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MARKETING THE HOLLYWOOD BLOCKBUSTER IN FRANCE (1995)

THE MARKETING OF HIGH-BUDGET films in our current "image society" or mass media age has emerged as a complex operation designed to predict the public's reactions and, above all, to influence the reception of blockbusters in such a way as to widen their appeal with the largest possible cross section of the population worldwide. As the major U.S. film companies (the Majors) have become integral parts of whole empires built around the integrated leisure and communication industries, they have embraced more systematic and scientific marketing strategies to transform superproductions into colossal, global, media events. But paradoxically, global strategies cannot be deployed without taking into account cultural differences that defy scientific methodology. The case of France may be particularly illuminating regarding the complex interplay of cultural and scientific economic factors involved in the successful international marketing of Hollywood films. France has a strong national filmgoing tradition and a relatively healthy domestic film industry. However, the appeal of U.S. films (i.e., of a few Hollywood blockbusters) has dramatically increased in France since the late 1980s. The growing popularity of American films may be attributed to four key elements: the close interaction of global and local marketing campaigns; the search for new advertising and publicity techniques to circumvent national legislative restrictions; the reliance on scientific marketing research to address local preferences; and the coordination of management decisions between the U.S. headquarters and local subsidiaries. Yet, those four factors are in themselves a scientific oversimplification that does not fully account for the unpredictability of cultural reactions that can make or break a film shown in another country.

COORDINATING GLOBAL AND LOCAL MEDIA EVENTS

The recent restructuring of the Majors within huge integrated entertainment and media empires (such as the 1989 Time-Warner merger) has given unprecedented importance to the blockbuster phenomenon. As cinema is once again a profitable business within the new multimedia environment, the highly integrated media empires, which are in the information-communication business, are willing to invest in the soaring production and

marketing costs required by the competitive film industry.¹ Only the most powerful companies can risk investing heavily in the production and international promotion of super-productions, from which they can expect to derive related benefits if they succeed (through profits from spin-off merchandise, videocassettes, books, music, and so on) or absorb the losses if they fail.

However, rising costs and stakes, combined with the relative decline of domestic theatrical earnings, have made U.S. film companies increasingly dependent on foreign and especially European revenues.² More than ever the global market is influencing production decisions about mainstream movies, which may be the first and most crucial marketing decision facing studio executives. Because an increasing number of movies are currently grossing more from foreign box-office revenues than domestic ones, many producers must decide whether or not to go ahead with a project on the basis of its potential foreign sales. Casting is frequently the result of the promotional potential of a movie star abroad. For instance, a major consideration in Paramount's decision to cast Sean Connery as Harrison Ford's father in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989) was the fact that Connery, known for his portrayal of James Bond, was extremely popular in Europe and other parts of the world.³

Moreover, as a result of the emphasis on globalization, the release and promotion of American films in the home and foreign markets have become closely interrelated. American audiences are huge test markets for the world at large because any film with a budget over \$12 million is almost certain to be released in foreign theaters, unless it is a disaster in the domestic market.⁴ And success at the American box office becomes a "selling tool" in itself in other parts of the world because "[c]ontemporary international audiences are plugged into what's hot on American marquees," especially when a film has "a high-profile release in America."⁵ One way film companies derive the greatest benefits from the impact of an American release and create media events on an international scale is through fast, high-visibility, foreign releases. If a film is successful in the United States, it is now not uncommon to release it worldwide within a few weeks (as soon as dubbed and subtitled versions are available), whereas, formerly, American films were released abroad at least six months after their releases in the United States (so that the American prints could be reused overseas).⁶ Furthermore, as in the United States, American studios now tend to saturate foreign markets with prints in order to capitalize on the impact of a new release. It is not uncommon for a blockbuster to be distributed abroad with over 2,000 prints. In France alone, a major American blockbuster can be released with as many as 500 prints (compared to an average 150 prints for national distribution by French companies), at a cost of nearly \$1 million solely in prints.⁷

In some cases, however, studios deliberately choose to postpone the foreign release of films and adopt a more cautious strategy. In particular, they tend to do so with films that they consider more difficult to market or that did not meet with the expected success at home. Columbia's *Hero*, which did poorly for its U.S. release in October 1992, started appearing in other countries only six months later. The time lapse gave the studio time to examine its mistakes and design a new marketing campaign that advertised the film as a satire rather than a straight comedy, and to change its name to *Accidental Hero*.⁸ In addition, it may be advisable to delay the foreign opening of a film in order to adjust to specific national environments. Summer, for example, is known to be a slow movie-going period in France, whereas October is usually the best month. Distributors also take into account their competitors' distribution plans abroad to avoid overcrowding the market. According to its French distributor, the success of *The Mask* in France was largely due to its positioning; it was the only comedy during a time that the public was assailed by massive publicity for several other American blockbusters.⁹

Attracting the public's attention is indeed the key to success. To do so, marketing executives have to decide on general strategies and oversee complex international campaigns that rely as much on actual advertising as on well-orchestrated publicity (that is, unpaid advertising). As far as publicity is concerned, the marketing of new films greatly depends on the media coverage generated by movie stars in the United States as well as abroad. Movie companies enlist the help of publicists who provide the press with selective glamorous information about their stars.¹⁰ The stars, in turn, often become studio ambassadors, who willingly discuss their new films with the press and provide details about new or upcoming releases through information media ranging from magazines to television shows. The goal of the publicity and extensive press coverage is to pique the curiosity of overinformed consumers. By striving to get press coverage of movies that are still in production, and by multiplying the information channels featuring new films and their stars, studios attempt to heighten the audience's expectations and curiosity to the point of driving them to the theater.

In France, the audience's increased interest in mundane details is reflected by the appearance in the 1980s of a number of glossy, illustrated fan magazines such as *Première* and *Studio*, in which superficial coverage and photo spreads play a much greater role than film reviews. However, even more important is the publicity generated by television programs featuring movies, film festivals, and star appearances. France's "proud cinematic tradition" has created an important "film culture" as well as independent-minded spectators who like to think of themselves as informed film critics.¹¹ Film clips from new releases are often shown as newsworthy events during mainstream daily reporting; twice a week, during prime time, in a program that successfully encourages moviegoing, the pay channel Canal Plus shows trailers of films being released.¹² Television coverage of films and movie stars is at its highest during prestigious French-based international film festivals, in particular the famous Cannes Film Festival (the number-one film festival in Europe) and the American film festival in Deauville highlighting new U.S. features. Because they generate extensive media coverage, these festivals act as a springboard for the promotion of new movies in France, and have a spillover effect for the rest of Europe and even the United States. Created in 1946 as a major art event, the Cannes festival has evolved, in the words of a *Variety* journalist, "into a frenzied international media circus . . . [which] is accelerating the release of Croisette-hyped pics in France and the rest of Europe," and Deauville "has become a focal point for French and European media."¹³

Film studios are also realizing the increasing importance of systematically tapping the appeal of American movie stars in France. Popular stars like Robert De Niro, Robin Williams, Dustin Hoffman, and Arnold Schwarzenegger have already made special appearances at French film festivals for several years to help promote the films in which they starred. However, in the last few years, the practice of perfunctory star appearances abroad in television programs, together with press conferences, has become much more institutionalized with some studios. Until the late 1980s, for example, Columbia TriStar organized only two yearly tours of the main foreign markets (mostly France, England, and Japan), during which famous stars could promote their most promising new releases. In 1992, in contrast, stars from soon-to-be-released pictures were systematically flown to Paris to give television interviews and hold press conferences, to which journalists from other European countries were invited.¹⁴

Because of France's special interest in film directors, who are perceived as auteurs (a perception that goes back to the prestige of film culture and film art), film directors also are often invited to make public appearances. The director of *Malcolm X* (1992), Spike Lee, was taken to France twice by the film's marketing team before the movie was released. To get the press to "write what you want it to write about the film," French journalists were

invited to New York to meet Malcolm X's widow and Denzel Washington, the star of the film.¹⁵ As another example, France is the only country where Woody Allen allows his name to be associated with the film title on a poster because he feels that French filmgoers respect directors.¹⁶ But in spite of the seemingly more cultural nature of France's interest in directors, the hoped-for outcome of all the intense publicity is simply to create media events that outdo earlier ones.

ADAPTING TO THE FRENCH LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENT

Although American studio executives and Hollywood-based advertising agencies design worldwide advertising campaigns, they are forced to adapt to local legislative restrictions and find a number of new venues for their French campaigns. In France—in contrast to the United States (where 90 percent of the major film companies' advertising budgets is spent on television commercials), and unlike most other European countries—legislation prohibits the use of television commercials for film advertising.¹⁷ Consequently, advertising films in France relies heavily on the use of billboards or posters, in strategic locations in city streets and in the Paris subway.¹⁸

Consequently, a good share of a French advertising campaign may be devoted to posters. At Columbia TriStar, for example, a low-budget campaign that relies exclusively on posters may cost 400,000 francs (approximately \$72,000). A Woody Allen movie, likely to attract a faithful group of discriminating moviegoers, still requires a fairly low marketing budget (around one million francs or \$180,000). On the other extreme, the marketing of a blockbuster like *Terminator 2*, requires millions of francs for radio and newspaper ads in addition to posters. *Terminator 2* cost six million francs (over \$1 million), which broke the former advertising-cost record in France—over five million francs for the 1989 launching of *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, released by UIP (in charge of distributing and marketing Universal and Paramount films in France). But even UIP's expenses did not compare with the extravagant fifteen million-franc campaign (about \$3 million) spent by Warner for the promotion of *Batman* the same year.¹⁹ Overall, the average budget for the French advertising of a U.S. film likely to be popular, without ranking it among the top superproductions, is between three and four million francs (between \$500,000 and \$700,000), as was the case for *The Silence of the Lambs* (1990) or *Malcolm X* (for each of which posters alone cost about \$200,000).²⁰ Such campaign budgets, which are based on a production's estimated appeal with the local audience, usually must be approved by the parent company in the United States.

The poster chosen for the French campaign may depart from the American poster or the rest of the international campaign to render a film more explicitly (as no television commercials provide background information about the film's storyline). For example, the American poster for *Drop Zone*, a skydiving action film, shows the main character's face under actor Wesley Snipes's name, which is displayed in big letters. The French poster was changed to a picture of a character jumping from a plane, and Snipes's name, unknown in France, is given a much less prominent place.²¹ In addition to the plot, a French poster often needs to highlight the mood or key images a film is built upon, and it often reflects a more cerebral approach than an American poster. For Oliver Stone's political thriller *Salvador*, for example, the French distributor suggested the portrayal of the three main characters with their hands up to suggest revolt, thus emphasizing the political aspect of the movie.²² The American poster for *Frankenstein* was a greenish, sinister image that evoked a morgue. In contrast, French advertisers from Columbia chose violent colors and lightning bolts to combine the ideas of electricity with life and joy and included a direct reference to Mary Shelley, whose story cultivated French viewers were likely to know.²³

French film posters also commonly display a series of logos of other national and local media (such as radio stations or magazines) that are partners in the promotion of a movie. This form of media partnership is not restricted to actual advertising; it has also recently expanded to non-conventional publicity, in particular to screening programs, that is, private VIP screenings organized in agreement between an American distributor and special clients for public relations purposes. The clients invite important personalities or their own clients (publicists, advertisers) to the screening; outside of Paris, they may invite their readers or listeners. The companies that sponsor the screenings benefit from the prestige of offering a special event to their patrons. In exchange for the event, the sponsor offers free publicity space to the film company, which in turn derives direct promotional benefits from the deal. Furthermore, spectators, who usually feel flattered to be invited to a private screening, are likely to react positively to the movie and initiate a word-of-mouth campaign, which often plays an essential role in France. This approach is particularly crucial for films that are not based on obvious concepts to market. For example, *Forrest Gump* (1994), staging a simpleton, was of no particular interest to the French audience, which tends to value cleverness. Therefore, UIP, *Forrest Gump*'s European distributor, had to rely on a large-scale, important screening program to foster the movie's image and visibility.²⁴

Since the late 1980s, other forms of creative partnerships between the major film companies and various companies intent on promoting their own products have flourished in order to launch U.S. films in the French market. Partnerships include an agreement between a film company and a restaurant chain, which may offer a movie ticket with the purchase of a meal.²⁵ A company may also supply American distributors with the prizes they increasingly give out in competitions aimed at promoting a new film. (Terminator scooters, for example, were donated by a toy company.) Furthermore, Columbia initiated the practice of having competitions that viewers could enter by dialing a special telephone number or an access code to the Minitel (France's nationwide home-computer system). The paying calls both brought attention to a new release and provided a source of revenue.²⁶ Thus, France's ban on television film commercials has forced distributors to take advertising and, above all, publicity to new creative heights.

MODERN MARKETING RESEARCH FOR A NON-HOMOGENEOUS PUBLIC

Adapting to foreign environments is but one instance of the complexities that now face marketing executives in charge of vast global campaigns. Not surprisingly, the marketing departments of the major studios are currently the fastest growing departments, and the international marketing divisions of these companies are no exception.²⁷ However, the most profound transformation of American marketing is not quantitative but qualitative as American film marketing techniques become more dependent on scientific market research. It is not rare for executives who have been with a company for years to be suddenly replaced with younger "Harvard MBA" types who approach the marketing of films more scientifically than "cinema people." Whereas traditional studio managers stress that marketing research, even in the hands of "number-oriented technicians," can only indicate probable pitfalls but cannot foresee the public's unpredictable reactions, the younger, business-oriented executives feel confident that U.S. marketers have superior ability to reach the targeted audiences.²⁸

Modern marketing techniques in the United States no longer simply rely on research bearing on the movie itself (such as concept testing and sneak previews, which measure an audience's reactions to film content and concepts before a company delivers the "final cut,"

with modified scenes and endings).²⁹ Today, the bulk of marketing research consists of designing a coherent strategy that best targets the expected audiences of a film.³⁰ Marketing research, based on sophisticated audience tracking surveys, examines the public's receptiveness to advertising themes, trailers, posters, and other promotional materials, and helps devise effective campaigns geared toward a film's potential audiences. Such campaigns must adapt to each individual film and target various groups of spectators, highlighting some aspects of the film and hiding others. For example, MarketCast, a research firm founded by social scientist film buffs, claims that movie preferences can swing by from 10 percent to 60 percent if the way a movie is described is changed. Consequently, the firm compiles 108 descriptions of one movie, then tests the descriptions by doing a telephone survey of "avid" moviegoers (who see 24 or more pictures a year, usually shortly after their release, and who become the catalysts for word-of-mouth advertising).³¹

The following examples will illustrate companies' attempts to alter the perception of their movies in an effort to reach broader audiences. Fearing that *Dances with Wolves* (1990) would be perceived as a Hollywood western, Orion targeted an upscale, adult audience with an aggressive campaign that portrayed the film as a serious "epic" with a documentary-like depiction of Native American life.³² In the case of the controversial *Malcolm X*, the movie's domestic distributor, Warner Brothers, hired Universal World Group, one of the largest advertising firms owned by blacks, to market the film to black customers. In addition, Warner Brothers prepared trailers that portrayed Malcolm as a political moderate to allay the fears of whites who may associate Malcolm with militant violence.³³ Advertising campaigns must evolve quickly with the public's reactions once the film is released. For example, the initial print campaign for Disney's *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988) sought to appeal to sophisticated filmgoers who might not be attracted to the idea of a cartoon, while media coverage and merchandising tie-ins focused on the animation. But when the studio found that most adult viewers reacted favorably to the cartoon characters, it immediately changed the direction of its print campaign and incorporated cartoon artwork in the ads.³⁴ In short, a new-movie advertisement campaign resembles a political campaign, adapting to fast-changing events and seeking the "one-time vote," the ticket bought by the moviegoer.³⁵

Similarly, the marketing of American films abroad must assess and address the ways in which the foreign public differs culturally from the American public. Not all studio executives agree on the best approach to design a localized marketing campaign, but they admit that an undifferentiated worldwide approach is not always best. In fact, it is estimated that movie campaigns are modified for international release about 50 percent of the time, in order to highlight some aspects and downplay others. For example, for the international marketing of *A League of Their Own* (1992)—which is based on elements of American culture (an American women's baseball team) that do not have great significance abroad—Columbia's marketers "spent months trying to take baseball out of the campaign for a movie that is fundamentally about baseball" (without very successful results).³⁶

More generally speaking, understanding cultural specificities is crucial for the marketing of films that depart from the adventure or visual spectacle superproductions with scarce dialogue. Traditional American box-office champions, such as *Indiana Jones*, *Terminator* and its sequel, or *Jurassic Park*, are considered to have "universal" appeal and can rely on simple marketing concepts. But surprisingly, these recent "cosmic" films have been overtaken at the French box office by films that go beyond the universal formulas. In particular, more French spectators saw *Dances with Wolves* and *Dead Poets Society* (over 7 million and 6.5 million spectators, respectively) than *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, *Terminator 2*, and *Jurassic Park* (6.2 million and less than 6 million spectators for the last two).³⁷ Yet to build their appeal with a foreign audience, films relying on less standardized formulas need innovative marketing campaigns that have been adapted to specific national contexts with the assistance of

foreign marketing teams. However, there are no set norms as to the proper way to ensure the financial success of such films, especially in a foreign cultural environment, and each company is still seeking the best strategy to maximize its chances for the greatest returns. As a consequence of this uncertainty, most companies avoid candid discussions about their marketing strategies and claim the right to proprietary secrecy in this domain.³⁸

One artful approach that film companies could apply to the marketing of some movies is to play on a mythical image of the United States in France. Although specific portrayals of life in "Mid-America" may be of no special interest to a foreign audience, the French public is sensitive to a certain vision of America, one largely created by past Hollywood films seen by generations of filmgoers. The campaign for *Dances with Wolves*, for example, played on the mythical and wild open spaces of the American West in the French imagination. This sense of wonder struck such a chord with the French public that, at one point, its distributor decided to no longer interfere with the "miracle" and stopped advertising the film.³⁹ However, in spite of their indisputable liking for American images, French audiences tend to think of themselves as critical of U.S. culture and politics. Therefore, films that evoke American culture, yet appear critical of it, have particular appeal for the French audience. For instance, *Accidental Hero*, which satirized American media and the gullibility of Americans while claiming to portray universal values, met with greater success in France than in the United States.⁴⁰ For the poster advertising *Malcolm X*, the French distributor suggested adding to the image of Malcolm a burning U.S. flag within the X, therefore suggesting rebellion against the American establishment. However, the campaign was also careful to educate the French public about the role of the black leader in the United States in the late 1950s and early 1960s, because Malcolm X was not known to the average French moviegoer.⁴¹

The educational dimension of films is in fact a venue that film publicists may choose to explore for the promotion of movies considered to have some substance. Because cinema has been taken traditionally as a serious art form among the French elite, another nontraditional marketing technique for films worthy of a serious audience consists of appealing to high school teachers. Distributors may place posters on high school walls and, above all, provide educators with pedagogical material for classroom use.⁴² Films such as *Schindler's List* and *Philadelphia* were selected as worthy springboards for profound reflection by their distributors, who provided free pamphlets describing the films' plots and the significance of the themes. The publications even included citations and questions that could serve as topics for written assignments. For example, the following subheadings, listed under the heading "Suggested Reflections," appeared in the pamphlet on *Philadelphia*: "Illness and the Cinema," "The Struggle Over Dignity," "Illness and Exclusion," and "Ignorance and Fear." Under such headings, topics such as the following were suggested: "Ignorance is the ferment of fear," Jonathan Demme asserted. How do you analyze this assertion?" or "It's difficult to deal sensitively with AIDS and illness in movies. What do you think of the manner in which cinema, in general, has represented these topics?"

Such innovative marketing techniques, therefore, are based on the local marketers' knowledge of consumption patterns among various French audiences (in spite of the absence of tracking surveys or sneak previews in France). But to target different audiences, French marketing teams are faced with an even more crucial decision: determining the appropriate translation method and more specifically, the optimal proportion of dubbed versus subtitled copies. Dubbed versions usually are intended for the mainstream public, while subtitled versions tend to be associated with art films and geared to spectators at a higher socioeducational level.⁴³ *Dead Poets Society*, (1989) did well in its subtitled version, according to Warner Brothers' sales manager in Paris.⁴⁴ As *Dead Poets Society*, reaching 2.5 million spectators in five weeks, became a real social phenomenon, it gave rise to a

heated debate in all the high schools in the French National Education system. Many prints, mostly dubbed, were then added to the original distribution plan (from a total of 93 prints to 200 prints by the third week).⁴⁵ According to Steve Rubin, general manager of Warner Brothers, France, the success of the dubbed version outside of Paris meant that the movie was "broadening the depths of its audience base" and also reaching more occasional viewers.⁴⁶

Similarly, because of Spike Lee's reputation as an auteur, an upscale French audience was the original target for the launching of *Malcolm X*. For the opening week, 10 out of 15 theaters in Paris were showing the film in its subtitled version. However, unlike former movies by Lee, the French-dubbed version did better than the subtitled one because the film unexpectedly attracted a large immigrant public who came to Paris from the working-class suburbs to see it—in spite of the fact that few were familiar with *Malcolm X* before hearing about the film. To capitalize on the popular audience, which usually refuses to see a film subtitled, the marketing campaign had to be quickly adjusted and more dubbed prints than subtitled ones made available.⁴⁷

A DELICATE BALANCE BETWEEN THE LOCAL AND THE GLOBAL

Thorough knowledge of products and consumers is clearly a prerequisite for success in foreign markets, and most U.S. marketing executives usually work closely with their foreign subsidiaries' counterparts or with local distributors for independent releases.⁴⁸ A delicate balance must be achieved between centralized decisions originating from the U.S. headquarters and decisions taken at the local level. The American company usually provides the worldwide marketing plan and material for a film's marketing campaign; it also draws upon the results of the American campaign. The foreign team may suggest ways to improve the campaign for the local market, and the modifications must in turn be approved by the parent company.

However, management styles and degrees of cooperation greatly differ from one major film company to another, as there appears to be no industrywide standard for the degree of initiative granted to local subsidiaries. For example, the 1992 annual report of Sony Corporation, the parent company of Columbia TriStar Pictures, pointed out the corporation's intent to "actively promote localization in various of its overseas operations," in particular marketing, and work in closer cooperation with the local communities.⁴⁹ In fact, unlike other major U.S. film companies, Columbia does not have a single British coordination center for its largest European markets (France, Germany, and Italy). Furthermore, if a foreign team fights for its autonomy and makes suggestions that prove to be particularly successful—as the French one did in the past—Columbia tends to reward it by giving it greater power of decision. As a result of such flexibility, half the posters used recently in France by Columbia had been designed by its French team.⁵⁰ Such a degree of autonomy at Columbia may reflect a Japanese management style or simply a general manager's personal philosophy, since the head of international marketing in Los Angeles, who is British, may be more sensitive to differences among European audiences than most of his American counterparts. On the other hand, Fox International, in a cost-cutting effort, recently let go 150 employees in its international operation and has opted for more centralized control.⁵¹

For most major film companies, however, there appears to be a trend toward greater centralization and standardization, especially when merchandising is involved. Since the release of *Jurassic Park* in the early 1990s, in particular, emphasis on merchandising has reached new heights for UIP, and the internationalization of products (toys, games, and so on)—released under their American names all over the world—is imposing new constraints upon foreign marketing managers. As a direct result of the added emphasis placed on

merchandising, some foreign teams have lost much of the initiative they enjoyed and are forced to adhere to marketing decisions made in London for the whole European market.

One direct consequence of the decreased autonomy of some national marketing teams is greater standardization in the use of posters. The change is particularly noticeable at UIP because until the early 1990s its French team had the option to design its own poster, in addition to a choice between the American poster or one designed in London for the European market. Today, UIP in France is no longer allowed to propose its own poster, unless the film is a failure in the United States (as in the case of *Drop Zone*, mentioned above). Overall at UIP, American posters have been kept in 70 percent of the cases—when the film was reasonably successful; in the remaining 30 percent of the cases, the London European headquarters decided for all the countries under its jurisdiction whether to use the American poster or to adapt it.⁵²

Another concrete consequence of reduced autonomy at the national level is the increasing number of film titles that remain untranslated, especially when tie-ins and merchandising are at stake. Marketers working in France for UIP, under orders from the London office, even convinced the French publisher Laffont to change the title of the book *Parc jurassique* to its English title (although the book already had been printed). Overall, UIP released about one-third of its films in 1993 and 1994 under their English titles for the French market, occasionally against the recommendation of the French team.⁵³ For example, UIP's headquarters insisted that the English title *The Flintstones* be kept (also for global merchandising reasons), in spite of warnings by the French marketing team that the title was a liability with the French public. French marketers claimed that French people would refuse to see a movie whose title they could not easily pronounce; they also stressed that the English name failed to capitalize on characters which had been popular on French television under their French names. The movie was indeed a failure in France and was finally re-released under its French title, *La famille Pierrefeu*.

The trend toward a more frequent use of English titles goes beyond merchandising considerations, however. Companies also hope to capitalize on the attraction the English language has for younger, educated viewers. Warner Brothers, for example, is now releasing up to 50 percent of its movies with their English titles in France primarily for this reason, according to its general manager.⁵⁴ And even at Columbia, where managers seem more attuned to cultural differences, more films are released in France with their English titles, especially when the title is easily pronounceable or has a certain recognizable "music" to it: *Only You* and *I Like It Like That*, for example, kept their English titles.⁵⁵ But in the process of anglicizing titles, marketers may run the risk of appealing only to the urban elite and lose access to the broader, more diverse French public who have probably contributed to the huge successes of *Danse avec les loups* and *Le cercle des poètes disparus* (the French titles of *Dances with Wolves* and *Dead Poets Society*).

CONCLUSION

Promoters are taking unprecedented care with the costly promotion of American blockbusters in the hope of transforming them into commodities with global appeal. Marketing research and thorough knowledge of national cultural identities can help draw attention to the commodities, better target differentiated foreign audiences, and adapt marketing campaigns to the changing cultural aspirations of the international public. Such strategies also require coordination of efforts both at the American and local levels, as was shown in the case of France. Occasionally, however, conflicts may arise between a more homogenized marketing approach drawing directly on global campaigns and the need to adapt to the

specificity of a foreign public's responses. Film industry specialists are still divided about the best way to resolve such conflicting approaches, in part because in recent years marketing practices have evolved so quickly that the results are still inconclusive. Some studios feel that they are nearing the single, dream market in which the glamour of Hollywood films can supplant cultural identities, as foreign publics appear increasingly sensitive to the prestige of American movies, stars, and even language. Others still stress that even "scientific" marketing research cannot always succeed in erasing cultural differences or predicting the best way to circumvent them because the business of selling moving images remains largely linked to the public's unpredictable reactions. For example, by reacting favorably to *Jurassic Park*, in spite of its English title, and rejecting *The Flintstones*, the French public gave marketers mixed signals about the importance of taking French culture into account. The jury is still out, therefore, on the extent to which Hollywood needs to cater to cultural preferences and national identities in the age of increasing globalization.

Notes

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- 2 Nicholas Garnham, *Capitalism and Communication: Global Culture and The Economics of Information* (London: Sage, 1990) 205-09.
- 3 Richard W. Stevenson, "Hollywood Takes to the Global Stage," *New York Times* 16 Apr. 1989, sec. 3: 1.
- 4 "Global Prices for US Theatrical Films," *Variety* 6 May 1991: C122.
- 5 Richard Gold, "Major Studios Speed up Their Foreign Openings to Synch with US Push," *Variety* 22 Aug. 1990: 96.
- 6 "This Summer's Hot Overseas Releases," *Variety* 22 Aug. 1990: 1, 96.
- 7 For example, Columbia released 481 prints in France for *Terminator 2* according to Patrick Laurence (sales manager, Columbia TriStar Films France), personal interview, 6 Feb. 1992; CNC info 233 (1991): 20-21; Ralph Alexander (vice president of sales and distribution, Columbia TriStar Film Distributors International), personal interview, 14 Apr. 1993.
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- 9 Paul Rassain, AMLF chief executive of marketing, telephone interview, 27 Dec. 1994.
- 10 Mark Crispin Miller, "Introduction: The Big Picture," *Seeing Through Movies*, ed. Mark Crispin Miller (New York: Pantheon, 1990) 8.
- 11 Gold 96.
- 12 René: Bonnell, *La vingt-cinquième image: une économie de l'audiovisuel* (Paris: Gallimard/FEMIS, 1989) 94-95.
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- 14 Mimi Burri (vice president, international marketing, Columbia TriStar Film Distributors International), personal interview, 8 Apr. 1993.
- 15 Joel Coler (Joel Coler and Friends, International Marketing Consultants), personal interview, 8 Apr. 1993.
- 16 Burri.
- 17 Steve Rubin, general manager of Warner Brothers France, telephone conversation, 4 Jan. 1995.
- 18 Burri.
- 19 "UIP Top Paris Distrib. in '89; AMLF Leads Indies with No. 1 French Pic.," *Variety* 22 Oct. 1989: 381; Burri.
- 20 Burri; Coler.
- 21 Caroline Decriem, director of public relations for Lumière (publicity agency for UIP), personal interview, 27 Dec. 1994.
- 22 Maureen Burke, "Hollywood's New Hype," *Stills* Nov. 1986: 82, 84.
- 23 Bruno Chatelain, director of publicity, Columbia TriStar France, personal interview, 4 Jan. 1995.
- 24 Decriem.
- 25 Chatelain.
- 26 Chatelain.

- 27 Vincent Bleuse (management associate, Columbia Pictures Marketing Department), personal interview, 8 Apr. 1993.
- 28 Coler; David Gross, vice president of marketing and distribution at Twentieth Century Fox International Corporation, personal interview, 14 Apr. 1993.
- 29 Richard Gold, "Modern Movie Mix: Money, Method, and Moxie," *Variety* 13 June 1990: 47; Randall Rothenberg, "Advertising: Movie Promoters Adopting Modern Marketing Skills," *New York Times* 23 Feb. 1990: D16; Lawrence Cohn, "Test Marketing: A Tried-and-True Formula for Finding an Audience," *Variety* 4 Apr. 1990: 8; Faye Brookman, "With Big Bux at Stake, They Do Their Homework," *Variety* 13 June 1990: 45.
- 30 Brookman 45.
- 31 "Movies by the numbers," *Variety* 13 June 1990: 45.
- 32 Greg Evans, "Orion Creates Epic Pitch for 'Dances with Wolves,'" *Variety* 5 Nov. 1990: 97.
- 33 Mark Whitaker et al., "Malcolm X," *Newsweek* 16 Nov. 1992: 68.
- 34 Richard Gold, "Marketers Do Heated Battle for B.O." *Variety* 17 Aug. 1988: 18.
- 35 Rothenberg, "Advertising" D16. In this comparison with politics, Rothenberg was citing Mike Kaiser, the creative director of Seiniger Advertising—one of the leading agencies for Hollywood advertising.
- 36 Burke 82; Thomas R. King, "Local Lures," *Wall Street Journal* 26 Mar. 1993: R13.
- 37 CNC Info 246 29; CNC Info 251 27. To better measure the remarkable success of the films mentioned, only 52 films out of all the French and foreign films released in France between 1956 and 1992 achieved an admission level of over 6 million spectators.
- 38 Gold, "Modern" 47. During my research in the Los Angeles area, a number of film marketing executives refused to discuss their companies' strategies: Several executives at Warner Brothers declined to be interviewed for various reasons: the senior vice president of International Marketing, Buena Vista Pictures, declared that it was a company-wide policy never to discuss its marketing decisions (Kevin Hyson, telephone interview, 29 Mar. 1993). National Research Group, a specialized film marketing research company (Ed Lambek, telephone interview, 8 April 1993) also stated that marketing information was strictly confidential because it was paid for by the client.
- 39 Rassain.
- 40 Burri.
- 41 Coler.
- 42 Decriem.
- 43 For a more detailed analysis of the French public's attitude toward dubbing and subtitling, see Martine Danan, *From Nationalism to Globalization: France's Challenges to Hollywood's Hegemony* (thèse de doctorat, Michigan Technological University, 1994) chap. 4.
- 44 Chenard.
- 45 Bruce Alderman, "'Poets' Knocks Them Dead at French Boxoffice," *Variety* 7 Feb. 1990: 19. *Dead Poets Society* was entitled to a unique three-page spread in *L'Express* (2 Mar. 1990) to discuss the social significance of the film. Even teachers and administrators from prestigious Parisian high schools participated in the debate by stating their pedagogical philosophy in interviews or articles sent to mainstream magazines like *L'Express* or *Le Nouvel Observateur*: See, for example, Marie-Laure de Léotard's interview of Paul Deheuvels (principal), "Un discours de plaisir et de jouissance," *L'Express* 2 Mar. 1990: 33; Suzanne Juillard-Agié: (teacher), "La passion d'enseigner," *Le Nouvel Observateur* 25 Jan. 1990: 105.
- 46 Tony Crawley, "Native fill in Francais for U.S. Players" *Variety* 2 May 1990: 110; Alderman 19.
- 47 Christian Simenc, "Qui va voir 'Malcolm X?'" *Le Monde* 12 Mar. 1993.
- 48 Milner; Bleuse.
- 49 Sony Corporation, Annual Report to Stockholders, 31 Mar. 1992: 6.
- 50 Chatelain.
- 51 Judy Brennan and Don Groves, "'Shadow' Deal Leaves Distrib. in the Dark," *Variety* 24 May 1993: 65.
- 52 Decriem.
- 53 Decriem.
- 54 Rubin.
- 55 Chatelain.