

Review article

Not like the US?

Europeans and the spread of American culture

SUSAN L. CARRUTHERS

Not like us: how Europeans have loved, hated, and transformed American culture since World War II. By Richard Pells. New York, NY: Basic Books, 1997. 444pp. Index. £22.00. isbn 0 465 00164 5.

Throughout the twentieth century, Europeans have repeatedly bemoaned the deleterious effects of ‘Americanization’ on their own indigenous cultures. Ambivalent at best about the ‘new world’ itself, certain Europeans have adopted an even dimmer view of the products—‘tangible or abstract, goods or ideas’—which Americans have despatched back to the old world.¹ Quite possibly, though, ‘America’ and ‘Americanization’ have served in such critiques as metonyms (but not quite as simple misnomers) for ‘modernity’ and ‘modernization’. After all, both detractors and admirers have often taken America as embodiment of ‘the future’: to be either embraced or resisted. By this token, European criticisms of America, and of the impact of American culture upon their own, have in fact been displaced attacks on the processes of modernization (mass production, commercialism, the homogenization of individuals and societies), projected onto ‘America’, their prime embodiment and exporter—a land ‘overflowing with their own mixed emotions’.² In the 1990s, however, anxiety about erosion of particular national and local cultures has come to hang more frequently, and fittingly, on the notion of ‘globalization’ than ‘Americanization’, though one might argue, in reverse, that the emergent ‘global culture’ assumes a decidedly American accent. The corporations responsible for creating ‘McWorld’ (in Benjamin Barber’s coinage) may be so thoroughly global in their finance, manufacture and marketing that their wares

¹ The phrase belongs to Rob Kroes, *If you've seen one, you've seen the mall: Europeans and American mass culture* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1996), p.172.

² Pells, *Not like us: how Europeans have loved, hated, and transformed American culture since World War II* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1997). p. 5, and *passim*. The confusion between ‘Americanization’ and modernization has been widely discussed. For two rather different considerations see John Tomlinson, *Cultural imperialism: a critical introduction* (London: Pinter, 1991) and Marshall Blonsky, *American mythologies* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992).

are necessarily labelled ‘product of more than one country’, but we all recognize the country—mythic landscape and real place—which many ubiquitous brands so powerfully evoke.³

‘Americanization’ thus remains a resonant description—if not a sharp analytic tool—for wide-ranging phenomena and their accompanying discontents. Although it is undoubtedly more fashionable at present to discuss ‘globalization’, Richard Pells’s study of the European reaction to the expansion of American culture (broadly understood, and in both a historical and contemporary setting) airs many of the issues, and dualities, at stake in that debate. Moreover, his is a bold—and welcome—attempt to sketch what one might term ‘cultural international history’ on a large canvas. Part of the ‘cultural turn’ in international history, a growing number of studies of ‘Americanization’ have emerged in recent years, but these have generally been cast as bi-national studies of the lopsided exchanges between the United States and a particular ‘target’.⁴ Rich as many of these have been, international history properly requires that *multi*-national studies supplement the detailed excavation of bilateral relations. Akira Iriye rightly points out that ‘international history is more than a sum total of national histories’.⁵ But unless it is to result from the gradual accretion of bi-national studies, international history also clearly calls for wide-ranging treatments of cultural relations such as *Not like us*.

Of course, to traverse terrain as extensive as America and Europe, and as slippery as ‘culture’, is to court danger, and Pells does not entirely manage to skirt it. The most obvious pitfall is that, lacking sufficient local knowledge of the societies involved (and relying on others’ accounts to supply it), the author flattens the distinctive topography of polities and cultures, overlooking the existence of distinct national—let alone regional—cultures within what are often wrongly termed ‘nation-states’. Consequently, despite acknowledging the inadequacy of the descriptive tags, the author may end up (as Pells does) referring to ‘the Americans’, ‘the British’, ‘the French’, lacking either the space or methodological sophistication to avoid the simplifying shorthand. Pells is certainly astute enough to recognize the problem with such reductive brevity, but his attempt to solve it is not entirely satisfactory, for rather than seeking, or fully crediting, the particularities of ‘national’ cultures, he tends merely to set

³ Benjamin R. Barber, *Jihad vs McWorld: how globalism and tribalism are reshaping the world* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1996).

⁴ With reference to western Europe alone, the literature includes Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-colonization and the Cold War: the cultural mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Frank Costigliola, *France and the United States: the cold alliance since World War II* (New York, NY: Twayne, 1992); Richard Kuisel, *Seducing the French: the dilemma of Americanization* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993); Ralph Willett, *The Americanization of Germany, 1945–1949* (London: Routledge, 1992); Michael Ermarth, ed., *America and the shaping of German society, 1945–1955* (Oxford: Berg, 1993); and Duncan Webster, *Looka yonder! The imaginary America of popular culture* (London: Routledge, 1988).

⁵ Akira Iriye, ‘Culture and international history’, in Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Patterson, eds, *Explaining the history of American foreign relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 219. For a fuller version of his views on the place of ‘culture’ in international relations, see Akira Iriye, *Cultural internationalism and world order* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

up an opposition between 'elite' and 'mass' within the various states he examines. Accordingly, those Europeans who oppose 'Americanization' constitute the culturally conservative elite, while those consumers of its culture for whom America signifies pleasure are the mass.

It should also be pointed out that, for the most part—other than savouring the irony of Moscow's Pushkin Square housing the world's busiest McDonald's, or noting that Latvians present each other with exorbitantly priced Cornflakes as special gifts—Pells's conception of 'Europe' does not stretch far beyond the erstwhile Iron Curtain.⁶ Were it not perhaps to ask the impossible of one volume, this would be a serious shortcoming, as the impact of American culture—tangible products, or the mere idea of them—on the eastern bloc has arguably been of greater historical significance than their very real presence in the West. Given these limitations, then, Pells is perhaps best supplemented by a number of recent studies—some published since, or synchronously with, his own—for which *Not like us* might serve as an aperitif but not a summation.

One of the most significant strands of the story of United States culture abroad is the degree to which its export has been abetted by the state. In combating European 'protectionism', United States governments tend absent-mindedly to overlook the incentives given to their own culture and manufacturing industries in competing on European turf which was, in any case, far from level after 1945. In fact, as Pells's early chapters demonstrate (though not for the first time), postwar United States administrations eagerly promoted the despatch of American ideas and entertainment, comestibles and consumer durables, to a devastated continent.

The Marshall Plan—its motives much debated by generations of postwar historians—reconstructed western Europe as a market for United States exports, and promised, into the bargain, dramatically higher living standards and mass consumption of both American goods and products domestically manufactured with American capital and know-how. Tellingly, Marshall Plan 'freedom trains' bore the slogan 'Prosperity makes you free' (a grisly, though presumably unconscious, echo of the ominous slogan which overhung the Nazi death camps, '*Arbeit macht frei*').⁷ Rather as the wartime Atlantic Charter aspired to deliver 'freedom from fear and want' to the postwar world, so the Marshall Plan held that the alleviation of material want would automatically stem fear—of communism most particularly.⁸ It is by no means certain, however, that this fear resided primarily in the west European recipients of Marshall aid rather than in their American benefactors. America's postwar hegemony over western Europe might have been an 'empire by invitation', but

⁶ Chapter 3, pp. 64–93 also makes some reference to 'cultural diplomacy' behind the Iron Curtain.

⁷ Emily Rosenberg, 'Cultural interactions', in Stanley I. Kutler, ed., *Encyclopedia of the United States in the twentieth century*, vol. II, *Global America* (New York, NY: Scribner's, 1996), p.705.

⁸ Ostensibly the plan was 'directed not against any country or doctrine but against hunger, poverty, desperation and chaos', but it was widely accepted in Washington that Moscow, in George Kennan's words, fed on 'the palsied decrepitude of the capitalist world'; cited by David W. Ellwood, *Rebuilding Europe: Western Europe, America and postwar reconstruction* (London: Longman, 1992), p.92.

the invitation was not unanimously proffered. Rather, it was extended by precisely those west European parties of the centre-right which stood to gain both broadly from the creation of an American 'empire by integration' in Europe, and narrowly from the covert funds which the CIA channelled to ensure their electoral success—in Italy and France especially—at the expense of communist rivals.⁹

In postwar western Europe, the selling of American goods and American ideas thus proceeded very much hand-in-hand. To a considerable extent, the goods *were* the idea, as Americans tended to conceive their preferred political and economic arrangements much more readily as a 'way of life' than as 'consumer capitalism' or 'liberal democracy', the latter formulations being too 'ideological' for a culture profoundly suspicious of 'all that political crap'—its own, or anyone else's.¹⁰ To their promoters, American goods offered themselves as a magic amulet against communism: a (less pregnable) Maginot line in the minds of those who ate burgers and wore blue jeans.

In France, where European opposition to 'Americanization' has been most pronounced, one newspaper in 1950 suggestively wrote of America's seminal product, Coca-Cola: 'You can't spread the doctrines of Marx among people who drink Coca-Cola... it is utterly fantastic to imagine two men stepping up to a soda fountain and ordering a couple of cokes in which to toast the downfall of their capitalist oppressors'.¹¹ The State Department, not to say the company's own long-time president, Robert Woodruff, who himself declared that every bottle contained 'the essence of capitalism' ('coke is it!' indeed), seemed to concur in this rather literal interpretation of the slogan 'you are what you eat'—or drink; thus the eagerness that Europeans should acquire American tastes not just in the West but behind the Iron Curtain too. The latter is a fascinating story which Pells largely eschews but which is told (in one of its key phases during the Eisenhower years) with considerable verve and authority in Walter L. Hixson's recent *Parting the curtain: propaganda, culture and the Cold War, 1945–1961*.¹²

Given the impenetrability of the eastern bloc, the endeavour was, quite knowingly, more often a matter of whetting an appetite which could not be fed than of satisfying it. The drab easterners, as conceived by State Department officials among others (and in terms often remarkably redolent of European detractors' conception of Americans as homogenized, Identikit individuals)

⁹The notions of 'empire by invitation' and 'by integration' are cogently explicated in Geir Lundestad's new volume, *Empire by integration: the United States and European integration, 1945–1997* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

¹⁰The scatologism is borrowed from Albert Biderman's research into the mental attitudes of American servicemen returning from captivity at communist hands after the Korean War, and his assertion that 'anti-ideology' was central to the 'American way'. Albert Biderman, *March to calumny: the story of the American POWs in the Korean War* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1963), pp. 257–61.

¹¹Cited by Kuisel, *Seducing the French*, p. 63.

¹²Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the curtain: propaganda, culture and the Cold War, 1945–1961* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997).

would have to rise up against Soviet totalitarianism to fulfil their consumerist, and latently capitalist, cravings.¹³ Political scientist David Riesman was therefore not far from the mark in 1954 when he satirically envisaged America bombarding the Soviet Union with goods ranging from tampons to toasters to tanks, with which literally to overrun communism, in an offensive dubbed the 'Nylon War'. To his chagrin, some American readers took the satire quite literally, though in fact the 'Nylon War' was indeed pursued, albeit using channels other than aerial bombardment.¹⁴ The role of radio broadcasting behind the Iron Curtain—one significant continuation of nylon warfare by other means—is an area which, touched on by Pells, has also been subjected to recent scrutiny by scholars and former practitioners alike.¹⁵

Perhaps the culminating moment of the real-life 'Nylon War' (prior to the collapse of the Soviet bloc itself), was the 1959 American National Exhibition. For six weeks, in a huge arena constructed at Sokolniki Park on Moscow's outskirts—a sort of 'Millennium Dome' for the 1950s—the consumerist dimensions of the Cold War were clearly mapped. Immortalized as the venue of Krushchev and Nixon's celebrated 'kitchen debate'—which Pells misleadingly suggests was a trivialization (not crystallization) of the issues over which the Cold War was contested—Sokolniki was also where the Soviet premier sampled, and indeed sanctioned, the rival elixir of capitalism, Pepsi-Cola.¹⁶ Intriguingly, Soviet officials, unlike communist critics of 'coca-colonization' in France, appeared to believe that the real danger to the revolution came not from coke but cosmetics. They therefore grudgingly admitted free samples of Pepsi but unbudgingly refused cosmetics on the grounds that 'there might be a stampede on the pavilion that would be dangerous to life and limb' if the give-away went ahead.¹⁷

Wherever possible, then, state assistance was given to the overseas dispatch of the semiotic shocktroops of American ideology, in whose ranks marched rock'n roll, fast food, and Hollywood movies. Sometimes, those policy-makers responsible for the formulation of 'cultural diplomacy' found themselves promoting aspects of American culture which they personally (or elected

¹³ Ironically, perhaps, European criticisms of Americans on these grounds were often explicitly built on American self-criticisms, such as the work of Vance Packard on advertising's corrosive effects on individuality and J. K. Galbraith's critique of the spiritual poverty and enervation of the 'Affluent society'; Pells, *Not like us*, pp. 173–4.

¹⁴ The essay is reprinted in David Riesman, *Individualism reconsidered and other essays* (New York, NY: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964). 'The Nylon War' is also discussed in Stephen J. Whitfield, *The culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 71–2.

¹⁵ For an upbeat account of how radio 'won' the Cold War written by a former managing director of Reuters, see Michael Nelson, *The war of the black heavens* (London: Brassey's, 1997). For a somewhat more searching account, by a former senior employee of Radio Free Europe, which throws into relief the contradictions between America's rhetorical support for 'freedom' and its failure actually to assist east Europeans to realize the aspirations which their broadcasts intentionally heightened, see George Urban, *Radio Free Europe and the pursuit of democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Yale University Press, 1997).

¹⁶ In Pells's opinion, 'momentarily, the Cold War seemed to have dissolved into a quarrel about which country produced better washing machines' in *Not like us*, p. 86. The story of Sokolniki is recounted at greater length by Hixson, *Parting the curtain*, pp. 151–213.

¹⁷ The Soviet position as cited by Hixson, *Parting the curtain*, p. 189.

politicians to whom they were answerable) found somewhat distasteful. One of the many ironies of the export of America abroad—quite apart from its propaganda simultaneously attacking Soviet ‘dialectical *materialism*’ while extolling the superior virtues of its own products—was that what appealed to the European masses was often precisely what did *not* appeal to elites on either side of the Atlantic. Rock’n roll was one such area of official ambivalence.¹⁸ However, the strategy was always dual-track: mass culture for the mass audience was coupled with state intervention in the production, export, and reproduction of scholarly knowledge.

The way in which the academy was also conscripted—wittingly and not so knowingly—into service is an integral part of Cold War history and Pells’s story. He charts the support, both open and clandestine, given by state agencies and semi-private foundations to send American academics abroad and bring overseas students, opinion-formers and university teachers to the United States, through the good offices of the Fulbright Commission, the Ford Foundation and so on.¹⁹ Pells also reveals the way in which ‘American Studies’ was awarded something akin to ‘most favoured discipline’ status, as it promised to ensure that Europeans should both ‘*like us*’ (where us was the US), and *be* ‘like us’. Here Pells can usefully be supplemented by other recent scholarship which suggests that American Studies, if perhaps privileged, was not the only discipline to receive such self-interested state attention. With some obvious simplification, one might nevertheless suggest that ‘Communications Studies’ during the Cold War—thanks to large injections of CIA research finance—was all too often concerned with discovering how to make people think ‘like us’ (by plagiarizing the Soviets’ methods if necessary), while ‘Area Studies’ frequently involved studying areas which had either ‘fallen’ to communism or teetered perilously on its brink, as the ubiquitous Cold War domino metaphor had it.²⁰

Attentive though his early chapters are to the agency of the state, Pells seems reluctant to ponder the implications of such ‘fixing’ when he extols the operation of the cultural free market. He is keen to assert that if European

¹⁸ Exporting elements of notably African-American culture—be it jazz or rock’n roll—was always contentious both within and beyond the United States. Indeed, the whole issue of how America’s multi-racial composition—and (in the early Cold War years) its continuing segregationism—was to be represented abroad was immensely problematic, however one approached it. For those wishing to present a positive image of United States as country of equality and freedom, racial discrimination and prejudice were real sticking points—an Achilles heel of which Soviet propaganda made much. See Hixson, *Parting the curtain*, pp. 129–31, 145–50, 198–204, and also Michael L. Krenn, “‘Unfinished business’: segregation and US diplomacy at the 1958 world’s fair”, *Diplomatic History* 20: 4, Fall 1996, pp. 591–612.

¹⁹ Pells, *Not like us*, ch. 4, pp. 95–133. See also Frank Ninkovich, *The diplomacy of ideas: US foreign policy and cultural relations, 1938–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 139–67.

²⁰ On ‘Communications Studies’ see Christopher Simpson, *Science of coercion: communication research and psychological warfare, 1945–1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); on ‘Area Studies’ see Immanuel Wallerstein, ‘The unintended consequences of Cold War Area Studies’, in Noam Chomsky *et al.*, *The Cold War and the university: toward an intellectual history of the postwar years* (New York, NY: New Press, 1997, pp. 195–231). For an interesting account of the Eisenhower administration’s involvement of academics in its ‘Campaign of truth’ behind the Iron Curtain, see Allan A. Needell, “‘Truth is our weapon’”: Project TROY, political warfare, and government-academic relations in the National Security state’, *Diplomatic History* 17: 3, Summer 1993, pp. 399–420.

consumers have expressed a preference for things American—to the vexation of elite custodians of stuffy national cultures—then that demonstrates a qualitative measure of those products' attractions, not (perhaps) a quantitative indicator of their sheer volume. In this vein, Pells suggests that the popularity of Hollywood movies in western Europe testifies—above all else—to the superiority of their direction, action, acting, and technical sophistication over the slow-moving artsy pretension of European films (p. 209).²¹ Yet Hollywood in its semi-official capacity as advertising agent to America was a clear beneficiary of state intervention. The industry's utility to American foreign policy—when that policy itself constituted, in Reinhold Wagnleitner's playful formulation, a 'Marilyn Monroe doctrine'—was yet more obvious in the postwar era than hitherto, as Pells admits.²² European audiences' apparently 'free choice' for American movies was not, therefore, exercised within a free market, for Hollywood was long permitted to act oligopolistically to ensure the primacy of its product at home and abroad, in a field where small European film-industries (most particularly non-English language ones) could scarcely hope to compete.²³ Moreover, if individual choices, as John Tomlinson suggests, 'only reflect autonomy within the range of what is "imaginable" as the attainable "good life" within a culture', then it is surely problematic to assert that European cinema-goers got—and get—what they want, not (at least conceivably) the reverse.²⁴ Where the market is saturated with Hollywood products, might it not be the case that America has indeed 'colonized the subconscious' of the continent, as a Wim Wenders character memorably put it?

As the foregoing example might suggest, Pells is not merely sanguine but positively optimistic about the impact of American culture across the Atlantic. His optimism does not derive from a chauvinistic preference that the American 'way of life' be adopted globally but from a belief that the imports have not seriously weakened, let alone torn, the cultural fabric of their European importers. His conclusions derive from something of an intellectual stew, in which the discernible ingredients include Tomlinson, Ien Ang, and Benedict Anderson, garnished generously with a neo-liberal insistence that the market is the best guarantor of quality. ('Shakespeare cared as much as Walt Disney about box office receipts', Pells improbably insists (p. 211)). His main contention is that cultures are, and always have been, mutable—subject certainly to the ebb

²¹ Pells, *Not like us*, ch. 8, *passim*.

²² As Gerald M. Mayer (Head of the International Division of the Motion Picture Association) put it, 'there has never been a more effective salesman for American products in foreign countries than the American motion picture'; cited by Wagnleitner, *Coca-colonization and the Cold War*, p. 227.

²³ Washington not only provided general assistance to Hollywood in opening and maintaining overseas markets but also made particular use of its movies in the process of 'de-Nazifying' Germany and Austria and in 're-educating' Japan. On this explicitly political use of film see Nicholas Pronay and Keith Wilson, eds, *The political re-education of Germany and her Allies after World War II* (London: Croom Helm, 1985); Wagnleitner, *Coca-colonization and the Cold War*, pp. 222–74; and on Japan, Kyoko Hirano, *Mr Smith goes to Tokyo: Japanese cinema under the American occupation, 1945–1952* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992).

²⁴ Tomlinson, *Cultural imperialism*, p. 163.

and flow of cross-boundary transmission but not to submersion by a cultural tidal wave. 'National identities' being largely a matter of myth, not of essence, he consequently has little time for 'cultural nationalism', and he seems ready to equate fissiparousness with 'ethnic' chauvinism, and a short-cut to the Balkans.²⁵

Taking issue with the 'cultural imperialism' thesis, Pells sees Europeans consuming American products and culture but not absorbing 'America' intravenously in the process. Europeans, it seems, have managed to have their coke and eat (or drink) it, contrary to State Department hopes and French communist fears. Sometimes, as Pells puts it, 'a movie is just a movie and a cheeseburger is just a cheeseburger' (p. 282). 'Americanization' in practice has thus been more a matter of mimicry than mutation, of adaptation—not wholesale adoption—of 'usable' elements of Americainerie. Passing through the 'golden arches', visiting Euro Disney, watching MTV, consuming popcorn and *Titanic* at the multiplex might mark out Europeans as sometime cultural transvestites, but they remain fundamentally European beneath the assumed identity—the vital reproductive organs of Europe's cultures still intact. Cross-dressing, not sex change, is thus the metaphor which suggests itself.

Championing the operation of the market, one might expect Pells to demonstrate reciprocity in the transatlantic trade. But despite a chapter devoted to the 'Europeanization' of American culture, he struggles to suggest a cultural balance of payments in the postwar era. It was not ever thus, of course. As Wagnleitner points out, 'the United States, however indigenous its cultural developments, is a result of the Europeanization of the world': the 'last beach of European culture' as Umberto Eco put it.²⁶ 'America' itself is thus a hybrid amalgam of different 'creolized' cultures, as Pells recognizes.²⁷ Since 1945, however, the traffic has been reversed, with America repackaging what washed up on its shores from the European (and non-European) world and selling it back. The chapter accordingly turns out to be in large part about the way in which American producers amend their goods for particular European markets, and less about the way in which Europe continues to 'Europeanize' the United States. (There are no green 'froot loops' in the European version of that breakfast cereal; one can order salmon burgers at McDonald's in Norway.)

Europe's major export success stateside, it seems, has been the triumph of what sceptical American academics refer to as 'continental theory'. Paradoxically, Europeans have tendered small-circulation currency for mass culture:

²⁵ These points are made most clearly in the final chapter, pp. 325–34. He is, of course, not alone in giving much of the 'fragmentary' flip-side to the globalization coin an 'ethnic' hue. Barber's juxtaposition of 'Jihad' with 'McWorld' rests on a similar notion that 'globalism' exists in dialectical relationship with 'tribalism'.

²⁶ Wagnleitner, *Coca-colonization and the Cold War*, p. xii.

²⁷ Thus Kroes similarly argues: 'in their selective appropriation of the European cultural heritage, Americans have tended to dissect patterns of traditional and organic cohesion while feeling free to rearrange the component parts into new wholes' in *If you've seen one*, p. 165.

paying for Levi's with Levi-Strauss, for Bart Simpson with Roland Barthes, for Disney with Derrida, for Burger King with Baudrillard, and Michael Jackson with Michel Foucault. It is perhaps ironic too that a country which since its 'discovery' and subsequent colonization was 'post-modern from the beginning' (if one wishes to put it thus), should have had post-modernity sold it by Europeans; that America, the powerful semiotic signifier of 'modernity', should have learnt to decode itself from a Frenchman.²⁸

Pells's advocacy of the cultural free market has, however, another drawback besides its one-sidedness. Although he seems to wish for diversity, he does not appear particularly sensitive to fears of cultural or linguistic erosion. Drawing particularly on Ang's reception study of Dallas among Dutch women, Pells champions a notion of the 'active audience': audiences exposed to 'hegemonic' cultural forces negotiate these 'texts' in culturally specific ways, so that these are transformed by the context of their reception, and don't themselves transform it. He counterposes such ideas with their one apparent alternative: that 'mass culture convert[ed] audiences into a collection of zombies, docile and passive, too drugged to discriminate between art and trash, too hypnotized to switch off the television set or get off the information highway' (p. 279). This represents a crude (but not uncommon) caricature of older 'media effects' theory—the so-called 'hypodermic model'—which Pells attributes, with equal exaggeration, to 'European intellectuals and government officials', mistrustful, and essentially disdainful of 'mass culture', for which Americans can usefully be blamed.

To take issue with him here is not to deny that different people read texts differently, or that anti-Americanism may indeed have served as kind of anti-modernist luddism (with America an eminently kickable Other), but it is to suggest that 'ordinary people' may have ambiguous responses to 'Americanization', even as they may simultaneously enjoy American products. It is easy to mock the French Academy's fears of linguistic pollution from Americanisms like *le weekend*, but the prospect of less prominent European cultures and languages suffocating is more real than Pells seems to allow. To applaud the commitment to preserve (what he wrongly calls) 'regional dialects like Gaelic, Welsh, Frisian, Provençal and Catalan' seems to mean as little, in the absence of some form of cultural protectionism, as expressing a desire to live in a world where exotica like rhinos and elephants survive but without seeing a need to curb game-hunting and the ivory trade.

The unerring optimism of *Not like us* is thus less than wholly persuasive when viewed from the periphery. Whatever one thinks of Pells's endorsement of neo-liberalism, it is hard to see on what secure ground he can claim that 'distinctive cultural characteristics' (p. 333) endure in the face of 'Americanization' (or 'modernization' or 'globalization') if he also holds that 'national' cultures are a 'handy polemical weapon in the struggle against the

²⁸ Kroes, *If you've seen one*, p. 174.

“imperialism” of the media moguls...but mostly a myth’ (p. 265). If ‘culture’ and ‘nation’ are little more than propaganda constructs, wherein lies their resilient ‘distinctiveness’, with which he dismisses fears of homogenization or dilution? Ultimately, then, the conceptual underpinnings of *Not like us* seem somewhat fragile, as though the historian is unsure both of his bearings in the less charted regions of Europe and of the elements of ‘continental’ and native American free market theory from which he himself wishes to pick and mix.