

French Identity in Question between Consumerism and Frenchness: *Les Choses* by Perec*

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Abstract: Published in 1965, Perec's novel *Les Choses/The Things* won the French Prize Renaudot and was translated into English two years later, in 1967. Subtitled, "a story of the sixties", it is, as meant by its author, a picture of a time of deep changes in France, on one side, and in French people's mentality on the other side. That is why, we aim at analysing the way in which consumerism imposed changes on the French identity on an individual level taking into account the social and political framework.

Keywords: France, consumerism, identity, Frenchness, Anglo-Saxon influence

1. The Political History of the Post-War France

The '60s were an era of ongoing changes as a consequence of the events having taken place in the '50s. According to McMillan (McMillan, 2003: 75), the "political history of post-war France can be divided into three stages: the era of the notable¹ (...), the era of the state (...) and that of globalization". If during the first stage, French politics was dominated by a group of powerful individuals operating locally, during the second one, it was under the influence of a small number of powerful people operating nationally, while the third stage saw a French state unable to control international technological and economic changes. The era of notable corresponds to the Fourth Republic (1946–1958), while the era of the state corresponds to the Fifth Republic in 1958 and the era of globalization starts in the 1990s.

After France had been liberated, the Parti Communiste Français played a major role in the French political life, while in point of economy, the industrial plants, as well as the coal and metallurgy industries developed:

"The threat that the communist party was seen to pose in the late 1940s ensured a certain degree of unity among the opponents of

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¹ The notables were the ones to choose the President of the Republic; he was not chosen by direct elections.

communism” (McMillan, 2003: 80). Thus, we can see two forces confronting: the communists fighting against capitalism and the Gaullists fighting against the Fourth Republic; the Gaullists make the Fourth Republic collapse and general de Gaulle, supported by a party called the Union pour la Nouvelle République, became the president of the Republic in 1965.

“In economic terms, France became prosperous in the 1960s. This was the age of consumerism: the age of Georges Perec’s novel *Things* and of Barthes’ essay on the Citroën DS. Consumerism blunted political discontent” (McMillan, 2003: 85). By making his way through history when communicating speeches on TV, de Gaulle himself became thus a part of this society.

1968 was a special year during this period. Students whose number had increased went on strike with the workers, joining them; students’ demonstrations made the universities close, all this being caused by the young people’s discontentment for not having enough opportunities. Thus, a big question mark was raised around everything the Fifth Republic meant and de Gaulle’s only answer was repression which did nothing but making the things worse:

In some ways, 1968 did represent a challenge to the Fifth Republic. Rigid rules and strict hierarchies were called into question. The consumer prosperity which had appeared to be the Republic’s most concrete achievement, was dismissed. (...) The students professed a hostility to both capitalism and American ‘imperialism’, yet they were attacking a state that affirmed itself in international terms against simple deference to America and in national terms against the unbridled operations of the free market. The students were often fascinated by American popular culture and by the informality of American life that contrasted with the world of the French education system. Sometimes, such people, once they had abandoned their youthful ideological luggage, fitted rather well into the American-owned advertising agencies and software houses that were to transform France at the end of the century. (McMillan, 2003: 89)

It was as if the Fifth Republic embodied rigid rules while America meant freedom on one side while, on the other side, America was seen as an imperialist power built on capitalism, while France was only trying to develop a consumerist approach. De Gaulle’s idea of having the students’ protest repressed made him lose popularity and finally resign in order to leave the place free for Valéry Giscard d’Estaing whose Prime Minister was Jacques Chirac and for François Mitterrand, the former de Gaulle’s challenger in the presidential elections. Mitterrand faced two international crises during his office: one caused by the oil price’s rising (1980) and the other one by the intensification of the Cold War.

In spite of all these upheavals, confronted from outside with the American consumerism and from inside with a denial of the values that

the Fifth Republic had promoted, France is “a nation state, a community which has a sense of identity, and which is represented by a government with the task of defending the national interest” (McMillan, 2003: 103). The elements involved by this task are: the defense of the national territory and of its inhabitants, of the economic basis of their existence, the importance of French language and culture in the world.

2. The French Identity – a political construct

Definition. « L’identité se construit, se définit et s’étudie en se rapportant à l’autre, elle est indissociable du lien social et de la relation à l’environnement. La problématique identitaire s’articule à celle des relations entre individus et entre groupes et aux processus de comparaison, reconnaissance, différenciation. Les façons dont l’individu, le groupe se définissent et sont définis sont en étroite relation avec l’alter individuel ou de groupe dans un environnement. L’identité est donc appréhendée comme processus plutôt que comme produit, comme fonction instable et non comme réalité substantielle. Autrement dit, il n’y a d’identité que médiatisée par le sujet en situation. L’identité peut être définie comme l’appropriation symbolique d’un sujet, lui permettant de se définir face à un alter dans un environnement. On trouve dans cette définition théorique les fonctions centrales du processus identitaire qui sont celles de permettre de se dire, de se montrer, d’être entendu, identifié, de maintenir un lien, une existence sociale. » (Voiculescu, 2013: 147)

As a consequence of the Fifth Republic’s negative reaction to American consumerism in the 1960s, the XXth century France “had been at the forefront of a movement of opposition to globalization” (Waters, 2012: 2). The reasons as explained by Waters are “a nation struggling to redefine itself and the terms of its political identity in a challenging globalized world” (Waters, 2012: 2). France’s reaction (maybe the most violent one at an international level²) does not root in the economic matters, but especially in identity issues as the French believe they stand for a set of values and a way of life, have certain symbols and consumerism and globalization are perceived as genuine threats to what Frenchness represents. Globalization is, in points of its social dimension, opposed to identity, being seen by some of its critics as a “cataclysmic force” (Bauman, 2006). Among the ways in which globalization challenges French identity according to Waters (Waters, 2012: 7–8), there are two drawing our attention as they have not only a political, but also a social and cultural impact: “it challenges the

² At the level of highly representative world institutions such as the EU, G20 or the World Economic Forum), French political leaders such as Lionel Jospin, Jacques Chirac or Nicolas Sarkozy questioned the neo-liberal policies.

foundational values on which the French republic is built and which continue to define the terms of identity today” and “it challenges French cultural identity and has long been equated with an Americanization of French culture and with cultural loss”. When we speak of the French values, we may refer to either daily things such as the French baguette for instance, or to complex realities, such as the concepts of « Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité ». Whichever the topic might be, we have to conceive them as “things” which are specific for the French people and this specificity becomes obvious when comparing them to other peoples’ realities. For the literary period we take into account here, the challenge represented by the so-called “Americanization of the French culture” is at stake. The “other” in relation to which the French people’s identity defines is, in our case, the United States of America and everything it stands for.

The constructivist approach of identity shows it (Waters, 2012) as a flexible concept, continuously subjected to changes as a reaction to momentary specific needs. Thus, we can say that the French identity in the 1960s was a reflection of the values of the Fifth Republic and, given the economic, social and political context, it was questioned by what represented at the time the so-called American values. America was seen as a financial power and in its case, the emphasis is not on the community’s needs, but on what a group of people may acquire in term of material possessions. “Everything is for sale” could have very well been applied. This model where the money/ to have is more important than the being/ to be was taken by the Great Britain, too and France struggled to preserve what it considered to be “its own”:

Faced with external pressures for change, cultures tend to reassert their identities and ‘civilizational consciousness’ and to reaffirm their distinctive status in the world. (Waters, 2012: 30)

Post-war France sees two different movements: at an economic level, the trends lead to adopting the American model while intellectuals fight against what the American way of life meant: Hollywood films, jazz, rock, jeans, coca-cola, chewing gum or Mac Donald’s succeeded in making their way in the French everyday life, but also in the French language. For common people, they are related to modernity, trends or wealth, while for cultural elites, “Americanization (is) treated with hostility as a pollution and a threat, even when they consumed their products” (McMillan, 2003: 195).

La question identitaire se manifeste par la simple présence de l’autre. Au moment où l’individu essaie de s’identifier à un certain groupe social, il se pose la question qui va de « Qui suis-je ? » (la recherche de l’identité individuelle) à « Qui sommes-nous ? » (la recherche de l’identité collective) et inversement. Cette recherche suppose un renouvellement continu et un changement permanent du processus d’auto-identification, en dépassant ainsi une position autodéfensive ou

nationaliste et en favorisant la connaissance du propre soi et la reconnaissance de l'autre. (Voiculescu, 2011 : 122)

3. A “Culture of Consumption” in the 1960s’ France?

Adopting the American or/and the Anglo-Saxon model meant, in a certain way, giving up the French identity ; it was as if the much blamed consumerism had replaced almost everything Frenchness might have stood for. The choice of a certain way of life, certain goods or certain places related to the United States or to the Great Britain is a biunivoque process: giving up Frenchness and adhering to what is American or British, in spite of a generally claimed view that these “cultures of consumption” are inferior to the French one.

“The choice and exhibition of an identity inherent in the selection of commodities is concisely highlighted by the ethnographer Pierre Mayol, who points out that ‘acheter est un acte public qui engage, non seulement par le prix que ça coûte, mais parce qu’on est vu par les autres en train de choisir (...). On dévoile donc quelque chose de soi, de son secret.’” (Walker, 2010 :13)

4. Perec’s view

Lately, a number of critical studies (Bracker: 2005, Godden: 1990, Osteen and Woodmansee: 1999) which are grounded in different economic concepts, have been published. The text is seen as “the locus of a play of forces engaging with socio-economic realities” (Walker, 2010: 13).

Perec’s novel is about a couple, Jérôme and Sylvie, dreaming of a better life. When they start to work as psycho-sociologists, they become fond of English clothes, by fashionable objects and are torn by the discrepancy between what they wish and what they can afford. Trying to leave behind their continuous dissatisfaction, they spend a year in Tunisia but they cannot get accustomed to a void lifestyle and decide to come back in France accepting to go to Bordeaux for a better job. The end of the novel shows them travelling by train while having a meal which seems nothing but monotonous to them.

The book has as a motto a quotation from Malcolm Lowry, an English poet and novelist, warning the reader in a certain way about the topics in the novel: “Incalculable are the benefits civilization has brought us, incommensurable the productive power of all classes of riches originated by the inventions and discoveries of science” (Perec, 1967: 2). This motto is dedicated to one of Perec’s closest friends, Denis Buffard, specialist in market research. The quotation opens by two words related to the field of economics (incalculable, benefits) and the person whom it is dedicated to is a specialist in the field; thus, a skilled reader has all the necessary data to intuit that the book is closely related to economics.

The space of their dreams. The book's beginning is dominated by the look as the very first word is "eye" as if everything which is to be told resembled an exhibition including objects shown in order to be desired and, then, sold/bought. The idea of desire, possibility is rendered by the constant use of the present tense of the conditional mood, a form able to express things which might still happen. (« L'oeil, d'abord, glisserait sur la moquette grise d'un long corridor, haut et étroit. Les murs seraient des placards de bois clair, dont les ferrures de cuivre luiraient » (Perec, 1967: 9). What comes after is the description of a space looking more like a dream space, an extremely stylish flat with large rooms furnished according to the latest fashion and to "the laws of good taste". It is decorated with three engravings; the first one depicts Thunderbird, the magic creature controlling the upper world or causing adventures. The second one shows a ship at dawn while the third represents one of Stephenson's engines. This is the first reference to the Anglo-Saxon world as Stephenson was an English engineer, the pioneer of the railway transport.

The description of this apartment including the furniture, shows the inhabitants' preference for the English objects; for instance, an English bed or an English pair of razors are parts of the scenery. ("(...) Un grand lit anglais en occuperait tout le fond (...) Une porte entrouverte, donnant sur une salle de bains, découvrirait (...) une paire de rasoirs anglais (...)") (Perec, 1967: 11). The entire space is projected by the narrator's using the conditional mood to show an idealized space, but also the fact that its turning into reality might be subjected to certain conditions.

This first chapter depicting what the main characters are hoping to possess is in contrast with the second one, this opposition being noticed at different levels; first of all, the beginning of the chapter uses the same conditional mood, but in a different tense: there is a perfect conditional suggesting unreal actions; the first thing which is wished and seems impossible to be fulfilled is richness ("Ils auraient aimé être riches. Ils croyaient qu'ils auraient su l'être. Ils aureraient su s'habiller, regarder, sourire comme des gens riches. (...)) (Perec, 1967: 16). Being rich is an important value of a consumerist society as it allows to buy anything and to lead a certain type of life associated with pleasure and leisure « Ils auraient oublié leur richesse, auraient su ne pas l'étaler. Ils ne s'en seraient pas glorifiés. Ils l'auraient respire. Leurs plaisirs auraient été intenses. Ils auraient aimé marcher, flâner, choisir, apprécier. Ils auraient aimé vivre. Leur vie aurait été un art de vivre » (Perec, 1967: 16). A second level at which opposition may be grasped is the space: if in the first chapter, the space is large, luxueux, the second one presents a limited space described by different terms such as "exigu" or "rétrécie", "minuscule", "étroit", "dimensions modestes". This feature extends to

their meals and their holidays and it is related to their economic situation (and this is the first clear reference to economy in the novel): « C'était ce qui correspondait à leur situation économique, à leur position sociale. C'était leur réalité, et ils n'en avaient pas d'autre » (Perec, 1967: 16). The 35 square meters of their flat give them the sensation of suffocation and one may easily notice the discrepancy between their needs and their financial possibilities: « Mais entre ces rêveries trop grandes (...) et la nullité de leurs actions réelles, nul projet rationnel, qui aurait concilié les nécessités objectives et leurs possibilités financières, ne venait s'insérer » (Perec, 1967: 21).

Before or instead of defining themselves by other characteristics, Jérôme and Sylvie are defined by their financial status. This shows in fact what really counts in terms of who they are; everything seems to be reduced to being rich and to affording things and not to being, in the absolute meaning of the word as the society does not value the being in itself, but rather the possessions one has. The space is not a surrounding environment anymore, but a kind of extension of the human being, one of the belongings. The couple has such a passion for wealth that the narrator appreciates that it exceeds the passion for living itself; this equals in fact a passion for appearance and what really counts is what one can show and not what is important at a much deeper level: « Ils succombaient aux signes de la richesse ; ils aimaient la richesse avant d'aimer la vie » (Perec, 1967: 23).

The supply – the temptation of the merchandise displayed

This attraction for what is shown is a behavior which is facilitated by everything around; the narrator spreads throughout the novel all sorts of hints related to what is displayed and can be admired; one of the first “laws” of selling is to show the merchandise, to enable the potential buyer to see it, to admire it, to desire it and finally to buy it. Despite admitting some of the offers might be “fallacious”, the virtual customers find them “attractive” – « les offres fallacieuses, et si chaleureuses pourtant » (Perec, 1967: 17). The display of the merchandise, a form of advertisement which is such a common practice for the consumerist cultures, is more and more aggressive and Paris becomes by everything which is shown in the shop windows a kind of “continuous temptation”; the temptation is only the first stage of a sort of shopping addiction: « (...) Paris entier était une perpétuelle tentation. Ils brûlaient d'y succomber, avec ivresse, tout de suite et à jamais » (Perec, 1967: 17). The text offers the reader a series of hints which make him think that the possible buyer finds hard if not impossible to resist, building an isotopy related to “temptation” (*tentation, brûler de, succomber, ivresse*). If the first chapter shows the

description of a space they are dreaming of but cannot afford, the third chapter continues the idea of the contrast between the desire and possibility; every excerpt in the book underlining this opposition is introduced by the linker “mais” (“but”): « Mais l’horizon de leurs désirs était impitoyablement bouché ; leurs grandes rêveries impossibles n’appartenaient qu’à l’utopie » (Perec, 1967: 17). This idea of “impossible daydream” is associated with a utopia.

The fact that the luxury shops they go to are seen as a kind of “Land of Promise” is also a way to imply that a certain type of life, that dominated by high standards belongs to certain geographical spaces, that is to the United States of America; the expression “land of promise” is an allusion to George Washington’s commitment of economic growth « Leurs premières sorties hors du monde étudiantin, leurs premières incursions dans cet univers des magasins de luxe qui n’allait plus tarder à devenir leur Terre Promise, furent, de ce point de vue, particulièrement révélatrices » (Perec, 1967:23). Thus, if the direct allusion is to the United States as a space of well-being and leisure, the indirect one goes straight to the economic issues of a society where economic growth seems to be the warranty of happiness.

« Il leur aurait fallu emprunter, économiser, investir. (...) Le coeur n’y était pas : ils ne pensaient qu’en termes de tout ou rien » (Perec, 1967: 20).

Fashion and image

Jérôme and Sylvie’s desire to lead a certain type of life, a life according to modern standards, requires their complying to certain “rules”; one of them is related to appearance which is, in its turn, related to fashion. The feeling of belonging to/ of being accepted by a certain group is also determined by the way people dress. In this context, Jérôme and Sylvie who want to be seen/perceived as having a certain life standard, are supposed to adopt an appropriate dress-code and this one is not French, but English as they think that it is the symbol of a moment of change in their life: they pass from the student’s life and clothes to the employed person’s status with everything this might involve « Ils se plongèrent avec ravissement dans la mode anglaise » (Perec, 1967: 32). Jérôme buys his first pair of British shoes, they discover the English textiles (such as wool, tweed, lamb-wool, cashmere, jersey etc), the English brands (Church, Weston, Western, Bunting or Lobb), the English shops « Il en acheta trois, chez Old England » (Perec, 1967: 33) and they are dreaming of a trip to London or even of living in England « Ils auraient aimé vivre en Angleterre » (Perec, 1967: 74).

Their way of dressing is influenced not only by the English fashion, but also by the American one that they get to know through American movies as cinema is a fashionable way of spending time but

also and especially a means of transmitting a type of culture. Jérôme and Sylvie who wish to imitate not necessarily a way of dressing but especially what it stands for (that is a way of life, i.e. the American one) cannot find and even if they should find, they could not afford Arrow or Van Heusen shirts, go to what the French call “Marché aux Puces”, a place wherefrom one can buy old things and antiquities: « Puis, ce fut presque une des grandes dates de leur vie, ils découvrirent le marché aux Puces. Des chemises Arrow ou Van Heusen, admirables, à long col boutonnant, alors introuvables à Paris, mais que les comédies américaines commençaient à populariser (du moins parmi cette frange restreinte qui trouve son bonheur dans les comédies américaines), s’y étalaient en pagaille (...) » (Perec, 1967: 33).

The American way of life did not mean only the fashion which could be seen in the American movies; it also meant a lifestyle including going out to bars and Jérôme and Sylvie choose places whose names have Anglo-Saxon resonance (they usually go to Harry’s New York Bar); they drink “gin”, “punch” or “Guinness” and they enjoy having fun and drinking much, together with their friends.

Another favourite hobby is watching movies; in spite of the French origin of the cinema, the seventh art flourished in the United States where, unlike France, a lot of commercial movies were produced; in fact, Jérôme and Sylvie like what is easy, they like “appearance” and this can be noticed in the movies showing cities like New York or tropical areas or simply in westerns which transport the viewer into another time and space detaching him/her from the surrounding reality: « Ils étaient cinéphiles. C’était leur passion première; ils s’y adonnaient chaque soir, ou presque. (...) Ils aimaient la conquête de l’espace, du temps, du mouvement, ils aimaient le tourbillon des rues de New York, la torpeur des tropiques, la violence des saloons » (Perec, 1967: 52).

The American cinema is opposed to the French one as Americanism is opposed to Frenchness. It is a way of showing that the two French young people willingly give up their own identity or what we could call “Frenchness” in favour of a “borrowed” identity, the American one, which is acquired by the symbolic appropriation of an object which is, in this case, the American cinema: « L’identité peut être définie comme l’appropriation symbolique d’un sujet, lui permettant de se définir face à un alter dans un environnement. On trouve dans cette définition théorique les fonctions centrales du processus identitaire qui sont celles de permettre de se dire, de se montrer, d’être entendu, identifié, de maintenir un lien, une existence sociale » (Voiculescu, 2013: 147). What Jérôme and Sylvie do is exactly to assert themselves as being closer to the American cinema or in a wider meaning to the American culture than to the French one:

Ils avaient une forte prévention contre le cinéma dit sérieux, qui leur faisait trouver plus belles encore les œuvres que ce qualificatif ne suffisait pas à rendre vaines (mais tout de même, disaient-ils, et ils avaient raison, *Marienbad*, quelle merde!), une sympathie presque exagérée pour les westerns, les thrillers, les comédies américaines, et pour ces aventures étonnantes, gonflées d'envolées lyriques, d'images somptueuses, de beautés fulgurantes et presque inexplicables, qu'étaient, par exemple - ils s'en souvenaient toujours -, *Lola*, *la Croisée des Destins*, *les Ensorcelés*, *Ecrit sur du Vent*. (Perec, 1967: 53)

They like everything which is produced by Americans and is fashionable; the opposition between the French cinema and the American cinema is revealed by the opposition “serious”/“vain“. *Marienbad* which is in fact a short way to talk about *L'Année dernière à Marienbad*, an ecranisation of Robbe-Grillet's novel, is despised and genres such as westerns, thrillers or American comedies are preferred ; the narrator gives some examples of adventure movies (*La Croisée des Destins*) or dramas (*Les Ensorcelés*, *Ecrit sur le Vent*) being slightly ironic when qualifying the adventures as being “amazing”, “full of lyrical surges” and involving “meteoric beauties”. The superficial side of their likes or dislikes as well as a sense of “not belonging to” what is French is thus revealed and this leads to a change and they feel like becomings “others”; this change is a change in their identity as this feeling of being others – « Ils changeaient, ils devenaient autres » (Perec, 1967: 33) is related to adopting a new way of life, a way of life which is not specific to the culture they originally belong to, but to a different culture, a new one which they consent to adhere and to become a part of by operating changes in their way of living the everyday life.

Advertisement and motivation studies

Motivational analysis or research, exploring the public's attitudes to products at a subconscious or unconscious level, is the phenomenon that caused a stir when its aims and methods were exposed by Vance Packard in *The Hidden Persuaders* of 1957 (Perec, 1967: 241)

The existence and the development of such studies is caused by the desire of making more money and people, in order to reach their goal, appeal to different types of solutions: studying the buyer's behaviour in order to “frame” it into categories which might help the providers sell their merchandise is only one of these and it implies that consumers are not persons having their own beliefs, but masses who can be talked into purchasing a certain item and whose desires and tastes may be manipulated easily. This kind of market research is “imported” from the United States and the terminology used by the narrator is English « testings ou enquêtes-minute » (Perec, 1967: 28).

The Frenchness now – quo vadis?

In fact, dreaming of a larger new flat with all kinds of English things, being attracted by the shop windows, wishing to dress according to the English fashion, going to places related to the English culture rather to the French lifestyle such as bars or taking up watching American movies are only some aspects which show the way by which the couple understand approach the Anglo-Saxon culture, a culture dominated by money; consequently, Sylvie and Jérôme value money more than anything else – « Ils ne méprisaient pas l'argent. Peut-être, au contraire, l'aimaient-ils trop » (Perec, 1967: 84) Their continuous reference is the “other” (in our case, the Other is anything belonging to the Anglo-Saxon culture) who makes his presence felt by common everyday things (such as clothes, decorations, furniture, movies or bars), but also and especially by the values he brings along (such as money which becomes the supreme reason for living).

La question identitaire se manifeste par la simple présence de l'autre. Au moment où l'individu essaie de s'identifier à un certain groupe social, il se pose des questions qui vont de « Qui suis-je ? » (la recherche de l'identité individuelle) à « Qui sommes-nous ? » (la recherche de l'identité collective) et inversement. Cette recherche suppose un renouvellement continu et un changement permanent du processus d'auto-identification, en dépassant ainsi une position autodéfensive ou nationaliste et en favorisant la connaissance du propre soi et la reconnaissance de l'autre. (Voiculescu, 2011: 122)

Published during a period of changes, when the French society and France itself are permanently subjected to the Anglo-Saxon influence, Perec's novel becomes a way of showing what is going on socially, but also a subtle way of criticizing and ironizing the manner in which people react to a foreign culture and especially to a culture dominated by consumerism. Giving up the French culture in favour of the Anglo-Saxon one has been a continuous phenomenon since the 1930's up to now, a phenomenon which has been accounted for by the economists as well as by writers.

After a long period of cultural domination, the French culture (including French as a language) does not enjoy its primacy anymore. Recent years have seen it replaced by a globalized English triggering Anglo-Saxon and American cultures. How does France cope with these developments? By protectionism: the famous “loi Toubon³ (1994) requiring the use of French for certain purposes, and the enlisting of the

³ The law also required the use of French in “all broadcast audiovisual programs, with exceptions for musical works and ‘original version’ films” (<https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=LEGITEXT000005616341> – 23: 37, 22.03.2018).

European Commission to limit imported material for television and radio” (McMillan, 2003:200) is only an example. The justification was noble; this law aimed at defending the “French culture from inferior foreign products and supply the nation with wholesome cultural and ideological fare” (Modern France: 200). Although criticized by the European Union which regarded it as “particularly offensive to the concept of free competition across national borders” (Ager, 1999: 44), it came into force with all its provisions. In spite of its recent efforts praised by some and criticized by others, Frenchness or the French identity seems to be affected and it finds difficult to keep up with the Anglo-Saxon and American market “invasion”.

This paper has not the aim to solve problems, but to raise questions and Perec’s literary text was nothing but a pretext that we chose to use in order to make people aware of what identity means, of how and if it should be preserved. So, instead of reaching a conclusion, we would rather ask two questions: Should one make more in order to preserve Frenchness? or Should one give it up as globalization is an irreversible phenomenon which might be seen as the future of the world?

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