converging toward a central point of focus (the port); then came the Americans, who laid out a grid pattern of avenues whose intersections with the previous network created a certain number of acute angles....

## FEUDAL POWER

The road toward explicitness, individuation, and contract is an arduous one, hence certain difficulties French society is currently experiencing in its transition. We will return to these difficulties later. The omnipresence of the hierarchical system in France is an expression of feudal power in mental representations that are shared by the top and bottom levels. Mental habits that have endured for a thousand years cannot be changed in a generation. Customers and suppliers have their designated place in the hierarchy: at the bottom. Being right vis-à-vis the customers is more important than satisfying them. Serving customers is often experienced as amounting to being their servant. "Hey, I'm not her servant!" The phrase, "*taillable et corvéable à merci*,"<sup>d</sup> clearly expresses this feeling.

Figure 5 shows a hierarchy of which clear examples can be found in certain French administrations and companies.



Figure 5. Hierarchical Relationships in France

When I showed this figure to Britons, they told me, "In our country, things are different: dogs come first, and then customers."

This pyramid could just as well illustrate relationships within hospitals, from department heads down to doctors, nurses and nurses' aides, and finally patients (the position of the dog being filled by the chamber pot).

For hierarchical relationships to endure, implicitness must be preserved, because too much explicitness could undermine the hierarchy by exposing it. In companies and administrations that have not yet reached modernity, leaders and subordinates are both aware that the latter should not mention certain things. I was told of an occasion when a senior executive in the historically monopolistic energy company had (later, and in private) taken offence because one of his subordinates to whom he offered what appeared to be an advancement—but to a position that was very vaguely defined and in a highly political context that involved risks for his career—had asked him for some details on the performance that would be expected from him. Mentioning the issue of compensation would of course have been sacrilegious, since the emergence of the contract also threatens hierarchies. Within a relationship perceived by those who participate in it as hierarchical, exchanges between participants are experienced by the dominant one as favors granted and by the dominated one as vested benefits. Introducing the logic of exchange and contract would bring a suspicious horizontal character to the relationship.

Employees say, "I work at So-and-So's," or "with So-and-So," or "In Professor So-and-So's service." Frenchmen seek refuge in an image of the father that they themselves do not embody. They obey their superiors, represent them, are afraid of them, avoid them, protect them, are gracious to them, anticipate their wishes; in short they act as if the superiors were present fathers when they really are absent ones, and then they cry in the lap of consultants or coaches: "My president told me...." There is so much regret hidden in this phrase so often heard from senior executives, the same ones who also criticize the boss behind his back! At every level, everyone suffers from not being recognized by Daddy, and then replicates the pattern

at the lower level, in a hierarchy that is all the more haughty, harsh, and rigid because it is based on the pretense of this presence in absence. The absent father that one is still looking for is also the monarchy that was overthrown and that, in an impossible attempt, every president tries to embody. As Balzac wrote, "By cutting off the head of Louis XVI, the Republic has cut off the head of every father." The French have not taken responsibility for killing the father<sup>ii</sup>

And then again, sometimes the father is there; but when he is, he is too much there, and the hierarchy he imposes is unbearable and provides too extreme a model to identify with.

Mid-level managers are becoming proletarianized, weary of the non-existence that is assigned to them. More and more of them are settling for the 35-hour workweek, giving up on their desperate attempt to identify with the top of a hierarchy that, at a fundamental level, fails to recognize its children. It is clear that the previous model is no longer relevant, even if many have not yet realized that. Fortunately, new modes of operation are now appearing (project- or network-based models, outsourcing, etc.), which no longer depend on this sinister hierarchical identification, but require and reinforce explicitness, individuation, focusing on tasks and contracts, personal initiative, instead of relying on implicitness, identification with the group, feudal relationships, authoritarianism, and passivity.

#### HIERARCHIES IN SERVICES

A significant expression of the French hierarchical relationship in the area of services to customers is the wish on the part of the salespersons to be right vis-à-vis their customers. Salespersons consider this as a way of gaining the upper hand over customers, therefore reversing the relationship of hierarchical dependence in which they experience themselves as servants. Thus, customers who bring a complaint are generally viewed from the start with suspicion, perceived at the onset as troublemakers, cheats, and abusive masters. What I have called the "porous border" between individuals makes it possible for the salespersons to see themselves in the position of the customers,

confusing the perspective of the latter with their own, as in the following dialogue. Customer, "I was told on the phone that..." Saleswoman, "That couldn't have happened in this way, since we never do that." This redefining of other people's worlds is significant in that the saleswoman appropriates the right to violate the personal experience of the customer, with the consequences that can be imagined in terms of escalation of the argument. When "those in charge" are called to the rescue, they usually side with the staff, for several reasons: because of the hierarchy and solidarity within the company that are shown in the ironical diagram above (Figure 5), the customers being perceived as standing outside the company; because, like overlords who are supposed to protect their vassals, they know that "their" salespersons will remain part of their team and that they will have to deal with them for a long time to come.

#### QUESTIONS OF PRINCIPLE

"Just imagine, Sir, what would happen if everybody asked me for the same thing!" Such a hypothesis is only mentioned because it is not plausible—the point is, not "everybody" asks for the same thing, and the likelihood that it would happen is infinitesimal. But this is a typically French way of immediately placing things at the level of theoretical considerations and principles. "Questions of principle" are assumed to stand above all other considerations, especially those considerations that rise from ordinary reality, which is contingent by nature.

An essential difference between French people and Americans is that the former believe they know what is good for others and make decisions for them. The unrealistic character of such a model preserves dependence and reinforces the spirit of insubordination, fueling the French pattern in which submission alternates with rebellion.

For the French, it goes without saying that doctors are omniscient and conversely that patients know nothing, these two assumptions reinforcing each other in a circular pattern. As a result, patients have limited recourse to resources of prevention and therapy. Recently,

more and more patients have started to get information on the Internet before consulting their physicians, which many physicians resent, seeing it as a questioning of the illusion of their exclusive access to knowledge. In the same way, by definition, teachers know what students must learn (even in college), and students have no say about it. As a result, teaching operates on the mode of replication rather than discovery or co-construction. Exclusive reasoning prevents the possibility of seeking intermediate points of shared knowledge and co-responsibility, and it preserves the hierarchies and the illusion of the omnipotence of some and therefore of the impotence of all others.

The prevailing model is that of the civil servant, invested by the state with a scrap of republican sacredness, and therefore unquestionable. There is a schizophrenic juxtaposition of a democratic discourse, implying the accountability of elected officials to the voters, with the unaccountability of the bureaucrats, who in the upper echelons are the new priests of the Civil Service, and in the lower ones are the owners of a scrap of authority fiercely defended by the members of the same category.

Engineers, deciders and civil servants collectively believe that they rank above customers, employees, and users. As a result, road signs are not checked in the field, and nobody monitors how drivers and pedestrians really fare, even when the signs were only designed for people who already know the neighborhood or the region. As for the others, they can just stay at home! Instructions are given without verifying with those in the field whether they can be implemented. Companies do not take into consideration how consumers actually use their products, which—since the King cannot be wrong—are supposed to be perfect from the start and exclusively used for their original purpose. In any case, if something does not work, that must be the customers' fault. As a consequence, a considerable source of innovation is lost. The Japanese have understood this: within their own feudal hierarchy, they place the customers above the company rather than below. The emphasis placed by Americans on tasks rather than on relationships makes it easier for them to deal with the

latter when they have to change a particular procedure. Since they are less concerned about the change being interpreted as a personal criticism of those who were in charge of the previous procedure, they have fewer qualms about bringing about change, which can thus occur more frequently and easily than in French organizations.

Anybody who has experienced both of France and the United States can verify every day that mistakes of all kinds occur more often in the former than in the latter. When you complain about those mistakes, a frequent retort is, "Anybody can make mistakes." Notice the semantic shift in the reply: the issue is not whether or not everybody can make mistakes (of course they can—and the purpose of the retort was precisely to obtain this inevitable assent), but that a specific mistake was made by this particular person or his or her organization, in this precise case rather than in general, and that it should be accounted for. The diversion of the question, or of the confrontation, through a defensive generalization makes it possible for the author of the mistake or his or her colleagues not to accept accountability for the mistake, in what must be called a culture of unaccountability<sup>iii</sup>.

American individuation and relationships between salespersons and customers that are more equal and focused on the task give sales and services there a different nature, as French tourists visiting the United States often notice. The salespersons' attention is focused on the task at hand, which is to serve the customers in such a way that they will be happy, talk about it, and return to the store, generate profits, etc.—rather than on the customers themselves. Customers are viewed as the means to perform this task. Performance of the task follows a codified procedure learned through a very precise training that is implemented to the letter. As seen from within American culture, this "instrumentalization" of the customers is not regarded as hypocritical, whereas it would be viewed as such within French culture. The customers exist separately and independently from the salespersons, who just need to perform their tasks and have no qualms about being in the position of performers of tasks defined by others.

As for American customers, they expect neither loving embraces

nor haughty rejections. They merely expect to be served with competence and courtesy, and will not hesitate to complain if either of those qualities is lacking. Customers who register complaints are presumed to be acting in good faith. Supervisors usually side with the customers. The story of the director of a Nordstrom store in Alaska, who refunded a dissatisfied customer for the purchase of two tires, has become legend: Nordstrom does not sell tires... Salespersons who would insist on being right at the expense of their customers would not last long in American stores. Finally, in a win-win perspective, a large part of the salespersons' compensation is usually tied to their meeting quantified objectives, which reinforces the clarity of their task, all the more so because they are soon dismissed if they do not meet those objectives.

#### MASTERS AND SERVANTS

In *Democracy in America*, a book that is still relevant because of the remarkable insight of its author and because the core characteristics of American culture have remained the same for more than two centuries, Tocqueville wrote, "At any moment a servant may become a master, and he aspires to rise to that condition; the servant is therefore not a different man from the master. Why, then, has the former a right to command, and what compels the latter to obey except the free and temporary consent of both their wills? Neither of them is by nature inferior to the other; they only become so for a time, by covenant. Within the terms of this covenant the one is a servant, the other a master; beyond it they are two citizens of the commonwealth, two men. [...] In their innermost convictions, the master and the servant no longer perceive any deep-seated difference between them, and they neither hope nor fear to meet with either at any time. They are therefore subject neither to disdain nor to anger, and they discern in each other neither humility nor pride. The master holds the contract of service to be the only source of his power, and the servant regards it as the only cause of his obedience. They do not quarrel about their reciprocal situations, but each knows his own and keeps it. [...] On their part, masters require nothing of their servants but the

faithful and rigorous performance of the covenant; they do not ask for marks of respect, they do not claim their love or devoted attachment; it is enough that, as servants, they are exact and honest.”

This says it all, and so beautifully!

Voltaire’s language was no less elegant when he wrote, in *Letters on England*<sup>iv</sup>, “In France the title of marquis is given gratis to any one who will accept of it; and whosoever arrives at Paris from the midst of the most remote provinces with money in his purse, and a name terminating in *ac* or *ille*, may strut about, and cry, ‘Such a man as I! A man of my rank and figure!’ and may look down upon a trader with sovereign contempt; while the trader on the other side, by thus often hearing his profession treated so disdainfully, is fool enough to blush at it. However, I need not say which is most useful to a nation; a lord, powdered in the tip of the mode, who knows exactly at what o’ clock the king raises and goes to bed, and who gives himself airs of grandeur and state, at the same time that he is acting the slave in the antechamber of a prime minister, or a merchant, who enriches his country, dispatches orders from his counting-house to Surat and Cairo, and contributes to the felicity of the world.”

Where are the Voltaires of today?

#### LEVELS OF REQUIREMENT AND FINISH

French people are sometimes surprised by the lack of sophistication of some American products, for instance, household appliances, cars, computers (except for Apple; as for Microsoft, it is often accused of favoring speed over sophistication), whereas the French would have invested much time in designing the most elegant solutions possible: they have a culture of aesthetics and a mathematical spirit. What matters to Americans is to provide the simplest product that will fill a given purpose; in some cases, this involves “giving your best,” and then they have no qualms about allocating significant budgets, but in other cases that is not necessary, and the minimum that will meet the purpose is enough. As for the French, their hesitation to commit themselves, to take risks, to let go of their products—as if the

products were their children—lead them to procrastination and perfectionism. Conversely, Americans are generally more demanding regarding finish, and “good enough” does not apply. French resumes are rarely up to American standards. This does not merely involve basic mistakes, such as mentioning the candidate’s date of birth or failing to indicate, using action verbs, quantitative results obtained, but also inaccurate spelling and punctuation and improper English. Americans have no patience for what they call sloppiness<sup>v</sup>.

#### AMERICAN SUBSIDIARIES OF FRENCH COMPANIES

I have interviewed CEOs and senior executives of many French companies in different sectors, as well as in their subsidiaries in the United States. The consistency of their topics of complaints is evidence that the phenomena involved are related to issues of national rather than company cultures.

The following is a composite scenario, based on real elements taken from different sources. The American head of the subsidiary, who is not familiar with French culture, is summoned to the Parisian headquarters to discuss corporate goals for the next budget term with his French boss. He returns to the United States, glad that this has been taken care of, although a few points have not been completely clarified. He expects that he will be able to work within a clear framework over the next period and will be evaluated based on the bottom line, under the terms he negotiated through his lawyers when he was hired—a procedure that had been found “a little surprising” by Parisian executives. Then one of them calls him and lets him understand that “it would be favorably viewed” if he were to take on the French executive’s godson as an intern—although the godson does not have any particular qualifications.

From then on he keeps receiving requests for precise figures on various minor points; then a young auditor turns up, producing a large stack of reports that are immediately sent back to France. Finally, while the stated goals remain the same, a key resource is taken from him without prior warning, when he naively believed he

was responsible for the results involved. Then a member of the French “upper management” to whom he does not directly report, who happens to be there on a visit to the subsidiary, tells him over lunch, “You shouldn’t take all this goals business too seriously; as for me, this is not the way I judge people.” When asked what he means exactly, he just shrugs the question off and exhales a puff of smoke.

Seriously unsettled over the following months by the apparently unnecessary requests he keeps receiving, unrelated to the goals that were agreed upon, the American dares to say no to one of them, claiming that he cannot at the same time meet it and dedicate the necessary amount of time to reaching the results expected by the headquarters. This crime of *lèse-majesté* is very badly received in Paris. Very harsh comments are made. “We’re not going to let this *Yankee* start telling us what to do,” they say. Without consulting with him, they decide to give him a French assistant who is an old hand in the company. You guessed it; this trusted man is the one who will “temporarily” take over the subsidiary after the American is gone.

Two different cultures have clashed. The first is an explicit one, focused on the contract and the results expected; the other is a largely implicit and personalized one that relies on individual trust and is heavily influenced by a feudal mentality. These two cultures are radically incompatible with each other. This is all the more so when each party is a prisoner of its own logic and incapable of stepping back to gain the necessary perspective, to realize that since the culture of the other party is a different one, a meta-communication is required, at the level we have called the sixth cross-cultural level<sup>i</sup>. Fortunately, some French corporations have been able to adopt a more “American” mode of operation, quite successfully for some of them. Yet it is not certain that they have been able to completely free themselves from all remnants of the feudal mentality.

i Martine Laval, personal communication.

ii According to the psychiatrist Jean-Pierre Lablanchy, this is the source of a perverse tendency in the French character. Personal communication.

- iii See the considerable resistance of the French administration to adopting the use of name-tags that would be readable by citizens or users of services.
- iv Written in English by Voltaire in 1733.
- v This term has no exact counterpart in French, which is always significant.
- vi See Chapter 1—Cultural Development.

#### TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

- a Characters in Gustave Flaubert’s last and eponymous novel.
- b Former French President.
- c Former member of the leadership of the French Socialist Party.
- d Counterpart of, “To be at everybody’s beck and call.” Literally, “To be required to pay taxes and perform work at will.” This phrase designated the condition of ordinary people under the *Ancien Régime*.

## CHAPTER 8

### TIME

As Edward T. Hall clearly demonstrated in *The Hidden Dimension* and *The Dance of Life*,<sup>1</sup> American culture is “monochronous,” which is to say that only one thing is done at a time. The bijective relation between a task and the time that is needed to perform it is consistent with the sequential character that characterizes processes: one thing at a time and one time for each thing. Each task must be finished on time, particularly meetings and appointments, so that the next meeting or appointment can start at the expected time.

The endemic lateness of the French can be interpreted as a transgression of an explicit or tacit commitment made in relation to time. Being late for a meeting or allowing a meeting to start late (or setting from the start a schedule without intending to follow it, such as the so-called “fifteen-minute break” in French universities), is a way of implicitly showing that you do not feel bound to a strict observance of the time-contract—or that you give up on holding others to it. This amounts to a kind of denial of power. You deny the power of whoever could appeal to observance of the punctuality rule, or you relinquish your own power of demanding punctuality on the part of others. Or, conversely, you exercise your power to disregard the rule. There is a collusion between those who are late and those who absolve them for it, which symbolically indicates their complicity in transgressing the time-contract. At the same time, pun not intended, the fact that one of the parties has the power of absolving the other indicates the hierarchical character of their relationship.

Lateness is the cost incurred for reminding everybody of who is the more important. The fact that only certain people are allowed to be late makes it possible to situate their relative positions in the power and status hierarchy. The highest-ranking individuals can also make this hierarchy apparent by reminding others of their duties, but

that is done at the cost of others' losing face—unless of course this is done within a clearly contractual framework that has been accepted by all parties, a hypothesis that cannot be completely excluded...

Similar remarks could be made regarding money, debt being substituted for lateness.

At an individual level, lateness is also the sign of an attachment. You are late for the next activity on the program because you were unable to detach yourself from the last one (appointment, meeting). Americans, who have fewer more tenuous attachments, find it easier to bring appointments and meetings to an end and to be on time for the next.

#### RHYTHMS

Both the French and the Americans follow two distinct modes as far as rhythms are concerned. For the French, the Prince can take his time; in any case, no one can impose a rhythm upon him. Proceeding slowly is a sign of power, sometimes the only one that is available to civil servants, along with the power to speed things up by special favor, and the power to say no. However, emergencies may occur. They are dealt with in a heroic mode. Shells dating back to World War I were allowed to keep decaying at Vimy for over eighty years, since the army believed them to be indestructible. That had also been the case of the Maginot line... Then, probably because yperite leaks had been detected—a fact the population was not informed of because one shouldn't scare the children—the evacuation of some twelve thousand people was heroically organized within eight days.

In the United States, processes are accompanied by pre-established sequencings, which have their own rhythms. As a consultant, I have had the opportunity to observe the primordial importance of the time factor in Silicon Valley (see Appendix 3, "Manager or Emerger?").

#### MEMORIES

As Fons Trompenaars<sup>ii</sup> showed, Americans mostly focus on the future and the present, whereas the French assign more value to the past. This is related to the optimism and pragmatism of the former and the pessimism and attachment to roots of the latter. In his memoirs, George Bush (Sr.) expressed his surprise that Mitterrand always began their encounters with historical explanations, the relevance of which Bush confessed he did not quite see—and it is not certain that his son, in spite of his Yale and Harvard education, goes beyond his father in this respect. Kissinger was an exception, but his recent European origin places him in a slightly different situation. American children show no interest in history because, in their view, it is useless. Individuals are assigned value based on what they can do for you today, not on their past glory. As a whole, few nations have as short a memory as the Americans.

#### PILLARS OF SALT

It is said that it makes sense for Americans not to be focused on the past because they do not have a long history behind them. I am convinced that, were a thousand years to be added to their meter, nothing would be changed. Their propensity to focus on the future seems to me to be, at an individual level, the direct result of their very early weaning and the prohibition against looking back. The depressive attitude that consists of yearning for a lost Eden is not made available to them by their mother or, later, by the social environment. There is a genuine American prohibition against depression, which is considered an ailment that can and must be immediately treated, rather than a shameful and irreversible disease whose existence and causes must not be mentioned, as in France. The bias in favor of the future, which is omnipresent in the education of American children, is probably a consequence of the difficulties the pioneers encountered, since they owed their survival to a resolutely optimistic attitude, consistently focused on solving the next challenge; in the hostile environment of early American history, natural selection did the

rest, and later the mythology of the conquest permanently set the national character.

Conversely, like Japanese culture, and for the same reason—an attachment to the mother that remains unresolved by weaning—French culture is primarily focused on the past. In the unconscious of those un-weaned nations, any change is experienced as a separation. Change is thus painful and must be proscribed. Culture must remain implicit, because too much explicitness would run the risk of leading to changes. Individuation is loathsome, because individual initiative could expose the group's dogmas and make them irrelevant. An excess of contractual relationships is dangerous, because it would lead to accountability for the consequences of the actions performed, as opposed to an impunity that is comforting for the beneficiaries of the established order. The importance assigned to aesthetics within the social realm cannot be explained by any Platonic attraction to beauty, the good, or truth, but by the fact that the source of beauty is found in tradition, which beauty endows with value by referring to it.

Nuance makes it possible for cultures that value the past more than the future to introduce variations and avoid an excess of repetition, without breaking their attachments. In order to remain focused on the future, a culture needs to make clear-cut choices possible, breaking with attachments and tradition.

The American win-win mentality is only possible because of the focus on the future. It is because you believe that tomorrow will be better than today that you can work with others at finding creative solutions in order to increase the size of the shared pie. Focusing on the past or believing that tomorrow will be even worse than today imposes a defensive withdrawal in order to preserve the status quo.

## TIME AND WORK

Decreasing the duration of the workweek is not only an attempt to reduce unemployment by sharing available work. It could only have been imagined and implemented because there is an un-stated consensus among the French—except for CEOs and some executives,

retailers, and professionals—to work as little as possible. This makes sense, since the French do not give the impression that they enjoy working, at least when placed in a situation of subordination (something Americans do not mind doing)<sup>iii</sup>. Americans living in France are surprised by the complex calculations French wage-earners perform in order to extend the length of long weekends and holidays, as well as by the duration of vacations, since in the United States employees only have three, sometimes two weeks of vacation per year for their first five years with a company, only ten holidays, and no extended weekends to speak of. When setting up appointments or meetings, French executives often choose a somewhat distant date, whereas Americans usually choose the earliest date possible; the French often do not start performing any relevant work until the meetings have taken place, whereas Americans actively engage with the relevant work in advance.

Americans are conditioned from their school days to place work above anything else and to regard themselves as responsible for their professional future. It is easy to have them work early in the morning, at night or on weekends when necessary. For a long time, unionized companies (now only employing 17% of industrial workers) were paid double wages for Sunday overtime. This is generally no longer the case, and salespersons are even often paid normal wages on Sundays. In France, the law mandates that stores be closed on Sundays, even though some flexibility has gradually been introduced. This is clear evidence that work is not placed above everything else. All this validates the aphorism according to which the French work in order to make a living, whereas the Americans live in order to work<sup>iv</sup>.

i Hall, Edward T., *The Hidden Dimension*. Garden City, NY. Anchor Press/Doubleday. 1966. *The Dance of Life*. Garden City, NY. Anchor Press/Doubleday. 1983.

ii Trompenaars, F. & Hampden-Turner, C. *Riding the Waves of Culture, Understanding Cultural Diversity in Business*. Nicholas Brealey. 2nd edition. 1997. (London. Economist Books. 1993).

iii I am not referring to the pride that can be derived from well-performed work, which is a different issue.

iv It is worth mentioning that the French word for "work," "travail" derives from the Latin word "tripalium," which means "torture."

## CHAPTER 9

# THE CENTRAL TABOO OF FRENCH CULTURE

French “schizophrenia” is often discussed, and the term is frequently mentioned in the literature on the French. This is an improvement, since achieving awareness is the first and necessary step toward a resolution; yet the word, when it is only used in a metaphorical sense, can have an effect of concealment. What is so difficult to understand from within is that this is not merely a metaphor. It seems to me that when a certain number of cultural characteristics of the French are considered together, the clinical chart of an actual schizophrenic syndrome emerges.

I will only indicate a few of the directions that I will let readers follow on their own, and I will suggest a combination of observation and reflection, leaving some time for a serious work of decantation to be performed on a topic that is not easy to grasp, since it is well concealed under our very eyes, at the core of French culture. Because of the intense denial and resistance this topic brings about when I mention it in France, I intend to return to it in other works on cultural schizophrenia, which seems to me to be nothing less than the central taboo of French culture.

### THE SCHIZOPHRENIC SPLIT

Occurring against the background of a split between Gauls and Romans and the schizophrenic split that pits mother and child against the outside world, the prohibition against sex (except for procreation purposes) and money (except for subsistence purposes) that was imposed by the dominant French religion, Catholicism, amounts for ordinary mortals to an unrealistic condemnation, and it necessarily implies transgression and doublespeak, “Do it, but don’t show

it."<sup>i</sup> For Catholics, this transgression is not as serious as it may appear, since most of them believe that their sins can be absolved. It also ensures the permanence of a feeling of guilt, which is legitimized by the dogma of Original Sin. Knowing that you are permanently guilty encourages a hypocritical and cynical attitude, involving a visible, official, and public behavior, and also a different and concealed one. This dichotomy has a schizophrenic nature. But this is not all.

According to a French dogma that has been taught since the time of Pascal, "The self is loathsome." This distance from oneself, which is mandated by the culture and is the unconscious counterpart of the imposition of a tyrannical superego and of the prohibition against pleasure, has a schizophrenic character in the way it establishes a border within the self. The excessive criticism received during childhood, in particular through such judgments as, "You are incapable" (whether they are stated or expressed by a delayed weaning), induce a split between the primary experience of the child ("I am what I am") and the word coming from the adults ("I am what I am told that I am").

Schizophrenia occurs in individuals when the cognitive and emotional model through which they make sense of the real world and on which they base their behavior is being systematically and permanently invalidated by those around them, especially by authority figures, during the formative phases of their personality. This is followed by their setting up of interpretive schemas of the real world that are overly narrow and rigid, preventing an efficient adaptation to their environment and leading them to exclusively select within a given context the information that reinforces the prevailing model and to refuse to take into account what could undermine the imposed cognitive schema.

To some extent, this tendency is a normal one in every human being. I think it could even be said that the theory of cognitive dissonance<sup>iii</sup> is a foundation of every culture and that, for culture to exist, some amount of shared schizophrenia is necessary. Only when this phenomenon takes on an acute form can it be actually considered as

schizophrenia in the clinical sense. This involves a difference in the degree rather than in the nature of the phenomenon. This view also makes it possible to avoid taking the superior position of psychiatrists, who reinforce the problem by placing themselves above ordinary people, introducing a split between themselves (as good) and their patients (as bad), which tends to induce schizophrenia.

However, it must be realized that the worldview that children are taught by their parents and teachers and that is echoed by their peers, who are constantly critical, along with an apparent valorization of children as if they were kings—not allowed to really be children and forced to be spurious kings—creates a dysfunctional cognitive schema. The final touch is a chronic invalidation of the children's feelings ("That's nothing," "No crying," etc.).

Children learn to establish the split that is necessary for them to later become full members of adult society through apparent submission as well as through concealed disobedience—a disobedience that is in fact tolerated (since it does not bring any real punishment) by the parents and the schools, in order to let children learn schizophrenia. Children must assimilate both the real rule ("You manage") and the apparent rule ("You do what you are officially supposed to do"). This complex attitude, which replicates that of earlier generations, allows them to play their role in the game.

#### THE DOUBLE BIND

According to the School of Palo Alto, schizophrenia sets in when individuals are placed over a long period in a double bind that they cannot resolve by making it explicit or by escaping from it. Technically, a double bind occurs for an entity of lesser status and/or power and includes three elements: an injunction ("Do what I tell you") received from a higher entity; an opposite injunction also received from the higher entity but situated at a logically higher level and governing the first injunction ("Don't do what I do"); finally, a prohibition against explicitly expressing the contradiction mentioned above. Thus, simultaneously conveying the overt message,

“Go ahead” and the concealed message, “You’re not capable of it,” while prohibiting any mention of this contradiction, is a schizophrenia-inducing behavior. I did not choose this example at random. This intolerable tension creates a split within the subject between a part of him that wants something and another part that governs the other and cannot obtain that thing. This schizophrenic split is made stable by internalizing the prohibition against talking about it—making it impossible to even see it, through the power of the reiteration of the prohibition. This undermining of *awareness* (a word that has no exact counterpart in French<sup>iv</sup>) allows the split to become permanent because escaping it would require: 1. becoming aware of it; 2. accepting it instead of investing energy in denial or resistance; finally, 3. changing. The third step cannot be accomplished if the first two have not been.

The French “either/or” has a different nature than the American dualistic thinking. The latter establishes dualistic classifications between elements situated at the same logical level: either “I know it as a fact,” or “I don’t know it as a fact;” either A or B. One is not better than the other, which echoes the founding act of the United States—making relationships equal—and the relationships between parents and children, in which the latter are regarded as autonomous beings. Under close examination, it becomes clear that the two branches of the French “either/or” alternative are not situated at the same level, or that one of the branches is hidden. For instance, I have heard a French civil servant state this exemplary instance of “either/or,” “Either you’re in civil service or you fill your pockets.” The two branches of the alternative appear to be situated at the same level. In fact, the whole statement should be compared to another one, which amounts to the second, concealed branch of a more devious “either/or:” “Financial success is prohibited.” Since this is concealed, it is out of reach. Readers can see what a long journey I had to take in order to state that alternative, even though I am not under any threat of being interrupted by an attempt to keep this contradiction in the dark.

### COMBINED FACTORS

Three characteristics of French culture combine with each other to ensure its schizophrenic nature: the tyranny of implicitness, weak individuation, and the predominance of hierarchical relationships.

The highly implicit character of French culture and the stated or un-stated prohibitions against explicitness make it possible to preserve the burden of the double bind, making it impossible to reveal it in order to free oneself from it: breaching those prohibitions would bring accusations of impoliteness, naivety, ridicule, or lack of intelligence, and even threats of physical or symbolic violence.

In this respect, the weak individuation of the French has two effects. At the primary level, the symbiosis between mother and child that pits them against external reality is in itself schizophrenia-inducing because it forces upon the child—against his or her natural perception, but more forcefully than this perception—a split view of the whole, made up by the mother and external reality. At the secondary level, the inner split between the part of the self that is embraced and the one that is excluded (disowned) leads the child to seek to restore completeness by appropriating a part of others. Hence, the fantasy that each person owns a part of the other and is to some degree owned and governed by the other.

Finally, French hierarchical relationships give rise to the dominator/dominated model, this dialectic of collusion between the master and the slave that is indispensable in preventing an early rebellion of the subject against the attempt by the dominator to induce schizophrenia. Subjects who have not been able to make the schizophrenia-inducing double bind explicit or to escape it withdraw into autistic behavior or retain a wish for revenge that seeks a forceful and even violent expression against other subjects identified as being in a position of weakness (clients, subjected persons, the handicapped, women, foreigners, and children).

### SIX CASES OF VIOLENCE

The underpaid, badly treated, never praised, and generally ignored

saleswoman can only avenge herself on her customers. The nice lady at the window in the state administration office, whose fate is not much better than that of the saleswoman, can only take it out on the constituents. Both of them make use of the weapons that are provided to them by their institution: for the saleswoman, a haughty coldness toward customers, which is tolerated by an intermediate hierarchy that is also in a situation of double bind; for the civil servant, a maze of regulations that gives her the power to say no. By acting in this manner, both of them believe that they can attain a dominant position, whereas they are only becoming the instruments of the replication of a schizophrenia-inducing system.

The particularly barbaric attitude of the French toward the handicapped seems to me to be another instance of this attitude; the way most French people deny the existence of this problem is very revealing. It involves a kind of concealed collective violence, in which the handicapped are victimized and are not supposed to complain when they are deviously allowed to lose their way within the mazes of administrations and of physical buildings. It may be that, at an unconscious level, they remind the French too strongly of their inner wound, in the same way as the stage director who made *Parsifal* wear his wound as an external object on his side. In any case, everything is done so that the handicapped will not be too visible.

In a society that has been historically dominated by men, who for centuries had the legal right to beat women, and then, until 1935, to impose physical punishment upon them, and in which women have only had the right to vote since 1944, it is not surprising that their slow rise would not have yet reached its goal. In spite of certain breakthroughs, the glass ceiling is still firmly in place within companies. I have often heard apparently good-faith statements such as, "We can't promote women, since we can't find any." In fact, what this involves is the unconscious refusal by males to find themselves once again under the domination of an overly controlling mother, whom they do not want to find once again within their territory, in a kind of reversal of the Greek *idion* and *koïnon*<sup>vi</sup>.

The hazing to which foreigners are subjected in order to be

assimilated into French society is in fact a rite of passage and a verification that they are playing by the rules. Conversely, Americans living in the United States are deemed to be naive, and to be taking appearances for realities, innocent as they are. Their posture as givers of morality lessons is absolutely intolerable to the French because the latter know quite well that they do not do what they say and that they manage not to be accountable for their actions: this is a condition of survival within French culture, a survival skill that they have learned in order to be able to dys-function in a normal way, like the others. This makes them unhappy, and even depressed—which is to say that their anger is turned against themselves—because they are not allowed to express it, but they have no choice, at least that is what they believe, since they have internalized the parental prohibition. There is no need to try to explain that to them, since they already know it—at least at an unstated level.

As for children, are they not the ideal subjects at the expense of whom the adults who have been rendered schizophrenic can perform the reversal they have so much wished for? Not only are children at first unaware that they are being subjected to an attempt to make them schizophrenic, but when they begin to realize it, it is easy to force them to remain silent. And then, children so strongly remind adults of the subjects they used to be that it allows the tyrannical superego of adults, which is a result of the split, to exercise its violence against an imaginary replica of their weakened selves. We thus see that the excessive ownership of French children by their mother, which is supposedly meant to protect young children, conceals a stifling characteristic that explains how eager the French later are to make occasional attempts to reassure themselves of their ability to be independent—through counter-dependency, in fact.

It is clear that normal American behavior does not involve an attempt to overly dominate customers, constituents, the handicapped, women, foreigners, and children. We will later see, however, evidence of an American schizophrenia at the level of international affairs.

### “THIS HERO WITH A GENTLE GAZE”

Within typical French families, the position assigned to the father—that of the authority figure—deserves attention. He is supposed to symbolize the law, but in fact the law he embodies is infinitely variable. This is a crucial point if we are to understand how cultural schizophrenia is transmitted. Parental arbitrariness, which is sublimated and later echoed by institutional arbitrariness, plays a central part in the development of the schizophrenic split. Appeals to authority (“Why?” “Because I said so”), followed by an inevitable verbal and sometimes physical escalation, make it possible to replace a reality-based situation, which would encourage a culture focused on tasks, by a power-based situation, embodied in a culture focused on hierarchical relationships. The decisions that are made to enforce or not to enforce the rule, more fully one day and less so the next, clearly—but in a way that makes any explicit questioning impossible—convey the fact that the only predictable element upon which children can rely is the arbitrariness of parents or, more generally, of authority figures, particularly at school. This conditioning induces in the child the replacement of a “cause and effect” model of understanding of the world by another model that is based on arbitrary power.

This arbitrariness is embodied in an unpredictable wavering of the exercise of authority, which results in erratic variations in the whole of the system. Since each of the agents involved (whether they are individuals or institutions) must protect himself from those unpredictable and potentially dangerous deviations, he ensures his own safety by dissociating himself from others, resulting in a scattering effect that is typical of schizophrenic systems. What matters above all is not to stand out—“in order to be happy, let us remain hidden” (especially if things are working out)—and not to be held accountable in any way if things go wrong.

All French people play this game; most of them, once they have become adults, try to reverse the hierarchy between dominant and dominated party; the institutions are built by people who were immersed in this system when they were children. The result is a society that is not only schizophrenic at a given time, but is also

adept at replicating the schizophrenic model in a stable manner.

In France, fathers waver between absence and tyranny in order to escape the control of the omnipotent mother, which they do either by fleeing or by escalating confrontations. As a result, the father is not there when he is needed to play the part that should be his: removing the child from the mother’s control. The merging between mother and child, thus extended for too long a period, induces schizophrenia in that it introduces within the child a split from external reality, instead of the relationship that should develop between subject and object. The excessive presence of the mother makes a culture topple into schizophrenia, whereas the excessive presence of the father would make it topple into neurosis. The institutions, which have been willed and designed by the adults that these children have become, replicate this mothering and even stifling attitude, overprotecting individuals who are regarded as constituents of administrations, and end up reinforcing non-individuation in a destructive vicious cycle.

### PLATO’S CAVE

Maintained in their un-weaned condition, first in a symbiosis with the mother, and then against their will, but still finding secondary benefits in this condition, French children, and eventually French adults, can only see things taking place without them in the shadow-theater of external reality. Their inability to seize the real world leads them to escape from it into a delusion of omnipotence, which forms the basis of hierarchical relationships. Since they cannot have a hold on the real world, they are forced to idealize it, thus escaping into a world of ideas and permanent criticism. Their position outside of the world of the living condemns them to irresponsibility. It is the basis of the French schizophrenic split.

The notion of the “French exception,” which has no counterpart in other nations, deserves to be questioned: what do the French want to be released from? From reality itself. They want the mother to sign a waiver in order to explain to the schoolmistress—who will act as an

accomplice—that the poor little one is indisposed and therefore cannot be in class. The French exception is a note from your parents meant to excuse you from the confrontation with everyday reality and an uncertain future.

As for American children, who were pushed too early out into the real world, a world that is not yet theirs, they are compelled to displace into the real world the omnipotence that was provided by the protected environment, the lost Eden from which they were excluded by their early weaning. But children can only have an incomplete view of the adult world, and the nation that sees itself as a great protector of the planet is in fact the leading predator of the natural environment. Having too much self-confidence and not prone to questioning things, it tends to be overbearing, which reinforces its limited and unsubtle worldview.

As a result, whereas the French delay implementation as long as possible, through studies, conceptualization, diplomacy, and endless debates, Americans are obsessed by immediate action, testing and learning, military intervention, and swift prototyping. The French, who are released from the compulsion to act, are better prepared for holistic thinking and complexity, establishing connections between apparently unconnected components of the real world, to which they are better able to bring simultaneous consideration. Conversely, Americans are content with only acting upon the modules that are within direct reach and under their own responsibility, in a narrower and more specialized worldview, and they are not concerned with global integration.

Being immersed at an early age, sink or swim, into the real world forces Americans to experiment. This constant learning makes it possible for them to recover, by achieving success, the confidence that was undermined by too early a rejection by the mother. Besides, mothers always praise their toddlers on their early successes. Americans are neurotically compelled to succeed, to secure a happy ending. Any failure would reopen the original wound. They therefore redefine as learning experiences what the French would call failures and as challenges what we would call problems. For instance,

unemployment is regarded as a stage in one's work life, if an obviously transitory one, rather than an undermining of one's identity. This makes it easier for American managers to lay off their employees.

#### CIRCULAR REINFORCEMENTS

The concepts of explicitness, individuation, contracts, hierarchical relationships, criticism, and double bind are mutually connected by circular reinforcement loops.

Within French culture, individuation is weak, which restricts the possibility of establishing contracts and preserves implicitness: contracts cannot be established if one of the parties exercises undue influence over the other. The absence of contractual relationships makes relationships of hierarchical domination possible and leaves things un-stated. This prohibits revealing and dissolving the double bind, which preserves both the implicit character of the culture and the weak individuation, as well as the absence of contractual relationships, which also reinforces non-individuation. Hierarchical relationships release agents from contracts and the law, and they go along with criticism, which prevents individuation and reinforces the double bind.

Conversely, within American culture, a strong individuation makes explicitness, equal relationships, and contracts possible; contracts reinforce horizontal relationships and explicitness, allowing for individuation. Explicitness ensures that relationships remain equal and that no double binds develop, which strengthens contracts. Finally, equal relationships make explicitness and contracts possible, reinforcing individuation.

The many circular reinforcements that are present in French and American cultures provide them with great stability.

Figures 6 and 7 illustrate these circular reinforcement loops.

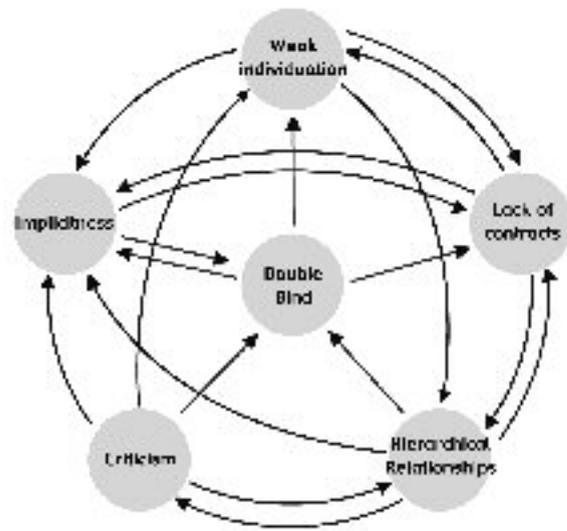


Figure 6. Circular Reinforcement Loops in French Culture

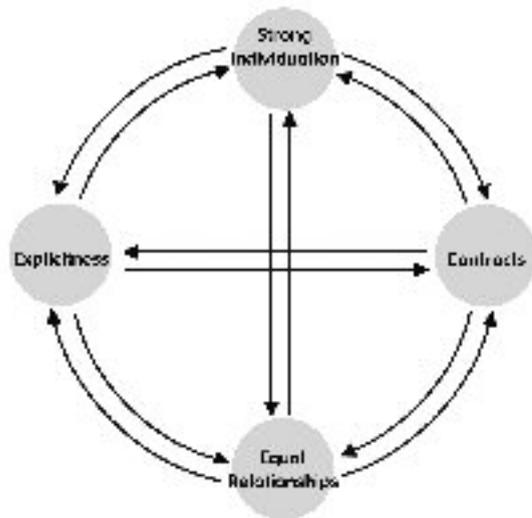


Figure 7. Circular Reinforcement Loops in American Culture

AMERICAN SCHIZOPHRENIA IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

In a mote and beam dialectic, the French are very sensitive to hypocrisy, which they easily detect and often attribute to Americans. They find pleasure in observing the Enron fiasco, the shenanigans of the Arthur Andersen accounting firm, and George W. Bush’s morality lessons. Yet, contrary to the French accusations of hypocrisy, American culture is not essentially schizophrenic in itself, thanks to its emphasis on individual responsibility (which of course does not mean that there are no schizophrenics in the United States!)<sup>vii</sup>. On the other hand, American culture clearly is schizophrenic in international affairs. Whereas Americans are highly respectful of the law in domestic issues, they are known for using every means within their power to impose their will on the rest of the world; what is schizophrenic is this double standard, not their will to dominate in and of itself. They provide disguised subsidies to their aerospace industry while blaming European countries for doing the same; they conduct large-scale spying through the Echelon network and by other means, while denying it; they destabilize other countries through the CIA, but always deny doing so; they spread disinformation in both enemy and friendly countries... These are only a few examples. And they only recognize with the greatest reluctance the legitimacy of international institutions such as the UN, which might enforce their rules upon them.

The radicalization of President Bush on the international stage and his domestic security drift after 9/11 are a cause of concern for the whole world (and even for many Americans), but, draping themselves in the star-spangled banner, Americans seem incapable of understanding the role their Manichaeism plays in a worldwide escalation, in which the very concept of “axis of evil” can only exacerbate tensions in the logic of holy war. The uncertain status deliberately assigned to prisoners at Guantanamo<sup>viii</sup> does not win any international respect for Americans, who usually proclaim more respect for the law (at least within their borders, which explains this cynical resort to a territory located outside of those borders). This kind of behavior is not unprecedented in periods of international tension.

The decision President Roosevelt made in 1942 to intern the Japanese residing in the United States remains one of the darkest pages in this country's history, along with the excesses of McCarthyism. America needs an enemy, an external echo of an overly delineated split between good and evil. Immediately following 9/11, 61% of the American people wanted to wage war, yet 62% did not know against whom it should be waged. However, one should not try to impose on the United States a double bind that would prohibit it from defending itself after the heart of its physical, symbolic and financial homeland was attacked. What would France have done in its place?

What matters is not to criticize the American mode of operation *per se*, and my purpose is not to award morality prizes, even if it is in the nature of any French person to wonder which side I favor<sup>ix</sup>. Besides, the French could be blamed for similar transgressions in every one of the categories I mentioned above; the subsidies provided to Airbus are not necessarily more legitimate than those provided to Boeing; the industrial espionage Bull is believed to have conducted in the past in Silicon Valley does not necessarily deserve more praise than the "new missions" of American intelligence agencies; Foccart's actions in Africa were not necessarily more fair than those of the CIA in Latin America, and the exactions committed by the French during the Algerian war were not necessarily more morally acceptable than those committed by the Americans in El Salvador. My purpose is merely to point out the double standard that is applied by Americans, which is significant in that it seems schizophrenic, since the United States believes itself to be a moral country in domestic affairs but allows itself the worst behavior in international ones. My purpose being to reach understanding rather than to render judgment, the double standard of the French seems to me less worthy of attention, since it is only the natural extension of a culture that has a split at its core.

#### AMERICA ÜBER ALLES

The schizophrenia of Americans in international affairs stands in

contrast to their absence of schizophrenia in domestic ones. Yet, as several cyber-readers have pointed out, how can it be said that Americans are not schizophrenic at home when, until the mid-1960s, they practiced racism against their black fellow countrymen?

This is of course not the case. In fact, Americans are only non-schizophrenic within the space where they define themselves as Americans, constituting an "us" that distinguishes and separates them from the rest of the world. But outside of this "us" space, *America über alles* reigns. Americans have equal relationships among themselves but relationships of domination with non-Americans. All the energy of the founding fathers of the United States of America was dedicated to ensuring that the nation they were creating would not be subject to the arbitrary power of the monarch they had suffered from, under the British colonial order. Their greatest achievement was the establishment of institutions and mechanisms that would permanently guarantee equality in relationships and transparency, due process, and checks and balances in domestic affairs. But during the time of Jefferson, "we" only included wealthy white men; women, slaves, and the poor were excluded. "Colored people" were not recognized as part of the American "us" until 1963, within the framework of the vigorous policy of desegregation implemented by the Kennedy brothers, of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, under Lyndon B. Johnson. It should be noted that the lasting insistence on the part of Americans on voicing opposition to apartheid in South Africa probably implied a mechanism of identification. A similar mechanism has been observed through history among other nations that have switched from the role of victim to that of persecutor, or conversely, and are quicker to notice the mote in others' eyes than the beam in theirs, but the schizophrenic split remains. In any case, America has been able to experience guilt over its role in the institution of slavery. On the other hand, the guilt of a country that was built on the genocide of the Native Americans cannot be accepted as its own, and has been transferred onto the victims of this extermination. This has put the United States on the side of paranoia. It took a long time for American cinema to

abandon its compulsion to show Indians as villains, and by the time it did, the paranoid bend had already been set.

For the French, globalization, the development of regional identities, a large influx of immigrants, and the construction of Europe, in particular the euro, with its significant symbolic content—have changed the meaning of “us,” which has not yet found a stable form. This uncertainty as to collective identity, which has not been compensated by investment in a strong collective project, generates reactions of defensive withdrawal that have a regressive character.

In any case, the resilience of American institutions, along with that of the culture they have generated, has created over more than two centuries a corpus that includes an effectively taught and widely shared belief in “the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness<sup>xi</sup>,” to quote the Declaration of Independence, as well as the principles and practices of equal relationships, the preeminence of contracts, individuation, and transparency. The cost of this great consistency and remarkable stability is a disconnection from international consensus. The problem is that Americans do not bear that cost alone—regarding this issue, it would be interesting to consult the citizens of some Latin American and Asian countries. Americans are wary of international institutions such as the UN, the International Criminal Court, and the Kyoto Protocol as the imposition on them of an external will. They are strongly blamed for this attitude. Yet, in order to preserve the internal consistency of their system, Americans ignore the discourse of those who would present them with an image that does not fit the one they wish to have. As Paul Valéry wrote, “Facts do not enter the realm of beliefs.”

#### THE FRENCH GAME

“Well, there’s theory, and then there’s reality.” This kind of statement usually involves a touch of humor, since speakers are quite aware of the irreconcilable dichotomies it reveals: between grand projects and simple resourcefulness; discourse on values and actual behavior; those who design and those who implement; yesterday and today;

lofty vision and everyday implementation; leaders and ordinary people; what you think and what you say. This element of humor indicates a companionship, as the one that exists between brothers who have learned very early on to pretend to obey the parents or the schoolmistress. Talk away! In France, everybody plays this theory-and-reality game; it has become so ingrained that you do not even realize you are playing it.

However, this behavior involves two significant aspects: collusion and game.

The game is crucial for the French. This can be observed among those who have been living in the United States for a few months, when all of a sudden they realize that they miss the (cheating) game. Confronted with Americans they regard as two-dimensional and too serious, they discover with surprise a need they always had but the importance of which they did not notice until then, because this need had been fulfilled on a daily basis—minute by minute, in fact—in the normal cultural mode of operation of the French (and of the Italians even more). Make-believe is an integral part of French culture. Calling it a game makes it possible to make it appear less important, and also amounts to an acknowledgment of complicity. The complicity that I mentioned, among brothers, is akin to the collusion that exists between parents and children; king and subjects; administration and constituents; management and unions: through make-believe, each party allows the other to dys-function in peace and to take advantage of its status, at the cost of forsaking the mission it is supposed to fulfill. This involves a kind of un-stated win-win-lose, something like, “you let me do my thing, and I’ll act as if you were in charge; and neither of us will be really concerned with what happens to our clients/taxpayers/constituents.” The culture of the split is only possible because you know you will not be held accountable for your actions (or inactions).

The French often fail to tell the truth under the guise of protecting others or of protecting themselves in anticipation against the reactions of others. This type of lying derives from the overprotection of which they were the objects, and even the victims, on the part of their

mother. The entity that is being protected, within others or oneself, is regarded as weak and unable to protect itself on its own. Overprotecting others amounts to considering that, to some extent, others belong to you in a symbiotic mode; overprotecting oneself involves the devalued part of the self—the internal other—that one has not completely made one's own. In both cases, this distortion or redefinition of what constitutes reality is schizophrenic. As they have been gradually progressing on the path toward individuation, the French have been yearning ever more strongly to be told the truth; telling them the truth amounts to helping them to become individuals. This spiral provides a way to escape the French schizophrenia. To the extent that women are often more able to tell the truth than men are, they should be increasingly drawn to playing a leadership role within a French society that is moving toward more explicitness. Male resistance against them partakes of the struggle against the mother's interference (and therefore against the female part that lies within each male) and of the fear, the terror even—camouflaged as machismo—that the schizophrenic split might be exposed. This terror generates violence, which takes on different forms (moral harassment, the silent violence of institutions, physical violence).

A schizophrenic mode of operation usually comes along with a mode of reasoning guided by an "all or nothing" principle. For instance, the response given by civil servants or salespersons to specific requests made by constituents or clients may be, "If everybody behaved as you do...." This entirely hypothetical generalization allows civil servants and salespersons to reject particular requests that they find inconvenient, and to ensure through this rejection the preservation of their dominant position within the hierarchical relationship. Such failures of logic amount to devaluations of components of the real world; taken in isolation, they only indicate a resistance; as frequent occurrences, they are usually symptomatic of schizophrenic dysfunction and therefore worthy of careful examination. In a healthy situation, they are easily corrected as soon as they are pointed out; within a dysfunctional system, confronting them generates an escalation.

## SCHIZOPHRENIA AND INSTITUTIONS

Within this dysfunctional system, there is dissociation into three different roles: the entity that is proclaimed to be sick; the one that suffers; the one that complains. The French never stop grumbling, which is to say that they proclaim that another entity is sick. But their complaints should not be taken at face value: they are in no way intended to cause a change in the system. And if you try to find out who is actually suffering, you discover that it is someone else. For instance, wage-earners go on strike (they complain); the management is designated as incompetent (it is sick); users of services pay the cost (they suffer).

Dysfunctional systems generate splits between different types of agents, and they need this split in order to continue to dysfunction. This circular reinforcement makes those systems very stable. Within French society, those splits are both vertical ones (between classes, levels of responsibility) and horizontal (bureaucratic splits). The director of the ENA School of Administration, herself a former ENA student and member of famed *Conseil d'État*, stated that "the primary vocation of the ENA is to prepare its students for public administration." The objective she assigned herself was to give students "a strong feeling of belonging to the service of the state<sup>xii</sup>." Hence (?), the elimination of internships in the private sector by the reform of 2002. Thus, under the guise of reinforcing the administrative vocation of this respectable school, the split between two worlds that are inseparable in today's society has been increased. This ensures a worsening dysfunction over many years, whereas the introduction of increased economic competition, the construction of Europe, the relative decline of the incestuous system of cross-participation within state capitalism, and a more serious consideration given to the performances of CEOs in determining their careers had threatened to reduce that dysfunction. Public dysfunction is resilient.

Public accounting provides another striking example of schizophrenic dissociation. Ordering, paying, and monitoring are performed by different agents, and none of them is concerned with the relevance of the expenses (which is to say their adequacy in the real

world; agents thus operate within an artificial world, a kind of Wonderland). Administrations are not taken to task by the *Cour des comptes* until several years have passed; what they are blamed for is usually called management mistakes, not misdemeanors; even when misdemeanors did occur, nobody will bear the consequence for them, and dysfunction will continue as before. In *Le Grand Gaspillage : Les vrais comptes de l'État*<sup>iii</sup>, the economist Jacques Marseille estimates that a healthy management of public expenses would generate savings of some 85 billion euros, amounting to ten times the income tax paid by the French. This amount may be debatable, but it is clear that the stakes are enormous. However, such an obviously needed reform as that of Bercy, which would have allowed every taxpayer to deal with only one administration in fiscal matters, failed after a year's work due to the selfish opposition of the unions, and the Minister of Finances, as the designated scapegoat, was disavowed by the Prime Minister.

#### THE FRENCH HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

The French healthcare system, which was supposed to ensure the health of the citizens, suffered a series of implicit restrictions which, by limiting its goals, allowed it to be turned into a closed system conducive to institutional schizophrenia. First, its purpose was restricted to caring for the sick (the "patients"), in a purely therapeutic perspective. Thus, truly preventive medicine would weaken the field of activity of those who derive advantage from the existing healthcare system. At an implicit level at least, the choice was made to encourage individuals to relinquish the responsibility for their own health by relying on healthcare professionals (disease professionals, in fact) instead of providing everyone with a basic healthcare education at school. In addition, a narrow definition of the exercise of medicine was selected, reserving this exercise to the holders of medical diplomas, with a *numerus clausus*, a strictly enforced and excessive restriction of the number of physicians, which was meant to protect the narrow interests of the profession. This prevented other healthcare professionals, such as nurses (a profession that was for a long time

exclusively reserved to women, heirs of the volunteers of World War I, and later underpaid and exploited), from performing so-called medical acts—which were narrowly defined in order to favor the apparent interests of the physicians rather than those of the public. Foreign physicians were prevented from setting up practice in France, first by law, later in fact. It is worth noting that this discrepancy between recognized public needs and the way things actually work has led the so-called healthcare system to create for itself a fictional world, allowing it to escape in a schizophrenic manner from the real needs of the population that the system was supposed to serve. It took about ten years for the *numerus clausus* to be raised, and the policies that were chosen were very incomplete and would not bear fruit for a decade. Interestingly, even the narrow interests of the physicians, which were supposed to be protected, were not. Schizophrenically dysfunctional systems preserve their homeostasis against the threat posed by the real world by secreting shared beliefs that become detached from actual situations, to such a degree that they can become entrenched dogmas that work against the very interests of those who had set them up.

Those in charge of training physicians exercise an absolute power that makes the replication of the system possible, since the double bind cannot be exposed under penalty of being excluded from the system. Physicians are overworked because there are not enough of them; they do not have enough time to dedicate to each patient, and even less to their own continuing education. They have let pharmaceutical laboratories take on a parasitic role within the system, not only in the prescription of medicine but also in what passes for continuing training, through conferences and trips that amount to a form of breach of trust or barely disguised influence peddling. The many mistakes and instances of malpractice that are generated by a dysfunctional system are covered up: when justice is dispensed by peers (in this case, members of the medical profession), it allows any abuse to persist. The system is breaking apart, but its agents are strongly attached to it and keep legitimizing it through all-or-nothing arguments that present it as the only possible system, as is

frequently the case within dysfunctional systems. They also take advantage of this to preserve its closed character, as in the case of the Perruche decree.

The various changes that have been made to the healthcare system, although they are still timid and subject to intense resistance, are conducive to turning a closed system into an open one: raising the *numerus clausus*; allowing foreign physicians to practice their profession in France; giving patients access to their medical files; developing prevention; taking palliative care and the comfort of patients into consideration; setting up rudiments of psychological training and training healthcare providers to listen to their patients; providing for the self-information of patients through the Internet and within support groups; self-medicating; recognizing so-called parallel or traditional forms of medicine; encouraging the information, support, and defense of patients by self-governed associations; allowing the intervention of the civil and criminal legal system; increasing the amount of malpractice awards; limiting certain abuses by pharmaceutical companies. All this is probably only the beginning of a process of renovation.

#### THE LOUVRE MUSEUM

The Louvre Museum has been led to close its exhibition spaces on a rotation basis because of "lack of personnel"<sup>xiv</sup>. Of course, technological solutions exist; volunteer services could be developed; museum keepers could spend less time chatting within two-person teams, and thus better cover their territory; in short, creative solutions could be found if there were a real will to solve the problem. But unions, management, and government prefer to stand firm on their positions and blame each other. The public is excluded from this, and must remain so in order for each party to be able to assign responsibility for this to other parties, even if the result is to give the impression that great and eternal France can no longer afford to maintain the greatest museum in the world.

#### TAX EVASION

Tax evasion, which is endemic in France, makes taxpayers constantly feel that they are at the edge, always liable to being found at fault, as if they were gamblers or kleptomaniacs. The fuzziness of regulations, in spite of their great number and apparent precision, preserving the illusion necessary to the institutional character and the permanence of the system, maintains a perverse mechanism in which contracts cannot exist. Either the citizens cannot obtain ahead of time reliable and precise information, for which those in charge could be held accountable (although, in theory, every one is supposed to be aware of the law), or the intent of the parties involved is not really contractual (as shown by the concealment of information or regulations, traps, and dirty tricks). The breaches committed by some justify those committed by others, in a give-and-take that certainly has its own logic, if a schizophrenic one, detached from the law, justice, and the real world.

In the United States, tax evasion is limited and mostly practiced by organized crime. Two factors contribute to this: tax rates are very low and are not experienced as being confiscatory; income is declared under penalty of perjury, which is quite another thing than the so-called "*déclaration sur l'honneur*," which allows make-believe statements and does not involve the prison sentences that are enforced in the United States. In fact, there is a real will on the part of all agents in the United States to have a fair system. In France the general will is only designated as political will, which makes it possible for citizens to complain about its failures while quietly continuing to dysfunction within their own domain. There is of course room for improvements in the American system, for instance in the quality of the response given to telephone callers, and in a simplification of the tax code, but the American tax system cannot be said to be schizophrenic.

In my experience, it is unusual to find French people who do not wish to evade paying taxes and tax auditors who consider taxpayers to be in good faith. But cheating would involve the courts and the prison system. The French (whether they are politicians, civil servants, or taxpayers) do not want such a system: they prefer to keep playing,

taking advantage of the loopholes in the system, and complaining.

For the French system to keep dys-functioning, it is crucial that the justice system itself be dysfunctional. Any improvement in the operation of the justice system threatens the homeostasis and the stability of the system, and is therefore experienced as a threat by the agents concerned, who sometimes react with complex maneuvering in order to recover the balance to which they are accustomed. In the same way, within schizophrenic families, any improvement in the health of one of the members quasi-mechanically triggers a worsening in the condition of another. Large-scale organizations, in particular administrations, to which so many French people are attached<sup>xv</sup>, are ideally suited for schizophrenic dysfunction. The real world and the obligation to perform that it involves only have a weak impact on organizations that are free from competition, and those organizations can assign to their constituents the position that suits the organization. The SNCF, in its engineer-based wisdom, calculates the rate of on-time arrival of its trains without taking into account the many days of strike, during which trains do not run. The so-called immigration *services* in regional administrations sadistically force applicants seeking legal residence to come back many times, and sometimes to wait under scandalous conditions, because one document is still missing; applicants must wait on line in order to be told what documents are required.

This litany could be extended to other domains, and would never fail to bring the retort, "You know, all this has been changing; we have made a lot of progress over the past few years." This is true, and many of those who used to be administered have become customers. This is even undeniable. The coexistence of whole domains that are undergoing fast changes with others that have undergone little or no change makes it difficult to establish a diagnosis. It is fortunate that things have been evolving, since the opening of borders, the construction of Europe, American pension funds, etc., make this evolution an urgent necessity. The French genius is best exemplified during crises, in the same way as children quickly make up with each other and organize in order to fix the results of their misdeeds when

they realize that, this time, they have gone too far. The good news is that genius exists here. There certainly is a need for it, because much remains to be done.

#### ESCAPING THE DOUBLE BIND

As I see it, six reactions are possible within a dysfunctional system, in order to escape from it or to make it evolve: anger; depression; alliance and seduction; desertion; counterattack; making things explicit. The French usually choose one of the first three, none of which provide a systemic solution, since they make it possible for the system to keep dys-functioning. If desertion (removing one's children from the public school system, or moving to England or Belgium), became a mass phenomenon, it could shake up the institutions and force them to recover; in any case, desertion brings an end to the suffering of those who choose to leave. Counterattacks (externalizing, subcontracting, deregulating) turn closed systems into open ones and overturn harmful dynamics. Making things explicit (publicly describing the double bind), which is rarely done, although it makes it possible to elevate the debate to a higher level of awareness, may provide a resolution, provided the strong reactions of denial and resistance on the part of the system can be overcome.

According to the School of Palo Alto, the schizophrenic double bind can only persist within dysfunctional systems (be they families, organizations, or societies) as long as the prohibition against making it explicit remains in place—usually because this prohibition, which was brought about by the power structure, has been internalized by the subjects. "Do what I say, but not what I do, and do not talk about it." Michel Foucault already made this claim, from within French culture. The major cleanup operation that is currently occurring within it, which consists of exploring the most prohibited crannies and placing them under a powerful light, precisely leads to releasing oneself from the many instantiations of the double bind that is at the very core of French culture.

## THE FADING OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

One of the reasons why American culture is fundamentally non-schizophrenic internally is that it glorifies and respects values of transparency, at least in peacetime. Americans are quite aware that the First Amendment<sup>xvi</sup> is crucial: let the press and the citizens say and write anything they want, whatever it may be, and the advantages of non-schizophrenia will more than balance out the downside of cacophony. This makes sense in a country that was founded on a rebellion against the arbitrary power of a king, and where citizens are not regarded as being below their leaders. Americans do become schizophrenic when, out of patriotism, they can no longer allow themselves to question their own double binds as far as their international role is concerned, including when freedom of speech is being restricted<sup>xvii</sup>. The same is true when, under the growing influence of legalism, it is no longer possible to publicly recognize the consequences of one's actions, for fear of criminal or civil legal consequences. The lie by omission that results is one of the components of the double bind<sup>xviii</sup>.

There is also the risk of a harmful evolution of American culture toward internal schizophrenia. The First Amendment can only remain meaningful if it is not restricted to a purely theoretical status, but is applied in real life. For this to occur, Americans must have something to say. In this respect, a number of factors—the significant decline of the elementary and secondary education system; the natural very weak critical distancing of Americans; their propensity to accept any process as long as it fulfills its stated purpose—tend to make debate meaningless. The risk thus exists, in a perverse manner, to confine oneself to an ideology of openness and debate that would be devoid of all content. When the cynical elite, in Washington, Hollywood, or New York is added to the mix, the result after a few decades may be an empty ideology, dumbed down by manipulative politicians, television, and the primacy granted to the marketplace, in a culture that may also start to be based on a split. The choir of the French virgins would then be able to reply, “Good, then they’ll be as rotten as we are.” The only difference from the French cultural schiz-

ophrenia would be that John Q. Public would not be aware of taking part in a double game. The choir of the virgins would then reply, “In that case, we’d rather keep our very own schizophrenia.”

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- i What Ernst Troeltsch modestly calls, “the compromise made between the demands of secular morality and the Christian morality of the origins.”
  - ii Symbolic split. Rigid separation between two parts of one’s personality.
  - iii Feistinger, *op. cit.*
  - iv The humorous connotations that this term has acquired in French do not make things any easier.
  - v This concept was developed by the American researcher and therapist Will Schutz.
  - vi See Jean Cornut, *Pourquoi les hommes ont peur des femmes*. PUF. 2002.
  - vii Yet one may wonder whether the fundamental American Manichaeism might not situate traditional America on the opposite side, that of paranoia.
  - viii Or the outsourcing of the handling of prisoners to countries that practice torture, according to Washington, such as Jordan, Egypt, and Morocco—or even to Iraq itself. See “US decries abuse but defends interrogations,” *The Washington Post*, December 26, 2002; article co-authored by Bob Woodward
  - ix One should be wary of too one-sided a reading, since I have bestowed both praise and criticism upon each of those two cultures. Anyway, my purpose is to use cross-cultural comparison in order to understand one’s own culture and make it progress.
  - x I am confounded by the naivety of many French managers who show very little awareness of the importance of information security.
  - xi The Founding Fathers have been able to channel the dangerous hostility of the Protestant sects, encouraging Americans in their “pursuit of happiness” by making collective energies converge toward earthly goals. But Americans do not use the word “happiness” in the same sense as the French, otherwise Stendhal could not have written in *On Love*, “They are just and they are rational, but they are anything but happy.” Montesquieu had already written that in the countries where people read the Bible, people are not happy. During the 18th century, the French were seeking the meaning of happiness when the Americans were content to find happiness. France is one of the few countries where philosophy is still taught in every senior class in high school.
  - xii *Le Monde*, February 19, 2002.
  - xiii Plon. 2002.
  - xiv This was the case long before the 35-hour work week!
  - xv The maternal function of these organizations is obviously one of the causes of this. This function is even officially called “guardianship.”

- xvi “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”
- xvii Thus, in 2002 the Bush administration directed lower levels of authority to restrict public access to administrative documents.
- xviii The American armed forces went as far as instituting a “Don’t ask—Don’t tell” policy that prohibited military institutions from inquiring about the sexual orientation of military personnel and individuals from revealing their own sexual orientation, so that homosexuality would remain un-stated, in order to avoid triggering any constraining legal process.

## CHAPTER 10

# FRANCE IN TRANSITION

### THE YOUNGER GENERATION

French culture has been undergoing change at an ever faster pace. Today’s young adults are more explicit, transparent, and individuated, and they disregard the taboos of earlier generations—and not just in reality shows. But this phenomenon concerns not only the young but all age groups. French society is more—although still incompletely—ruled by law. A slew of televised debates of every kind have been exposing the last hidden nooks and crannies of French culture: minority or deviant sexual practices; “affairs”; files that had remained buried for decades; transgressions of every kind; airing out of the most lurid stories (incest, pedophilia, marital violence, harassment, cult activities, etc.) All this contributes to a kind of return of the repressed, which has a cathartic value and spreads within French culture a certain model of transparency and acceptance of the real world.

French society is moving toward individuation. A first major change was brought about by the generation that came of age at the time of May 1968, the oil-induced recession of 1973, the end of the 30-year long post-World War II economic expansion, and rising unemployment. This was a fatherless generation, at a time when abortion was legalized and feminist movements developed. Since then, mothers have been granting more personal space to their children, and fathers have been more involved in their education; this trend has lately been picking up pace. Today’s youth are less overprotected than their elders were, and therefore less prone to depression; they have started to grow away from the model of the lifelong adolescent exemplified by *Tanguy*. A series of successes in international sport competitions have strengthened the belief that France can be a winner. This generation has a critical attitude toward the feudal

relationship its elders had with the companies to which they belonged, and which abandoned them when times grew harsher. This generation does not tolerate tall tales, and it places its own interests above those of any employers—and it says *soi*. Many French CEOs of large companies have asked me over the past few years how they should deal with young people; I had never been asked that question before; this seems to suggest that a fundamental change is occurring, perhaps as much within families as within companies, and that it has been noticed by leaders who are ill-prepared to take it into account.

Demographic changes that are expected to occur within the next forty years, including a doubling of the proportion of people over 65 relative to those between 20 and 64<sup>ii</sup>, will raise the issue of cross-generational solidarity. At the same time, the young people of today will be less inclined than earlier generations were to tolerate significant transfers of income to their elders, creating the potential for explosive situations over the long run.

#### STATUS OF THE BODY AND VIOLENCE

1789. The King and noblemen were decapitated. Heads were cut off from bodies. At a symbolic level, the head was cut off from the social body. In France, in addition to the schizophrenic split within heads, another one occurs between head and body: between the capital and the rest of the country. The Paris area includes 18% of the French people and accounts for 28% of the GDP; the whole country is governed by a Parisian clique. "Talk to my head, my body is sick." The bodies of the French are less valued than their heads. At school, bodies are contained, constrained, and disciplined. It is therefore not surprising that otherwise healthy children would respond to this constraining violence by other forms of violence that they exert against teachers, and society as a whole. "When I say what I think, they tell me to shut up."<sup>iii</sup> As unacceptable as this violence may be, it is a signal indicating that schools must reexamine in depth the place they grant to bodies. The schizophrenic marginalization of bodies, confined to

physical education and sports, is no more than a safety valve, since it does not deal with the issue of the status of bodies within the classroom and therefore, at a symbolic level, within the mind.

I sometimes take managers of French companies to gospel services in American churches on Sundays. From the back of the church, when only the backs of the audience members are visible, it only takes an instant to tell who the French are: they are the most physically uptight (but an internet reader noted that the Americans are the fattest). Since one of the main purposes of the education system is to prevent the culture from evolving, and since the system follows the evolution of society with a considerable delay rather than anticipating it, this situation is not about to change—even if some children, who are rejected by the dominant model, cause an irruption of the social body in the heart of the educational shrine.

For France to work better, the body must be rehabilitated and given full recognition, both symbolically (in the relationships between Paris and the rest of the country; castle and countryside; the elite and ordinary citizens; intellectual professions and manual trades) and physically (with respect to sport, beauty, well-being, sex, and health). The area of health may be the one in which change will be the most difficult to implement because there is a risk that energy may be exclusively dedicated to financial and management issues—which are of course important—whereas the very concept of health needs to be entirely reexamined and situated in relationship to completeness and well-being rather than to disease alone. Physicians are mostly trained in the technical aspects of medicine, not in its relational or psychological aspects. From rushed doctors' calls, unused drug prescriptions, and medicine not taken, to requests for obliging doctors' notes, physicians are confronted with a demand on the part of "their" patients to be taken charge of, which they are unable to fulfill. But the re-appropriation by each person of his or her own health is not about to happen, in particular because of resistance on the part of the medical "corps."

## CULTS

The current French preoccupation with cults deserves consideration. Beyond actual cases, which it is important to investigate and prosecute, it seems to me that cults play the role that werewolves used to play in the collective unconscious of the French: "Give me a scare!" It is well-known that the Catholic Church got changes be made to a bill under consideration by the National Assembly, which was so extensive that certain common religious practices would have fallen under the control of the state. In the same way, after an initial focus on actual cultish practices, the government commission in charge of the fight against cults gradually extended its work to various areas (Steiner schools, PNL, training, consulting, health), exemplifying a drift and a self-justifying mode of reasoning that recall the gradual drift of the Inquisition. Eventually, a more reasonable attitude prevailed.

Beyond posturing, what matters is the nature of the hidden fears that are evoked by the scarecrow that cults constitute: a fear of being imprisoned, certainly, but also a fear of being lost within an all-powerful mother, in a regression to the condition that existed before the mirror stage. What is significant is that this fear would now reemerge—because it is indicative of the evolutions and involutions that are in process within French culture. The current movement of society toward explicitness, individuation, risk-taking, accepting of responsibility, and extension of contractual relationships and of the legal system has a counterpart in a sense of isolation and fragmentation, and an increased need to belong. This need recalls the problem of excessive belonging and merging that is also involved, *a contrario*, in the cult phenomenon. In a sense, the excessive fear that cults generate is a positive symptom, in that it reveals the growing pains of French culture's journey toward maturity.

## FOREIGNERS IN FRANCE

France, which acts as if it did not like foreigners, is in fact the Western European country that has assimilated the most foreigners over the course of its history. As early as the second generation, no one cares

whether your name is Jasjiewski, Linares, Muller, Spasski, or any other name that reflects the foreign origin of your parents. The cost of this assimilation is the requirement to play the game by behaving like other French people, even if that involves giving up the customs of your country of origin, or at least the most visible of them. One of the meanings of the word "equality," as it is used in the French motto, is republican uniformity; everyone is the same; no one can claim any essential difference. Therefore, the Islamic scarf is forbidden because it is viewed as an "ostentatious" symbol of the fact that one has not given up belonging to another entity, an attitude that amounts to an intolerable insult to the culture of the host country. The republican tradition of secularism has complicated the issue, in a country that still bears the imprint of past conflicts between Catholics and anticlericals. Some have evoked the separation between church and state, in a country where village churches still chime out the time (which had been a privilege of the ruling class until clocks became common in the general population)—but where no muezzins sing *sourates* from the tops of minarets, despite the presence of millions of Moslems. The fear of communalism, which has been loudly invoked, is in fact the fear that some groups may disclaim solidarity with the pack, creating a split that would undermine the sacred unity of the nation.

Americans, who have more confidence in their ability to assimilate immigrants—rightly or wrongly so, in a period of very fast growth for the Latino community—demand less apparent conformity and have no understanding of this *tchador* story when one tries to explain it to them. Americans therefore let people practice their religion the way they like, dress as they wish, and eat ethnic foods, which also happens to be good for business. However, the law is the same for everybody: taxes and fines must be paid, and lying under oath will not be tolerated.

"Come and join us in France; we know what you have endured if you have had to leave your own country; we are prepared to make some sacrifices in order to welcome you among us, but be kind enough to behave as we do, and assimilate. Pay the tribute. Being

French is costly for us, in terms of problems and dysfunctions of all kinds, although we are emotionally very attached to our system; so it must be costly for you too; things would be too easy otherwise! And don't forget that we are paying for you; you must therefore have a hard time in order to deserve to become like us." Whereas the Anglo-American communalism involves a juxtaposition of ethnic groups, the French mode of assimilation operates according to the canons of "integration" and through the acquiring of French citizenship; this injunction, "Become like us," reassures the pack.

This process has operated for a long time without any major problems, at least for the second generation (the children of the immigrants), and has made it possible to continually renew France's genetic and cultural capital. It may be claimed that the melting pot has been a founding mechanism in France as well as in the United States, at least until recently, when the integration of North Africans has started to be problematic. What the so-called native French blame the North Africans for is failing to play the game, by proclaiming their difference rather than trying to assimilate. The French hardly care that the very conditions of immigration, which were at first determined by the major automobile manufacturers, have led to a massive influx of North Africans into France, and that those workers were selected from among the most illiterate in order to avoid problems with unions. The French do not feel responsible for this influx, the extent and form of which was determined by France, following short-sighted policies, and they blame immigrants for the consequences of those policies, thus placing them, by the way, in a double bind<sup>iv</sup>.

Then, as in the case of Chicanos in the United States, genuine urban ghettos develop in France, making integration even more difficult and causing a catastrophic decline in the quality of education in the schools of the republic. Yet, the credits of television programs are evidence enough that many descendants of North Africans immigrants are in the process of finding their place within the nation, whether or not they practice Islam. But many others are still marginalized and participate in the development of a polarized society. The first intimations of such a society can be observed in the

United States, where the weakening of the middle class has been brutally exposing the contrast between those able to navigate in an information society and those condemned to flip hamburgers.

On this point, the continual erosion of the education level outside of privileged neighborhoods is an extremely worrisome phenomenon to which the closest attention should be paid in both countries. But the weakness of public institutions in the United States and the weight of special interests within a giant, and therefore impossible to reform, national education system in France stand in the way of the changes that are necessary in order to prevent the decline of our respective societies. The United States has three major weaknesses, which may prove to be fatal over the long term: education, drugs, and violence<sup>v</sup>; for France to have a chance to manage, it is crucial that it avoid those traps.

#### 18 BRUMAIRE

France is in a difficult position: it is more and more affected by American ills, including a growing lack of reference to its own past, the loss of meaning due to increasing commodification, violence, and drugs; it is also suffering from the lack of a clear goal for the future. The founding ideology of the French republic is dying, but has not yet been replaced by something else, even if references to a refoundation, a Sixth Republic, etc. have started to appear in public discourse. The problem with the current primacy of economics over politics is that one cannot ask the marketplace to provide meaning; that is not its role, and if one insists on it, confusion follows, as André Comte-Sponville clearly demonstrated. In a country that currently lacks any great thinker, artist, or statesman<sup>vi</sup>, and is experiencing an acute lack of meaning, this vacuum may eventually prove to be beneficial, since disenchantment can sometimes trigger a regeneration—but this is far from certain.

France may be today in a state of confusion akin to the one that prevailed just before Bonaparte's coup on 18 Brumaire: loss of reference, political cacophony, and lack of vision and of a collective

goal. Then Bonaparte turned into Napoléon and cleaned things up within two years. In difficult times, the French yearn to find salvation in a providential man, with all the dangers involved, and the inevitable adoration-rejection syndrome, which was experienced in turn by Napoléon, Pétain, and de Gaulle<sup>vii</sup>. The great ambivalence of the French toward strong men reflects an archetypal relationship with an overly strict father, “feared and respected,” as the phrase goes. The current revival of interest in Napoléon, “the greatest man to have appeared in the world since Julius Caesar,” according to Stendhal, is consistent with this need of an exceptional man who would magically solve every problem. This mythical character is all the more significant for the French psyche—and not just for Chateaubriand—because “Mister N.” ended up stripped of everything and as if cleansed of his wrongs by his tragic end, which amounted to a form of atonement.

As society becomes increasingly influenced by female values, not through an exacerbation of a state that is already overly maternal but, on the contrary, through the increasing participation of real women in the public and private spheres of power, this problem will fade away. But they must be real women, rather than all-powerful and strict mothers like Édith Cresson or Martine Aubry. The latter are members of the first generation of female leaders, and they are temporarily acceptable by men because they resemble them and are thus perceived as reassuring—while at the same time they infantilize them. Yet, France will for a long time remain under the influence of a profoundly macho culture, which it fails to recognize, enmeshed in a kind of silent male violence that is part of the problem.

Another possible path toward change is that of emergence. In complexity theory, “emergence” designates the appearance of a new level of complexity, higher than the previous one, which subsumes that earlier level and cannot be mechanically predicted based on knowledge of it. Appendix 4, “Manager or Emerger,” presents a development of this issue.

Will civil society be capable of giving rise to original positive emergences? This cannot be predicted. The most that can be done is

to work at creating contexts that will increase the potential for positive emergences to occur. Acting on culture, which is the purpose of the present work, is part of this effort.

## BLOCKS

According to Freud, working provides creative pleasure for those who are capable of sublimating their aggressive impulses. For the large fraction of the French people who do not derive pleasure from working, the question must be raised as to whether this indicates a sublimation disorder. If this is the case, then how is aggressiveness channeled? The lack of emotional involvement in one’s work can be compensated for by a socialized agitation. This catatonia<sup>viii</sup> partly explains the rise of social violence, as a compensation phenomenon.

For many French people, working does not provide a reward; the counterpart of this lack of reward is the protection set up by wage-earners and their unions in order to limit criticism in case of failure. Resistance to privatization, deregulation, and other forms of intervention of the real world, although apparently based on ideology, is partly due to the desire on the part of civil servants, and those who would like to be so, to preserve a system of organized irresponsibility. It is as if belonging to the mother *ad vitam æternam* and protecting the illusion of immortality enjoyed by state monopolies were inalienable rights. The result is a warm and fuzzy whole that favors mediocrity and largely explains the fact that the French pay too much for their public services—51% of the national product in taxes and deductions as opposed to an average of 43% in other G8 countries—and do not get their money’s worth. The combination of the inexhaustible cash cow, seniority- rather than performance-based advancement—since merit-based systems are accused of arbitrariness, as if seniority-based systems were not even more so—and the impossibility of restricting vested benefits results in disaster. Vested benefits are perceived as belonging to the order of being, and their elimination as a *diminutio capitis* rather than as a downscaling due to factual reasons within real-life situations. All this glorifies bureaucracy, kills initiative, prevents the necessary reforms,

protects special interests, dampens passion, and prevents the French genius from finding any expression other than the heroic efforts needed to manage and make up for mistakes, or even cronyism and unacceptable—although widespread—practices. It is well-known that some major companies have developed based on such practices, which are even found in some courts of justice.

### REVOLUTIONS OR SIDEWAYS EVOLUTIONS

The obstacles that prevent the French system from changing have often been analyzed since Crozier, and I will not return to them. It is enough to note that France evolves in two different ways: either through revolution or through what I call sideways evolution.

When the system is pulled in different directions by contradictory interests and when everybody is increasingly dissatisfied with his or her fate and eagerly yearning for a change—but a change that would not involve oneself—confrontation becomes inevitable, and tension keeps growing until the system breaks apart. A large number of rebellions have fed the unconscious of the nation and shaped a revengeful character. The Revolution certainly was extremely costly, not only at the time but also through the decades of wavering and procrastination that followed. Most importantly, it did not fundamentally alter the French character, in particular its lingering feudalism.

Yet, if France is observed at ten-year intervals, it is undeniable that it undergoes changes, and that they have been occurring at an ever faster pace. But, in spite of the continued influence of the tradition of state-planning, the directions changes take are not necessarily the ones that were set by state leaders; the same is true within large companies. It is as if, after leaders indicated a given direction, a more or less chaotic resistance at the grassroots level ended up determining another one, not a completely opposite one, by the way. France progresses, sideways, but progresses nevertheless. And maybe that is no so bad, since reactions at the grassroots are sometimes more realistic than those of haughty leaders who stand isolated from the field.

The American author Simon Chama developed in his excellent

history of the French Revolution, *Citizens*, the argument that the main source of the anger that resulted in revolutionary violence was hostility against modernization, which was already ongoing under the *Ancien Régime*, rather than an apparent impatience at the slow pace of progress<sup>ix</sup>. It may be that France is now in a pre-revolutionary situation: the categories of people that have been passed over by an evolution over which they have no control, particularly in terms of individuation and thus decreased social protection, may find no other outlet than violence, in the glaring absence of a grand purpose that would mobilize their energy.

### POLITICAL MOTHERING

This risk, which is probably intuitively perceived by political leaders, has increased the maternal character of their response, which in turn has only reinforced the dependency of the citizens. Mothering is the new opium of the people. They are encouraged to listen rather than to act; the wildly increasing influence of the mass media has reinforced the importance of appearances (of appearing to listen and to act). But the system is locked to such a degree that an appearance of listening, often followed by spectacular announcements and laws designed for the occasion but not for actual implementation over the long term, does not result in action; this increases the anger, and therefore the depression or violence of those who feel excluded.

Implicitness is maternal. Explicitness is paternal. In the double bind, the prohibition against telling is paternal; the impossibility to tell is maternal. From a Freudian perspective, one cannot avoid unconsciously identifying leaders with father or mother figures. One problem that I perceive in the current French political system is the gradual shift that has occurred from father to mother figures. We are far from Napoléon, Clemenceau, Pétain, and de Gaulle, now that political parties and state compete in their ever-increasing mothering of voters. Almost no one dares to remind people of the law. Mothering has been so excessive that paternal discourse, in particular the discourse of law and order, has begun to receive a positive response.

Yet, one should not scare the people, those poor little ones who are incapable of protecting themselves against contaminated blood, the Tchernobyl cloud, bone meal, future pensions.... This attitude preserves the lack of transparency and the feudal character of the system. As a result, leaders yield to the demands of special interests, but they do so as late as possible—just before things have reached the boiling point—and as little as possible—behaving as managers rather than as leaders, failing to establish any priorities among tobacco store owners, physicians, contract workers in show business, and researchers. Since the French state is now a mother figure, the thinking process of politicians after the first round of the 2002 presidential election is easy to understand, “The people are sending us a very strong message of distrust; we must therefore listen more closely,” instead of “French people, you are a bunch of brats.”

#### FATHER AND POLITICS

Since, in the French collective unconscious, a father can only be either tyrannical or absent, political leaders prefer absence to tyranny, and almost nobody dares to be on the side of the father. All this reinforces the general sense that there is no one at the wheel and undermines the credibility of the whole political system, increasing the cynicism of the shrewd and the profiteers despite an utterly laughable discourse on “zero tolerance.” The result is a schizophrenic scattering in which every agent dysfunctions on its own, with an ever-decreasing impact on the real world. Leaders no longer lead; politics becomes a show; voters vote for something in order to signify something else; the people do what they can to survive or accumulate wealth, etc.

As in the pre-Revolutionary period, every one is asking for changes to be made without really wishing for them to occur, because every one puts up a resistance when directly affected by change, either personally or as a member of the category to which one belongs. Those requests for changes are in actuality complaints and in fact preserve the schizophrenic split, in a shared belief in scarcity, according to

which others must change but not oneself, as if only one of the two had to. Ironically, by blocking every possible direction, those omnidirectional demands for change reinforce the homeostasis and therefore the sturdiness of the system. Changes only occur through concessions or break-ups, and are never optimal ones.

And then, Nicolas Sarkozy, instead of pretending, really believed he was the Interior Minister and began to implement the law and to say that he was doing so. This caused a complete surprise, in particular on the part of the man who had made him a prince (well, not quite a prince). As a result, motorists have started to behave, reluctantly of course, but started nevertheless. There is so much need for a father.

In the United States, father figures prevail among politicians, and the more motherly ones are accused of being wimps, as was Jimmy Carter or George Bush, Senior, who probably threw himself into the first Gulf War partly in order to restore his image as a he-man, before his son tried to finish the job for him. Americans, who originate from the courageous act of their founding fathers, wish for strong leadership, in their companies as in politics, and they venerate their leaders, whose actions they are endlessly reminded of, as if in reassurance. To some extent, Clinton’s escapades reassured them of their collective masculinity; according to a persistent rumor, Al Gore took lessons in order to come closer to the image of an alpha male (politicians modeling their behavior on that of apes).

It is possible that an escape from the French political collapse may be provided either by women (real women, not dragons or overly controlling mothers), by a transition period under a strong man (with all the risks involved), or by a strong woman. In any case, it will take a certain amount of time for the French to reconcile themselves to the figures of their leaders and allow themselves to be shaped by the image that will be reflected by those leaders. It takes more than a few years for collective symbolic identities to change.

May 1968 was an attempt to release oneself from the yoke of the double bind, and we know how it ended. But now, France is under-

going another attempt, a more peaceful one—for now—that is still occurring below the radar. The real confrontation of the years to come will not take place between left and right, or even between leaders and the rest of the country—the top and the grassroots, to use a phrase that makes French hierarchies explicit. It will pit the supporters of the *status quo*, who will try to preserve the double bind against those who will work at releasing the country from this double bind. Because of the enormous capacity for resistance that dysfunctional systems have, it seems to me that there is a real risk of a breakdown—and not just in underprivileged suburbs—and a real risk of a quasi-fascist hardening against havoc and chaos, to use a phrase coined by General de Gaulle. We must be wary of those two pitfalls. Let us hope that we will, for the sake of our country.

France is now embarking on a journey not just toward change but toward transformation, as systems theory defines the term. *Nolens volens*, France is in transition from a closed to an open system. Currently in mid-stream, the country is experiencing the chaotic phase that is typical of transitions from one paradigm to another. Because of the French aversion for lasting processes, this revolution cannot be the object of a fully-controlled knowledge; the domain of study of large-scale systematic change that Americans call Organizational Development has no direct counterpart in France. And there is generally no consensus in France on allowing political leaders to lead a genuine change. Post-crises periods are exceptions to this: many profound changes occurred in France following violent revolutions or military defeats (1789, 1830, 1848, 1871, 1940, and 1958). But, in the crisis that has followed the 2002 election, any hurried attempt to provide a new foundation for the republic would be risky. An extended effort of critical analysis and collective appropriation must first be performed if a shared vision is to emerge. We must be very wary of a phony consensus (such as the law on the Islamic scarf, on which there was a general agreement—except for that of some of those directly concerned—but which solved nothing at a deeper level, as demonstrated by a grotesque directive of implementation)—all the more so because real opportunities for a new foundation do not frequently arise through history.

## THE FRENCH DREAM

Countries without a vision are countries without a future. What has made America great, and has allowed it to remain great for so long, has been its capacity to generate dreams. I was a senior executive in Detroit in 1986, when it was announced that Chrysler CEO Lee Iacocca had just earned \$20 million, which was a large amount at the time. I once asked a cleaning lady, an American of Colombian descent, what she thought about it. For her, that was a good thing, because if her son worked hard enough he too could get there. John F. Kennedy's speech, which committed the United States to sending a man to the Moon by the end of the decade, presented a vision, as did Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, or Reconstruction after the Civil War. Some day in the near future, the Chinese too will probably send a man to the Moon, and the United States, wounded in its pride as it was when it heard Sputnik's beep in October 1957, will develop another vision of reconquest and perhaps a hostile attitude toward China—but a vision does not necessarily require that an opponent be designated. Whether or not the Moon is involved, the question is, what will America's attitude be once China's economy has caught up with its own?

Strong visions are supported by strong ideologies. Why are both found in the Americans, and only cynicism in the French? Because in France words do not match things; the French know that those who speak the language of values are manipulators. As a result, they listen to them with a mocking attitude, or they pretend to subscribe to the values that are proclaimed when they feel forced to do so by the hierarchy. But their hearts are not in it: they have been fooled in the past, and they know that acts do not match words. In addition, their depressive character prevents them from subscribing to an optimistic vision over the long term. Finally, their belief in scarcity leads them to pay more attention to what the proponents of a vision have to gain from it—at their own expense, according to that belief—than to what they themselves could get out of that vision.

A vision does not have to be realistic; it must even be beyond realism, otherwise there would be no dream, no inspiration, and no

impetus. It must be engaging, encourage you to surpass yourself, and make you feel that you could not manage on your own and must unite with others in a gesture of affirmation. At the moment, France has no dream, no vision, and no goal. For now, it does not have a future. But this great vacuum, the presence of which can no longer be denied in spite of all the talk on the theme of France's decline, may be the source from which yet unknown forces will emerge and mobilize for a rebirth. Perhaps more than any other people, the French are capable of a recovery.

Edgar Morin wrote, "The disintegration of a culture under the destructive effect of technical and cultural domination is a loss for the whole of humankind, of which cultural diversity constitutes one of the most priceless resources." And also, "Cultural globalization is not homogenizing. Great transnational waves develop, at the same time favoring the expression of national specificities and feeding a global nutrient broth, whose development is a central feature of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and should increase during the 21<sup>st</sup>." For us to be able to share his optimism on this last point will require a dynamism at least equal to that of the culture that is now the most triumphant in the world. I am convinced that there is room for a fruitful cohabitation between French and American cultures—I have been striving toward that goal for the past fifteen years—but this right to coexistence is not a given; it must be earned.

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- i On this topic, see Hervé Sérieyx's work, *Les jeunes et l'entreprise : des noces ambiguës*, Eyrolles, 2002.
- ii Report on *Démographie et économie*. Conseil d'analyse économique. Paris. 2002.
- iii Rap lyric. Quoted in the *Caméra Télécité* television program. France 3. March 2, 2002, 1 PM.
- iv The harkis, Algerians who had sided with the French, have met an even worse fate.
- v In the United States, there are more black people in prison than in college.
- vi And when one happens to emerge, he comes under attack from every side, even his own. French culture does not make it easy for people to accept a positive goal rather than only defining themselves as against something....
- vii "It would certainly not have been considered useful to ask those questions in a strictly national poll, since democracy appears to have been completely accepted in our country. However, the response

was surprising [...]. One third of the French people would consider as 'very good' or 'fairly good' a political system led by 'a strong man who would not need to concern himself with a parliament or elections.'" Pierre Bréchon. *Les Valeurs des Français*. Armand Colin. 2003.

- viii Schizophrenic condition involving an apparent passivity.
- ix Simon Chama. *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution*.

## CHAPTER 11

# CULTURAL AND INDIVIDUAL GENIUS

### CULTURAL GENIUS

In the previous chapters, my purpose in identifying cultural differences between the French and Americans was to help French people reflect upon their own culture in areas where, because of the implicit character of French culture, naming things is difficult. In view of what I have written above, one might expect that living in France would be unpleasant, or even off-putting. However, *angulus ridet*, the French love their country and are very attached to it. The same is true of some foreigners, and among them, many Americans who move to France upon their retirement. As I have shown, this attachment on the part of the French has some hidden motivations; yet, the attraction of French culture and *art de vivre* cannot be reduced to a mere set of secondary benefits. French culture is a magnificent one, and it deserves to be defended against trivialization and unrestrained Americanization. On this point, let us listen to none other than Johnny Hallyday, one of those who were most responsible for importing a certain American culture into France. He stated with astonishing perceptiveness, "Honestly, if Le Pen had been elected, I would probably have left the country." "Where would you have gone? To the United States? "Certainly not! I would have stayed in Europe. I like to visit the United States, for a month. I like horses, Harleys, and American music, but that is not my own culture; I am too much of a Latin for that. I am disappointed by the mindset of the Americans, their obsession with loot and business, and their tendency to believe they are the masters of the world."

My goal is to set things in motion, to make it possible for the

French to take responsibility for their culture, to decide what must be cherished and preserved and to identify what must change. This critical examination and this voluntarist approach to culture require lucidity, courage, tolerance, and persistence. This is the cost of preserving French culture for the decades to come, rather than being left with a bland mixture of French and American cultures.

I support the cultural exception, but without any illusion. This exception is an expression at the national level of the desire of every French individual to be an exception. But an exception to what? To the rule, of course, as in the idiomatic and yet odd phrase, “the exception that confirms the rule,” which is to say that the exception would be confirmed, but only regarding others, who would remain subject to the rule from which one would be released. In any case, the cultural exception is necessary, at least for the time it will take to stop the hemorrhage. But this conservatory measure is not enough. The deeper problem must also be addressed through a forceful promotion of every aspect of French culture. In general, protectionist policies seem dangerous to me, because they make it possible to fall into a cozy lethargy and are followed by painful awakenings. They obviously amount to a refusal to grow up and become adults.

French culture can be called longitudinal. It can only be understood when its roots are taken into account; it finds its strength over time. This does not imply that it is backward-looking or stationary; on the contrary, it means that change must be analyzed from a diachronic perspective. American culture is transversal, through time as well as through space. Through time: the present constitutes its own legitimacy, and understanding the present requires no reference to the past. Through space: American culture claims universalism through domination of the whole planet. A confrontation between those two competing universalisms was thus inevitable. American universalism is at the pinnacle of its power; it derives its legitimacy from its economic and military domination. French universalism is only a weak echo of its past glory, in decline because it no longer has either of those two legitimacies, or a doctrine or vision capable of prevailing on its own.

Cultural influence has contributed to economic domination. The agreements signed by Léon Blum in 1936, which opened France to American audiovisual productions for the next fifty years, without any restrictions, bear a heavy responsibility in the harmful penetration of the cultural, societal, and economic model that went along with France’s cultural decline. What was at stake was no longer the distanced, reasoned, integrated, and appropriated discovery of America by the likes of André Siegfried, Georges Duhamel, André Maurois, Jean Giraudoux, Paul Morand, and many others. Later, the Marshall Plan contributed to France’s economic recovery, but increased the flood of American culture into France. Economic domination now feeds cultural domination, bringing a vulgar opposition between armed violence (under the modest designation of “action scenes”) and court scenes onto French movie and television screens. As the Marquise de Sévigné said, “France, your coffee is in the dumps.” Is there still time to react?

I have no magical solution to offer for France’s pulling itself out of the downward spiral in which it is caught, and which has now been acknowledged by the Prime Minister himself. Besides, there is no fundamental reason why this country would retain its supposed greatness over the long term. It is enough to read Michael Porter’s book on the competitiveness of nations<sup>iii</sup> to become convinced of this. The same is true of the United States, by the way. Bush (Jr.) was aware of this, when he began, pre 9/11, to identify China as a potential enemy for the future. Civilizations too are mortal, even if the accumulated capital—of every kind—makes decline sufficiently slow so as not to trigger reflex reactions when downward spirals begin. It takes a certain time for the first scouts to notice it, and even more for a critical mass of people to admit it, in particular for the French, who have a strong propensity for denial; after this, much additional time is needed for a consensus on the appropriate solutions to emerge, which may never happen because of the ancient inclination of the French toward discord, which Julius Caesar had already noticed about the Gauls; then, assuming that the power structure is clear and strong enough—which is rarely the case in

Gaul—the solutions that were chosen must be implemented and allowed to bear fruit. Meanwhile, and this involves a long while, the situation keeps worsening, usually with catastrophic acceleration.

What cultural identity should France seek? As in the business world, the winning strategy will be based on a unique selling proposition: the decisive advantage will result from the specific elements that the French will be able to valorize, elements that are unique to them and yet bring something deemed valuable by the rest of the world. We should begin the struggle, without allowing cultural timidity to hamper us. In this respect, the shrunken budget granted to culture, the scandalous inadequacy of the funding of the *Alliances françaises*; the great mediocrity of many of the civil servants posted abroad, who are more concerned with their career—"The Career," as it is called in the French Foreign Service—than with dynamic action to increase France's influence; the significant decrease in the number of scholarships awarded to foreigners in French universities and elite institutions of higher education; all those factors ensure a decline in the influence of French culture in the world.

On the other shore, we can observe an America endowed with an awesome efficiency. It is both France's ally and its competitor, and it has remarkable assets that generally ensure a better economic performance over the long term. What are the strong points of American culture? In no particular order: focused and highly consistent goals; a focus on the future and action; a strong interest in innovation, considered as a process that can be managed; an intrinsic optimism; a belief in individual ability and a great self-confidence (a "can-do" attitude); the ability to identify and name what is wrong without engaging in personal attacks and to make sudden changes when necessary; bold thinking; a tendency to engage one's energy to the fullest without wasting time on unproductive whining; a glorification of work and a great attention given to tasks; non-feudal relationships; a tendency to seek win-win propositions; a preference for dynamic over static situations; a strong contrast between reward and punishment; a consistent legal system that is intended to work; clear and explicit values; an emphasis placed on accountability; an

ideology that encourages effort; and a highly-developed sense of the national interest. That is a lot.

#### FRANCE'S UNIQUE ADVANTAGES

Yet, France also has its own assets. Let us first examine what is uniquely French, in particular in contrast with American characteristics. I am not anti-American; however, I do not share the American delusion according to which all the peoples of the world should be fashioned in the image of Americans. At a time when economics prevails over all other spheres, there is a risk of identifying moral, cultural, technical, and military realms with the economy that is dominant in the world, as if its success in and of itself provided it with legitimacy. In the same way as globalization has brought new practices of "coopetition" between companies—which is to say, partial cooperation between competitors, France must find the right distance between cooperation and competition in its relationship with the United States. An "and/and" instead of an "either/or" relationship must be sought. To this purpose, Europe will be a necessary support; it must be a dynamic Europe, unencumbered by French obsessions with German predominance or with systematic defense of the interests of the larger countries against those of smaller ones. This implies that France must find a specific and substantial role, for instance, that of providing a bond with the French-speaking countries of the world.

What then are the strong points of the French? In no particular order: a context-rich culture; variety; a critical sense; subtleness; an art of living; a sense of aesthetics; an awareness of history and of their roots; past glory; fidelity; the emotional dimension; intellectual capital; a scientific tradition; creativity; resourcefulness; a certain form of adaptability; heroism; a sense of honor; geographical location; membership in the European Union; ethnic and cultural diversity; membership in the French-speaking community; the success of some of their companies<sup>vi</sup>.

Some policies have already been implemented in each of those

areas, but in a scattered manner, with limited scope, as the French often do, following a small-scale mode of thinking. Yet the energy reserves of the French are immense when they are mobilized by love of their country. A crystallizing element is needed, such as an event or a person, which would evoke the positive instead of the negative side of this internally-split people. This is an emergence we can wish for, an unexpected collective recovery, a true re-foundation, which would not draw on the destructive revolutionary capacity of the French but on the enormous emotional energy that overwhelmed the country on the night of its important and symbolic victory in the World Cup in 1998. This energy must be extended beyond temporary circumstances. When I observe French cultural genius at work in the likes of Aimé Jacquet—an ability to give and to surpass oneself; cunning; tenacity; trust in one's intuition without sacrificing a professional attitude; team spirit; humility; authority; heart; resistance to adversity (in particular during the shameful campaign that four journalists from the newspaper *l'Équipe* led against him until the very day of the victory), I am proud of having been born French.

#### INDIVIDUAL GENIUS

Individual genius consists of mobilizing the whole of your talents and of the influences you have received in order to define and accomplish a purpose that constitutes a concrete expression of your most passionate concerns, those which make you a unique person.

Realizing that you have an incipient passion, without allowing the internalized objections of those around you to stifle it, can take a long time; most people never achieve this because they are stifled by an overly developed superego, a need to be liked, the ignorance of what is possible, a denial of their own mortality, a lack of a sense of urgency, a difficulty in accepting adulthood, sensitivity to criticism, the weight of routine, the comfort found in groups, the awesome extent of the work to be done, various deficiencies, the uncertainty of the task, practical obstacles, their material situation, fear of the unknown, a need of safety, satisfaction found in mediocrity,

resistance to change, fear of success, the unusual character of an approach, and any number of other pretexts.

I remember a late patient who had attended a prestigious business school because of his parents' expectations rather than out of his own inclination—which is probably not an unusual case. His true passion was ichthyology, the study of fish, and he suffered from the apparently irreconcilable character of those two directions, torn as he was between the apparent uselessness of his hobby and the guilt caused by his failure to apply his training. He finally found his own mode of accomplishment by starting a company that provided aquariums in kit form to communities. This unlikely creative synthesis made it possible for him to combine his love of fish and his management know-how into an original and viable professional project. He was not a Mozart, and he did not discover a proof of Fermat's great theorem, but he found an original, almost incongruous path that involved the whole of who he was, with his unique character, which he accepted as such. I like this example for its slightly trivial character—not as far as he was concerned, though!—as opposed to a grandiose conception of genius that, by forcing you to choose between everything and nothing, generally results in nothing.

As Seneca wrote, "It is not true that one does not dare to accomplish things because they are difficult; things are difficult because one does not dare to accomplish them." And, according to Goethe, "No matter what it is that you can do or dream of doing, do it. There is genius, power, and magic in daring. Start right now." Hegel wrote, "Nothing great in this world was ever done without passion."

This definition of individual genius raises particular challenges within the framework of French culture, but it also takes its natural place within the French cultural genius and constitutes one of the opportunities that are available to French culture.

According to this view of individual genius, you must allow yourself your own desire and release yourself from the weight of the past, the judgment of others, prohibitions, and criticism; in a word, you must authorize yourself. Yet it is difficult for French children and

future adults to free themselves from the plans their parents have made for them. Generally, these parental plans are forced upon the children, denying them their own wishes and replacing them with the heritage of previous generations, which includes the burdensome obligation to pass on the heritage as it is. This heritage is too imposing to allow children to rediscover it for themselves and too inflexible to allow the next generation to accept it in a merely provisional manner: it must be accepted as a whole.

Constant criticism by your peers restricts individual initiative, thus increasing cultural stability. Success is not viewed kindly, since, due to the belief in scarcity, what someone gains is perceived as being taken away from others rather than as a contribution to the common wealth—contrary to the Protestant ethics. In addition, the attachments and depressive tendencies that are inherent in the French character limit risk-taking<sup>vii</sup> and lead to overestimating the obstacles encountered. Failure is severely castigated, in part as a punishment for attempting to break from the norm and disclaim solidarity with the group (so is success, by the way). What the French call “*banqueroute*” (utter and irretrievable financial failure) is covered by Chapter 11 of the American bankruptcy code, which allows a company to keep operating by protecting it from its creditors until it has shown within a reasonable deadline that it can become viable once again. Americans have chosen to favor the vitality of their economy over the interests of creditors, of shareholders in particular. As for the French, it is not easy to determine what choice they have made, when the quasi-parasitic profession of official receiver exploits companies that could have remained viable.

In spite of all these obstacles, is there a place for the expression of personal genius within French culture? Of course there is; first, because culture is not monolithic and there are significant individual variations; second, because the critical, rebellious, and heroic character of the French is conducive to a reexamination of accepted practices<sup>viii</sup>; finally, because the French emphasis on the person rests on individual difference. One just needs to look around to see a collection of rabid individualists who have dared and have succeeded in

achieving their personal goals. I meet some of them every day in Silicon Valley.

## GIVING AND THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PASS ON THE HERITAGE

One final word on two aspects of individual genius that join with collective genius and are among the strong points of French culture: giving and the duty to pass on one's heritage. In a more and more market-oriented and cynical society, in which generosity is disappearing and individuals are increasingly isolated from each other, the heart must come back into play: we must give our time, attention, money, and knowledge. In a country whose culture is on the wane, we must be the agents of a great effort of recovery; go beyond immediate personal gain; rediscover generosity, this affirmation of fraternity that is neither fearful nor defensive; pass on what is valuable in our cultural heritage, in particular to the next generations. These are personal and collective imperatives. By providing individual satisfaction, they partake in personal genius; by ensuring the continuity of our culture, they are part of our cultural genius. The writing of this book, which is rooted in the rich *corpus* of French culture, and which aims to be a defense and an example of it, embodies this double imperative. This is why it is made available free of charge on the Web, in addition to being published in traditional paper form. Fortunately, many other ways can be found to fulfill this imperative.

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- i Interview by Stéphane Davet and Frank Nouchi, *Le Monde*, November 3, 2002.
  - ii “Jean-Pierre Raffarin declared on Friday December 20 in Poitiers, before the *Agence française des investissements internationaux en France*, ‘there has been a real decline of our country’ for the past few years.” (*Le Monde*, December 21, 2002.)
  - iii *Competitive Advantage*. New York, Free Press. 1985.
  - iv This analysis is taken from Langdon Morris, in particular from his book, *Fourth Generation R&D*. John Wiley & Sons. 1999.
  - v Recently, the number of these scholarships has been increased, but only by a small amount, whereas they constitute one of the easiest and cheapest ways to expand France's political and commercial

influence over the long term by developing its worldwide network of Francophiles, as the United States has understood quite well. Léo Hamon wrote in *Le Monde*, December 27, 1953, “[We] offer 6 scholarships in Japan whereas the United States provides 716. In Italy, 28 as opposed to 150. In Latin America, the stakes are crucial. Two hundred million men, rather than a few million, will be civilized (*sic*) by the beginning of the next century. Language, taste, everything that is customarily called the Latin civilization, leads these men to choose French as their international language: everything... except for France’s presence.” We cannot say that we have not been warned.

- vi And let us not forget “*la tête de veau sauce gribiche*.”
- vii It is significant that the French designate as “*capital risqué*” (“risky capital”) what Americans call “venture capital.”
- viii According to Tocqueville, of all people, the French are “the most unadventurous and set in their ways when left on their own; and yet, once they have been roused away from their homes and their routines, they are ready to go to the ends of the earth and to dare anything.” *The Old Regime and the Revolution*.

## CHAPTER 12

# DECONSTRUCTION

What if...

What if things were not as clear as this book suggests....

What if Americans, as simple as they appear to be, could not be reduced to little diagrams and a few explanatory principles....

What if the French, despite their lack of awareness of their own culture, could find in this culture a potentially more fruitful treasure trove and use it to achieve success in the complex world of today....

Above all, what if American culture were more implicit than it appears to be....

In any culture, some features can conceal others. It might seem that this would only be the case for implicit cultures. Yet, for any culture to exist, for human beings to be able to live together and communicate with each other, they must find a collective middle ground between individual views that necessarily differ from each other. For this collective adjustment that we call “culture” to be able to operate, a discrepancy must exist between what is said and what is meant. Implicitness could therefore be found among Americans, and not just among its leaders or in politically correct statements.

And then, what if there were more and more explicitness among the French, in management, within professions with a technical or financial culture, but also in general among the younger generations, along with the decline of Catholicism and the growing influence of American culture... In short, what if, in France also, things were beginning to be more and more stated....

No more explicitness?

What about individuation? “You can do it!” But what if Americans, because they were weaned too early and are uncertain that they are loved, were to face a fundamental personal insecurity

that led them to rush into conformism and the safety provided by omnipresent processes—even in their personal relationships.... What if this process were to replace thinking and allow them to find reassurance in doing instead of having to face the ordinary and trivial difficulty of existing, providing them too with the safety found in belonging to a world dominated by the marketplace, collective religiosity, and comforting nationalism.... What if those who could not face this deficit of being were to find refuge in drugs or some other virtual paradise....

On the other shore are the French, incompletely weaned, but so capable of love, bonding and meaning, attached to the past and therefore capable of making history.

No more individuation?

What if the Americans, who are so attached to the law in domestic matters but domineering abroad, were to release themselves from the burden of contractual relationships that are too oppressive because they serve as substitutes for virtue? By doing so, Americans would also rid themselves of a parasitic class of lawyers that has perverted the spirit of a system that was completely viable until greed took it over.

What if the French were in the process of learning to become accountable for their actions and adopting a less dysfunctional legal system and a more reliable contractual system, finally realizing, in facts and not just in words, that freedom is measured by the yardstick of responsibility....

No more contractual relationships?

What if it turned out that the American obsessions with tasks and material possessions concealed the fear of a great inner emptiness and a denial of mortality....

What if the French were to recover the true meaning of the vertical relationship, that of service and dedication to others, rediscovering the dimension of generosity that was lost had dissipated into feudal remnants.... What if, because of healthier parental relationships, the French were more able to face things, and not just through

reactions of rebellious independence....

No more emphasis on tasks and relationships

What if American culture too were internally schizophrenic.... What if this self-confident and dominating country were to rot from the inside in the comfortable sleep of declining civilizations, abandoning itself, without a real reaction, to Wall Street's unbounded greed, to the trivialization of violence peddled by Hollywood without any awareness of its—significant—responsibility, and to the general decadence of its education system... In a word, what if this great country no longer had the moral leadership that could justify its political, military, monetary, commercial, and cultural leadership.

What if France were to pull itself together, reform its justice system and develop a genuine spirit of responsibility, find a purpose worthy of itself, without spite or arrogance but also without defeatism, and accept the specific role it can have within its local communities and regions, in Europe, in the French-speaking world, and in the concert of nations....

No more schizophrenia?

What if....

These few examples show that cultures could undergo an endless sequence of critical re-combinations through a series of mirror effects, which would only result in preserving the *status quo ante* and encouraging inaction.

Yet, even if these points and counterpoints were to threaten the beautiful and rational edifice of apparent cultural differences between our two countries, this would not release us from a critical examination of the ins and outs of French culture, from attempting to understand its hidden mechanisms, to better master it by knowing it better, to make it evolve—in a conscious manner, rather than under the strain of uncontrollable determinisms—, and finally to acknowledge our responsibility to the survival of our own culture—which, let us proclaim it, is too important to be left to the Americans.<sup>i</sup>

<sup>i</sup> Congratulations to the readers who have read this book from cover to cover. Because of the inevitable circular causalities it presents, they are now advised to read it again. "Double the pleasure...."

## APPENDIX 1

# FRENCH ANTI-AMERICANISM: IS IT ALL DECIDED BEFORE THE AGE OF SIX?<sup>i</sup>

The more Americans plunge into saber-rattling and rev up the war machine as 2002 draws to a close, the more anti-Americanism rises in France. In any case, it is a subject of debate, as the opposing opinions of Jean-François Revel and Emmanuel Todd illustrate. This summer, a remarkable essay by Robert Kagan<sup>ii</sup> reminded us that for centuries, the weaker state has been the stronger pacifist. In the heyday of Europe's greatness, it was the Americans who wanted to pacify the warmongering of the Old World.

These days, plenty is being written about anti-Americanism. But is there more going on under the surface of the debate? Whatever the arguments for or against Americans, we have to wonder if the deep ambivalence of the French toward Americans isn't governed by hidden determinisms more powerful than the arguments articulated, which are too rational to be completely honest.

Americans, weaned young and pushed away too soon by mothers who constantly cheered them on saying, "Go, have fun! You can do it!" are haunted by the question of whether they are loved. It is strange to see such a "self-assured and dominating people," as General de Gaulle said in another context, be so sensitive to this issue. The day after the United States was expelled from the United Nations Human Rights Commission, the headline of the *New York Times* read, "The Whole World Hates Us." An American arriving in Paris who gets snubbed by a taxi driver might imagine that the French hate Americans. Little does she know that a French person would be greeted in the same way. In short, however tough they may

appear, Americans do not deal well with rejection. On some level, the French know this and try to avenge their dethroned hegemony by striking where it hurts.

The title chosen by very erudite Harvard professor Stanley Hoffman for his article on anti-Americanism was none other than, "Why Don't They Like Us?"<sup>iii</sup> He writes: "Past hegemons, from Rome to Great Britain, tended to be quite realistic [...]. They wanted to be obeyed or, as in the case of France, admired. They rarely wanted to be loved. But as a combination of high-noon sheriff and proselytizing missionary, the United States expects gratitude and affection. It was bound to be disappointed; gratitude is not an emotion that one associates with the behavior of states."

Weaned late and incompletely, the French need not wonder if they are loved; they are loved all too much. Yet sheltered too long by their mothers, they do feel the need to prove their independence. So they act out. They constantly go on strike, skirt the law, come up with some impossibly complicated construct (but only once, just prove everyone wrong by showing they can). They perform small, heroic acts, find their own back-door solutions, cheat on their taxes and, sometimes, thumb their noses at those Yanks. Then, satisfied that they *could* be weaned but not wanting to be forever, they rush back to the maternal bosom where they settle into a comfortable slumber on the soft pillow of entitlements—lifetime employment, a 35-hour work week and other distinctly French luxuries.

The French, too close to Americans, very much influenced by them, captivated by their mercantile seduction, and nearly overrun culturally and economically, experience America as an ambiguous, Jekyll-and-Hyde mother—sometimes all good, sometimes all bad. Overly attached to this omnipotent mother, they need to make a clean break here as well by declaring their opposition. These two countries also share a brotherly, love-hate relationship. America, the younger, deplores the hereditary legitimacy of the elder, whereas the latter envies the freedom and lack of responsibility of the younger.<sup>iv</sup>

Increasingly faced with unemployment, economic competition,

and the demand for performance, in other words, *reality*, French society has responded with thirty years of excessive mothering. In trying to protect her poor little ones, France has made them more depressed. Overprotection, whether of a child or a citizen, conveys the underlying message "You can't do it." For the French, constantly criticized during their childhood, this judgment has reopened the wound of self-doubt at the core of their personality. We should beware: depression being a form of internalized aggression, it would not take much for this pent-up energy to be unleashed in a massive outburst.

Metaphorically speaking, children need a father to shield them from the stranglehold of the mother(land). However, in the French collective unconscious, the father is absent or tyrannical, in any case, never where he belongs. In the April 2002 elections, the French had the choice between rhetoric even more materialistic (the absent father) and extreme radicalization of the paternal role (the tyrannical father). As the current resurgence of the Napoleonic myth indicates, it could be tempting to look to a savior, a man invested with divine powers. However, ever since Gallic chief Vercingétorix failed to thwart Roman rule, all the dangers of this archetype, including rejection and ultimate defeat, have been permanently etched into the national psyche. In this difficult context, President Bush's bellicose resolve awakens French ambivalence towards the father figure and provides a logical target in the dialectic of the log and the speck.

Still steeped in a vertical social structure inherited first from feudalism, then from the nobility, the French cannot tolerate being subordinate in a relationship. Having endured constant criticism in their childhood, they seek to reverse the power dynamic by in turn becoming the critic—this time of Americans. By pointing out every inconsistency between word and deed, accusing Americans of hypocrisy, and building a case against them as the real "bad guys," the French get to cast themselves as the "good guys."

None of this necessarily means that the Americans are right. Their moralistic attitude is irritating; the vast discrepancy between their domestic legalism and their direct action abroad is exasperating; the idea of an "axis of evil" regrettably frames the debate squarely as

holy war; and the notion of preemptive war is certainly questionable. But, for goodness' sake, let us have the clarity to recognize that more can be at play than meets the eye.

- i A large excerpt from this text appeared in the December 7, 2002 issue of *Le Figaro Magazine*.
- ii Kagan, Robert, *Power and Weakness, Policy Review*, June 2002.
- iii *Commentary*, Issue 96, Winter 2001-2002
- iv Alex ElKayem, personal communication.

Translated by students in the Graduate School of Translation and Interpretation at the Monterey Institute of International Studies ([www.miis.edu](http://www.miis.edu)) under the direction of Assistant Professor Julie E. Johnson.

## APPENDIX 2

# THE FRENCH AND THE JAPANESE

The French are culturally closer to the Japanese than to the Americans, even though they do not realize it because of the different physical appearance of the Japanese and of a culture that is puzzling for them—and that few of them know, in any case. In my opinion, there are two reasons for this: first, the lack of weaning of the Japanese, which is a magnified reflection of the delayed weaning of the French; second, the feudal heritage of both countries.

Thus, a similar dialectic is at work in both countries: between form and content, gift and the art of giving or wrapping the gift, what is said and what is implied, moral debt and its repayment, map and territory, and real feelings and apparent courtesy, each of which reflects the discrepancy that exists between real and symbolic realms.

Thus, one cannot understand these two cultures without the concept of attachment: to the mother, of course. For the Japanese, it is embodied in a forever inconsolable nostalgia; for the French, in a strong feeling of belonging mixed with chronic rebellion; in both cases, in the strong desire of extreme abandon to an always benevolent mother (“*amae*”)<sup>i</sup>, which the French sublimate into a mothering state and its protecting institutions such the national system of health and unemployment insurance<sup>ii</sup>, or various forms of guardianship. Attachment to the mother situates these two cultures on the side of implicitness, at least as far as relationships are involved (Japanese culture is extremely explicit with respect to tasks). It should be noted that incomplete or delayed weaning generates the same effects in other cultures, whether it is nostalgia or even despair in the Russian soul or *saudade* in Brazil.

Attachment also concerns the past, and is related to the

importance of history and tradition, and to aestheticism. The highest degree of belonging is expressed in both cultures by a pronounced feeling of belonging, related to the fact that the Japanese actually live on an island and that the French believe that they do, as shown by protectionism, the exception for culture, and what Americans sometimes affectionately call, "*Vive la différence!*"

Hierarchies thus play an essential part in inter-individual relationships, even if the French are generally not aware of it. The authority argument is the French counterpart of the Japanese *rikutsu nuki shukanka saseru* (instilling habits without giving reasons for them). In both cases, the goal is to pass on the implicit character of the culture to the next generation, without allowing the bind to be exposed. The difference is that the French force things through, if necessary through a violence of which they are not even aware, whereas the Japanese pass things on smoothly, through the parents and grandparents' constant attention to children. For example, although toilet-training occurs at an extremely early stage, it does not generate resistance because adults pay attention to the rhythm of the children's bowel and bladder movements, teach them how to name them (*shishi* or *unun*), and place them on the potty when they are only a few months old, in a situation that involves no confrontation and therefore no collision with the need for independence that was mentioned above about the French.

But in Japan, the self will not even emerge, and the lack of self-awareness will allow the Japanese to be entirely ruled by the collective superego, whereas the French are forced into an endless wavering between belonging and occasional rebellion.

Both cultures are characterized by the absence or weakness of the father. For the Japanese, an omnipresent collectivity takes his place, giving the law an oddly maternal character. For the French, the father's wavering between absence and tyranny produces the effects of cultural schizophrenia that have been described in Chapter 9.

In a certain way, observing the Japanese is helpful in order to understand the French, if we wonder whether a given character trait

that can be observed in Japan might not be an exaggerated form of a similar trait found in the French. I confess that I have used this method in writing this book. In fact, I have done the same things with the Italians, whose similarity to the French is more obvious, although they lack certain anal characteristics of the latter. Symmetrically, observing the Germans helps to understand the Americans<sup>iii</sup>.

i E. Dale Saunders, the translator of Takeo Doi, translated this concept as "indulgence." Michael Balint chose the terms "primary love" and "passive objectal love." *Primary Love and Psychoanalytic Technique*. Liveright. 1965.

ii Conversely, American mothers do not allow *amae* to their children.

iii This approach can be dangerous if used carelessly, as is the use of analogy in mathematics, because it risks leading to inappropriate comparisons; proper judgment must be exercised when using it.

## APPENDIX 3

# EXPLICIT CULTURE, PROCESS, AND COMPLEXITY THEORY

In Chapter 2 (Explicitness), I wrote that, for Americans, “the map is the territory.” Without dwelling on the pragmatic paradox generated by this deliberate (and voluntaristic) confusion, I would like to examine a few of its consequences in terms of complexity theory.

Given a series  $s_{R,G}$  describing a reality  $R$  with graininess (level of discrimination)  $G$ , graininess being in this case the base in which series  $s_{R,G}$  is expressed, the higher the base, the finer the grain (or size of the mesh), and the smaller the detail detected in  $R$ ; for a binary series, the minimum value of  $G$  is 2.

All cultures tend to employ a distortion of perception, or more precisely to set up a filter, which leads its members to see (= to foreground in order to use) what makes sense in order to achieve a satisfaction  $S$  out of the fuzziness of a given reality  $R$ . In the case of American culture, satisfaction  $S_A$  is one-dimensional and usually expressed in dollar amounts. For the French, satisfaction  $S_F$  is multi-dimensional and expressed in terms of quality of life, relationships, historical attachments, status, money, etc., in proportions that vary depending on the individual and the organization involved. Because of the multi-dimensional character of  $S_F$ , attaining a local optimum is more likely than attaining absolute optimum  $S_{max}$ , and the probability that  $S_A = S_{max}$  is greater than the probability that  $S_F = S_{max}$ , and, in most cases,  $S_A > S_F$ .

The filter used by Americans selects elements of reality  $R$  based on the previous application of processes that are already known to be efficient in optimizing  $S_A$ . The filter evolves with time according to a Markovian process (the state of the system at stage  $n$  depends on its state at stages  $[n-1], [n-2], \dots, [n-p]$ ), which is one of the components

of learning in a culture. The higher the level of satisfaction achieved is, the higher the propensity to reuse the processes that have led to it; this tropism is stronger for Americans because  $S_A > S_F$ .

Series  $s_{R,G}$  presents a structure, which is to say redundancies that make it possible to recognize patterns in it; taking this pattern into account has already been rewarded. Being redundant, this series is compressible. If  $s$  is a binary series, Levin's Measurement  $m(s)$  is the probability determined by  $m(s) = 1/2^{K(s)}$ , in which  $K(s)$ , Kolmogorov's complexity factor is the length of the shortest program that can describe  $s$ . It can be shown that  $K(s)$  is also the length of its best compressed version.

The more explicit a culture is, the more structured it is (since expressing it requires words, each of which is a microstructure, a small process that is applied in order to describe reality  $R$ , and therefore the lower  $K(s)$  is).

Given a series  $s$  with graininess  $G$ ,  $m_G(s) = 1/G^{K(s)}$ , with a special case if  $G=2$  (binary series). The higher the granularity is, the lower Levin's Measurement is. The latter is more affected by an increase in graininess than by an increase in Kolmogorov's complexity factor, which is an exponent in the denominator of Levin's equation. In order to obtain the same Levin's Measurement for two different pairs  $\{K(s_1), G_1\}$  and  $\{K(s_2), G_2\}$  (one for the French, the other for the Americans, of course), a small increase in the graininess of one pair is enough to compensate for a large increase in complexity. In the case that I am discussing, the Americans' propensity to watch reality through the filter of their processes and therefore to operate with a high degree of graininess helps them to process (= maximize the satisfaction derived from) a more complex reality than the French can because, due to their aversion for processes, the French preserve a low degree of graininess.

Thus, ironically, by trying to maximize several criteria at the same time the French operate in a less than optimal manner, although their approach is more consistent with the complexity of the real world; whereas Americans, by observing the real world through the

simplifying filter of their processes and because of their obsessive pursuit of material gain, better optimize their satisfaction ratio and benefit from better learning. Appendix 4 will show that, on the other hand, French culture can generate more emergences under certain conditions, which constitutes one of the opportunities available to it in an increasingly complex world.

It is possible to identify a cognition/action sequence that leads from perception to control through the stages of identification, classification, interpretation, designation of objectives, and allocation and management of resources. It is noteworthy that, when seeking to optimize a given satisfaction ratio, it is more relevant to focus on the beginning stages of this sequence than on its end stages, even though most researchers and men of action tend to focus their attention on the latter!

#### CULTURAL DUALITY

Since the topic of this appendix is what could be called "Cultural Mathematics," another observation comes to mind. It seems to me that French and American cultures are not merely different, inter-linked, opposite, contrary, or even orthogonal. In my opinion, the term that most adequately describes the relationship that exists between them is that of "duality," in the mathematical sense:<sup>ii</sup>

This sheds light on a number of dualistic oppositions between French and American cultures: hierarchical relationships vs. horizontal ones; culture (in the sense of "being cultured") as a set of horizontal transversal relationships between different kinds of knowledge vs. culture as specialization (vertical deepening); a broad field of vision vs. focalization; analog vs. digital; perception through fine-grain size of the impressionistic type vs. perception through large-mesh filters; favoring the nuances of gray of the real world's underbelly vs. seeking the starkest contrasts possible between black and white; being vs. having; relationships vs. tasks; seeking to preserve belonging vs. being separated and taking risks; essentialism and personal mark vs. universalism of the process; minimizing losses

(*minimax*) vs. maximizing gains (*maximin*).

In addition to this duality between two cultures, other dualities also seem to exist within given cultures, for instance the high degree of contrast embodied by French tribalism (you're either in or out) or the supposed French Cartesianism; or, for the Japanese, implicitness of relationships vs. explicitness of tasks. These various levels of dualities might be connected by fractal relationships within each culture.

If my intuitions are accurate, this duality involves a kind of underlying cultural structure of which this book has only lightly touched the outlying branches, those that emerge at the surface of everyday reality, perhaps also touching a first layer of interpretation, but not much more at this stage. I intend to return to this cultural duality in more detail in subsequent writings.

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- i At least in modern times; In classical times, many cultures had already discovered this.
- ii In equation  $AX = k$ , where A designates parameters {a, b, c}, and X designates coordinates {x, y, z}, and which can be developed as  $ax + by + cz = k$ , A and X are dual. A certain number of consequences derive from this property, in particular cross-correspondences between the two universes of A and X; there is a correspondence between certain properties of A and "dual" properties of X.

## APPENDIX 4

### MANAGER OR "ENERGER"

Today, management theory is known to trail some distance behind scientific theory, as if our basic vision of the world precedes our understanding of how best to manage it. A centralized, pyramid-like representation of companies corresponded to the scientific paradigm of causality. The notion of predictability was reflected in "strategic" planning and "rational" organization. It thus comes as no surprise that challenges to the Newtonian model—first by Einstein, then by Heisenberg and Prigogine—and the related appearance of Complexity sciences have given rise to a new managerial paradigm.

The Santa Fe Institute in New Mexico was born out of the demise of the Los Alamos nuclear laboratories and the determination of eccentric Nobel Prize winner in physics Murray Gell-Mann, who fully appreciated the implications of the narrow band between the standard order of calculable phenomena and the chaos of nuclear turbulence. In that band lie various phenomena of everyday life - thought, economics, self-organization (notably biological) - that do not lend themselves to any necessarily reductive model. Until then, insistence on looking for solutions within the universe of the calculable, and not the universe of the possible, had excluded from the field of our reasoning attention most of what nature offers.

The profound implications of this work did not escape John Reed, president of Citicorp who, beyond his obviously genuine personal interest, probably recognized that it held clues to a better understanding of economic mechanisms, in particular the stock market. At the Faculté d'Orsay, one of France's centers of mathematical excellence, mathematician René Thom established Catastrophe Theory, later refined by the French-American Mandelbrot and a team at the University of California at Santa Cruz where the concepts of fractals were deepened and key invariants of complex phenomena were discovered. Then Brian Arthur—a Complexity thinker who dares to

ask questions like “Why do clocks run clockwise?”-raised a eponymous question that earned him the ridicule of his fellow economists at the time (1960): “And what if, in economics, there were a place for phenomena of increasing returns?”

Any normal economist knew very well that the only prevailing and immutable law was that of diminishing returns, which states that the marginal price of a good or service on a non-monopoly market tends toward the marginal cost, and that the margin of return therefore tends toward zero. The alluring profits reaped by an innovator attract new players. The resulting competition causes all players to lower their prices until the initially attractive differentiation gives way to a commoditization and to a calculable order quite reassuring to advocates of the invisible hand. In the copasetic company of economists, Brian Arthur was a troublemaker . . . that is, until the information economy, with its externalized networks, gave credence to his conjecture.

Today, everyone can see that the usefulness of a telephone (or fax machine) grows as the square of the number of people using one, and that Windows is a logical choice of operating systems because it is the most widely used. Now, a contemporary Winner-Take-All economy has come to co-exist with the traditional economy of diminishing returns. The richer a nation, the wider the gap automatically becomes between it and other countries; the quicker a company snaps up market share in a new internet niche, the more futile the prospects become for latecomers.

In this new economy, time is the key resource. Talent (defined as the combined capacity to comprehend and then act faster than one’s competitors) and the ecological wealth of the supporting environment (cultural and institutional openness to the creation of wealth; variety and availability of the resources required for innovation and for rapid growth) are more important than financial resources, which are becoming more of a consequence than a cause. The situation is not necessarily hopeless for those who find themselves sidelined with (relatively) meager resources (but have not fallen into poverty - that magnet, that black hole, from which no one escapes without

external assistance). Such hopefuls can still attack a niche market. To take advantage of the upward spiral of positive reinforcement, they can even create a niche, a new business sufficiently innovative and focused to trigger the divergent spiral effect of interest here (e.g. Apple Computer’s desktop publishing).

In this context of two coexisting, contradictory models, one well known and relatively mastered, the other still misunderstood by many economists and simple mortals like yours truly, John Holland entered the picture. At one of the Santa Fe Institute’s annual symposia he proposed the following experiment: suppose we have a relatively significant number of agents (molecules, individuals, companies, countries or galaxies). Imagine that we begin connecting them by bars (links, relations) two at a time, at random, and from time to time stop and lift out one of these bars, also at random, to see what comes with it. Not much at first: disparate points have been connected and the corresponding links are scattered. But as we continue connecting points and the density of connections approaches 1/2, suddenly we get something very different when we lift out a bar: because of the many interconnections, we now hold an increasingly rich structure. (Physicists and chemists will recognize this as a phenomenon of phase transition.)

The interesting point of this hypothetical experiment is that what is lifted together from the point of inflection is of a different nature than the individual elements at the outset. Likewise, where initially only a smattering of individual companies were of interest, a sufficient density of relationships causes phenomena beyond particular players, ideas, financial resources, institutions, and sub-cultures to capture our attention. We now behold an entity so complex (and so effective) that it has become known far and wide as the “Silicon Valley.” The process of interconnection gave rise to an entity on an order of complexity superior to that of its constituent parts, which it subsumes and governs. Beyond the initial elements and the relationships among them, this resulting entity has new functional capabilities and a stable-or at least perennial-structure. A new species has appeared. In a word, we have witnessed an emergence.

How, then, can favorable emergences be created at will? This is more than a theoretical question. The breakdown of post-modern society, the meaninglessness increasingly experienced in so-called developed societies, the failure of political policies, and the search for new global economic models are just some of the phenomena that beg such a question. Businesses, meanwhile, need to mobilize everyone's brain power, not just that of their executives; they seek innovations that truly resonate with their market and thus require efforts more evenly spread across both marketing and R&D; they are looking not just for new products, but for new business models.

John Holland and other complexity theorists have identified five conditions that increase the possibility of an emergence. (Let it be clear that one cannot, per the old Command and Control model, order an emergence to appear; the best one can do is increase its chances of happening.)

**A large number of agents.**

**A high density of agents.**

**A measure of diversity.**

**A great many connections.**

**A state of heightened intensity.**

Interestingly, the Silicon Valley meets these five criteria, and not just anecdotally. Annalee Saxenian, U.C. Berkeley professor, effectively demonstrated as much (without explicitly saying so) in her book *Regional Advantage: Culture and Competition in Silicon Valley and Route 128*, (Harvard University Press, 1996). She explains the success of the Silicon Valley by its early adoption of a so-called open model, in contrast to the closed model of Boston's Route 128. The recent appearance of Silicon Alley—where some 150,000 jobs have been created in two years—on the East Coast of the United States, and the Hsinchu-Taipei region (Taiwan), show that the model is transposable to other environments.

**1. Large number of agents.** The large number of agents in the Silicon Valley is partly due to the fact that, in California, innovative companies prefer to establish partnerships with the “best of

breed” rather than try to do everything themselves. This enables them to focus on their core competencies and not waste time reinventing the wheel. This preference for calling on a host of outside contractors has led to a proliferation of small companies, each attempting to be the best in its own very narrow market, thus helping to satisfy the first condition for emergence.

American legal practices make such contract relationships both reliable and quick to establish. Conversely, the French traditionally launch in-house projects that are as ambitious as possible and that extend over a longer period of time (years rather than months). They are loath to call on outside assistance, as if doing so were an admission of incompetence. This more monolithic approach, in line with Colbertian tradition and the projection-oriented culture of the *grandes écoles*, requires fewer agents in the surrounding economy and is thus less conducive to emergence.

**2. High density of agents.** The high density of agents in the Silicon Valley results from the geographically limited space defined by the Pacific Ocean, the City of San Francisco, San Francisco Bay, and the mountains south of San Jose. Similar space restrictions can be observed on smaller scales, such as offices of cubicles and research centers like that of Steelcase in Michigan, where the pyramidal architecture is designed to accommodate the maximum number of researchers in the minimum amount of space, thus also satisfying the fourth condition for emergence (a great many connections). Rows of closed-door offices along austere corridors obviously do not facilitate emergence.

**3. Measure of diversity.** Diversity can be achieved with several comparably-sized categories of agents or, in the parlance of chemistry and electronics, with one dominant category enriched by a few “impurities.”

Ethnic diversity, clearly valued in Silicon Valley culture as an enriching factor, enables the system to draw on a wider range of perspectives and potential solutions than available in a more monochrome system.

Yesterday's stable environments selected "species" that thrived on stability, which they in turn reinforced. It is worth noting that an all-male upper management, as still exists in many companies, is absurd from the standpoint of emergence. What business, what country can afford to not to avail itself of half the available intelligence? Furthermore, given the diversity of problems encountered, who would decline the advantage of a corresponding diversity from within? The politically correct reactions one inevitably hears to any call for more women in upper management (or in R&D) are but a smoke screen veiling the enormous resistance of traditional males to the emergence of new behaviors less predictable than the Old Boy network.

- 4. Great number of connections.** In the Silicon Valley, a great number of connections are fostered by a culture that encourages strangers to communicate with one another. The fact that these relations are often ephemeral (and hence seen by the French as "hypocritical") is irrelevant. What matters is achieving the fastest possible cross-fertilization. The French (and the Japanese) prefer fewer, more lasting relationships, which result in fewer surprises and less emergence. Interpersonal distance, observed by Polly Platt in her (hilarious) chapter about Smiling (and not smiling) in French or Foe?: Getting the Most Out of Visiting, Living and Working in France (Cultural Crossings, Ltd., May 1995) is an impediment to communication, and therefore to emergence.

Risk tolerance (notoriously higher in the American culture), transparency, and the belief in abundance that manifests itself in a "win-win" mentality, lead Americans to view strangers as sources of potential enrichment, not as predators. Operating in a deregulated economy also facilitates emergence.

- 5. State of heightened intensity.** The heightened intensity of players in the Silicon Valley is expressed in the passion they have for their work (successfully completing a project) and in financial drivers (across-the-board stock options for all start-up employees). According to conventional reasoning, it makes perfect

sense to limit the income of employees in the dot-com business unit of a company or to castrate stock-option legislation with heavy taxation. But it makes no sense whatsoever in the new economy. (This observation does not in itself solve any of the problems that stem from the coexistence of two different mind-sets. Some companies attempt to resolve the situation by outsourcing their Internet activities—a disassociation that will make overall unifying emergences all the more imperative).

In 1997, unemployed workers in France held "strikes," staging sit-ins at the offices of the French National Employment Agency (ANPE). This action embodied the five conditions necessary for emergence (in this case, passive-dejection-turned-anger satisfied the fifth condition of heightened intensity). The government and the General Confederation of Labor (CGT), having clearly understood the situation, injected calming "boron rods" into this "social reactor" to avoid a critical divergence that could potentially lead to the emergence of a new type of union activity which existing mechanisms would be unable to control.

All emergences come as a relative surprise (otherwise, we would be back in the realm of mechanistic prediction) and can be either favorable or unfavorable. We must therefore identify the necessary conditions for favorable emergences, or the mechanisms of selection by which we retain only those that are desirable. The point is to tip the playing field, to create a force field, a tropism that will foster welcome emergences while hampering the rest, just as in biology there are factors that either facilitate or impede the emergence of a species. Social ethics, understood as a set of values shared by a community, can fulfill this function. One of the responsibilities of a leader will be to ensure, by philosophy and by personal example, that such ethics are upheld.

Albert Einstein declared that it takes a higher level of intelligence to solve problems than the level which prevailed when they were created. What could be a more clear call for emergence? What if the

role of a CEO (or political leader) were, above all, to stimulate emergence? What philosophies, cultures, policies, structures, behaviors, and what means should be established to increase the chances of enriching emergences? But how can we even begin to consider such questions when most leaders feel like their back is to the wall, like they have no option but to operate defensively, particularly in the face of accelerating change, increasingly intense competition, and given their belief that the attitude of control which got them to where they are today is the only viable approach to solving to the problems now confronting them, confronting “their” organizations and confronting society at large? To the contrary, a certain “letting go” is needed to be receptive to the surprise of emergences, just as children can become fulfilled adults only if they are afforded sufficient freedom to experience their own emergences, not relive those of their parents.

Will our societies allow leaders of this new type to emerge, or will they entrench themselves in mechanistic schemata that are reassuring because familiar, but ill suited to solving problems caused by the increasing complexity of our world?

Translated by students in the Graduate School of Translation and Interpretation at the Monterey Institute of International Studies ([www.miis.edu](http://www.miis.edu)) under the direction of Assistant Professor Julie E. Johnson.

## APPENDIX 5

### The Americans and the French: Learning to Work Better Together

It is always difficult to find solutions to cross-cultural problems. Among **general obstacles** are the ignorance of the other culture, the tendency to feel superior and to be critical, and misunderstandings due to cultural projections. Well integrated in a company, several cultures complementing each other can take advantage of a wider variety of skills and knowledge, more creativity, and a better handling of new and complex situations, since the diversity inside the company better reflects the complexity of the outside world. Poorly integrated, it can lead to negative synergy, with each cultural group becoming defensive, avoiding contact, and contributing to a more rigid and ineffective response to challenges.

In the case of the French and the Americans, some **specific differences** require careful attention. Here are the main ones:

French culture is implicit, while American culture is explicit. Being too explicit can be perceived by the French as being naive or impolite. Being too implicit can be perceived by Americans as being unclear or political. The understanding of what constitutes a fact is different in each culture.

Americans tend to go straight to the point and to eliminate unnecessary details (“low context”); the French seem to always want more information and to base decisions on a wide variety of factors (“high context”), which require them to take more time to decide and to keep constant attention on the networks with which they surround themselves.

The Americans are more focused on the task, the French on the relationship. The French way is to first establish and nurture a relationship, then to carry it to fruition to solve the problems that arise. This personal attention tends to be seen by Americans as a waste of time, as since they put more

emphasis respecting the clear and pre-established process (which in turn is perceived as too impersonal and rigid by the French).

While the very purpose of the American Revolution was to establish more horizontal relationships and, through checks and balances, to avoid abuse of power, the French Revolution has not abolished all remnants of feudalism. French Employees tend to have strong loyalty and a sense of belonging to their company, department, and boss; they expect and receive a large amount of protection in exchange. Functionality is key to understanding American companies, while hierarchy better describes French organizations.

In the (more) horizontal American culture, contracts form the basis of all relationships and are expected to be respected by both parties, irrespective of their relative status. While the French may also place an apparent emphasis on legal or bureaucratic aspects, the intention is not always really contractual, and the relative power of the parties plays a larger role. Each party expects a lot of leeway in adjusting to changes in circumstances, regardless of what the contract stipulated in the first place. The more personal the relationship, the more that deviation will be possible—and expected, as a mark of favor that will consolidate the relationship. For the French, a casual attitude toward contracts may be regarded as an expression of a close relationship—which can lead to major misunderstandings with Americans at a later stage.

Americans are more individuated, whilst the French are more group-oriented. The former are constantly reminded that “you can do it” and are encouraged to take initiatives and rewarded for doing so. The latter have a strong preference for *appartenance* (belonging), with characteristic Gallic bursts of independence or rebellion - much to the dismay of their American counterparts who are more accustomed to some predictability of behavior. While wanting to preserve their individual privileges and being keenly aware of their person-

al specificity (sometimes to the point of arrogance), the French tend to derive a large part of their identity from the groups to which they belong (families, alumni, social strata, unions, etc....).

Americans tend to rely more on processes, which are supposed to be independent from the individuals who perform them. The French are more “personalistic”; they tend to have difficulty following a process for a long time and to insist on expressing their individuality and leaving their personal mark on their *opus*.

Americans are generally more open to risk. They prefer to try and learn from their mistakes. The French, having been constantly criticized during their youth, tend to be perfectionist and more risk-averse.

Americans are “monochronous” (one thing at a time and a time for each thing or person), whereas the French are “polychronous.” The attention that the French pay to several things or people at a time, along with other factors, can lead to a lesser respect for deadlines and to less stringent adherence to schedules.

Finally, the French tend to have a sense that, on the international stage, Americans do not always abide by the rules and attitudes that they are so keen to enforce domestically, whereas Americans tend to accuse the French of being unreliable allies and of other such niceties. Each of them sometimes accuses the other one of arrogance; many other cross-accusations could be mentioned, in what has been dubbed a love-hate relationship.

Obviously, for those two great peoples whose histories are so intertwined, there are more differences than meet the eyes, more potential tensions, and therefore more opportunities for mistakes. Let us then offer a few suggestions for improvement in joint work situations:

## HELPING THE FRENCH AND THE AMERICANS TO COPE WITH ONE ANOTHER.

*The French* will gain by the following:

Being more explicit, in particular by asking clearly what they want, saying “no” more directly, admitting it when they don’t know something, and showing less concern for the image they project when asking questions.

Being more individuated, by being more direct, less polite, less protective of the other party, and by disclosing more of their own feelings, whether they are positive or negative.

Being more pragmatic and considering the practical value of ideas instead of over-analyzing them intellectually. Demanding more practical results from all those who are involved in innovation (not only R&D).

Being less perfectionist and less risk-averse; quickly testing new ideas or projects on a small scale and learning from their mistakes. And by thinking big when the potential is there.

Being more aware of time pressure, both during meetings and regarding projects.

Being less critical and more positive; looking first at what is good in a new idea, what can work instead of what cannot work; giving the benefit of the doubt to people whom they do not know and judging them more on what they do than on who they are; finally, giving more credit to individuals and groups for their achievements.

Being less hierarchical, trusting their subordinates more and giving them more authority, without demanding constant feed-back or second-guessing those subordinates once they have reached a decision.

Being more contractual, by better clarifying and abiding by their commitments, including deadlines, and by specifying what they want before a contract (verbal or written) has been established; being on time.

Being less heroic and more professional; giving value to being steadfast and to achieving quality and delivering results over the long term.

Being more fair, in particular towards women and minorities, and recognizing talent wherever talent is, irrespective of pre-established categories.

*Americans* will gain by the followingBbecoming more aware of the existence of cultural differences; investing time in leaving their country and spending significant amounts of time in a specific place in order to learn about its culture and to develop an awareness of it.

Not assuming that all European countries or even all regions in a given country are alike; reading about those countries.

Becoming more accepting of other cultures; acknowledging that their own culture is not necessarily the only valid one in this world; letting go of a natural tendency to be overbearing abroad.

Slowing down in order to better observe what is around them, without trying to make sense of it too fast.

Learning to recognize shades of gray in a given situation and becoming more tolerant of ambiguity.

Learning to play with time, to let people who have a peripheral position relative to a project or to a decision have their say, beyond a strict *need to know* basis.

Spending more time to establish relationships, and not only with the principals; nurturing existing relationships, especially when not in need of anything in particular at the moment; learning to establish and work their network, and to stay abreast of changes in the context.

Learning to notice subtle clues coming from an implicit culture such as French culture; asking for help from friends in making sense of those clues; learning to rely more on their

intuition and to be less dependent on hard facts.

Becoming more flexible regarding processes and contracts, in order to allow them to evolve when it is appropriate (but without allowing themselves to be manipulated when it is not).

The remarks above assume that one can talk about *the* French and about *the* Americans, which is of course an overgeneralization. Mastering cultural differences means, among other things, recognizing whether a given difference is attributable to cultures or to individuals. In the process of observing differences from another culture, one may become more aware of one's own. This constitutes a process of *Cultural Development*, similar to *Personal Development* or to *Organizational Development*, but applied to cultures. Beyond having to cope with different cultures, one can gain by engaging in such a process. So can companies. Besides minimizing possible dysfunctions when they work together, the French and the Americans can aim at achieving positive synergies and creating added value by creatively blending their respective cultural geniuses. Here are a few recommendations in that direction:

#### ACHIEVING POSITIVE SYNERGIES BETWEEN THE FRENCH AND THE AMERICANS.

Multiculturalism in a company, be it between Americans and French people or on a broader scale, is to be managed. It does not occur by happenstance or by benign neglect. It requires constant attention from the leadership, a lot of practice, and the determination of the whole organization to learn to fully integrate the cultural dimension. The scope and difficulty of such an endeavor, plus the priority usually given to more urgent projects, explain that very few organizations achieve truly positive potential synergies between different cultures. Here are a few words of advice for those who want to embark on such a quest:

Include the intercultural dimension among the formal values of the company and implement it through example.

Ensure that the leadership team(s) is/are multicultural. This is the only way to be sure that the various cultures will be represented, understood and integrated at the level where this is the most effective. This will help ensure that ideas emanating from outside Headquarters will be better listened to and implemented. Besides, if a given culture is over-represented at the leadership level, this team will be identified with that culture or nationality, further complicating already naturally delicate relationships between the center and the periphery.

Make sure that as many projects as possible are launched on an intercultural basis, not only at the leadership level but also within the ranks. Try to represent and embody the strong points of each culture within the teams. Always start a cross-cultural project with some kind of cultural awareness phase (team building, seminar, readings,...).

Review frequently the state of cross-cultural affairs in the company, be it through surveys, analyses of critical incidents, specifically scheduled agendas items in meetings, short formal discussions during executive meetings, or by inclusion of cross-cultural perspectives in the performance review system. Systematically track cultural bias in hiring, promotion, compensation, training, etc....

Although such an endeavor to deliver additional cultural value is certainly a long-term initiative, it is a worthwhile one in order to allow companies to reflect the outside diversity and to be better attuned to the multicultural world of today.

Pascal Baudry, October 10, 2002.

## SUGGESTED READINGS

*In English:*

Asselin, G., and Mastron, R. (2001) *Au contraire! Figuring out the French*. Intercultural Press.

Carroll, R. (1990) *Cultural Misunderstanding, The French-American Experience*. Chicago. University of Chicago Press.

Platt, P. (1998, 2nd edition) *French or Foe?: Getting the Most Out of Visiting, Living and Working in France*. London: Culture Crossings.

*In French:*

Baudry, Pascal, *L'autre rive: Comprendre les Américains pour comprendre les Français*, a cyberbook in free access on [www.pbaudry.com](http://www.pbaudry.com); also published by Village Mondial, Pearson Ed. under the title *Français et Américains—L'autre rive* (Paris, 2003).

Platt, Polly, *Ils sont fous, ces Français*, Bayard Edition, Paris (1997).

An extended bibliography (several hundred titles) can be downloaded free of charge at [www.pbaudry.com](http://www.pbaudry.com).

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