Rethinking *l'exception culturelle* in French Music Then and Now: Language, Memory, and Political Order

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Rethinking *l'exception culturelle* in French Music Then and Now: Language, Memory, and Political Order

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Melanie Ann LaFoy
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Abstract

Through this thesis, entitled “Rethinking l'exception culturelle in French Music then and now: Language, Memory, and Political Order,” I explore the concept of exception culturelle as it relates to music in France. I break down this concept by situating current French music trends within a historical landscape, highlighting certain moments of tension between music, politics, and language that appear in the decades after the Dreyfus Affair (1894), which I consider to be a turning point in the way French music is and was perceived inside and outside French national borders. I also examine the years after the second World War which saw the rise of Charles De Gaulle and his ideas of reinforcing nation through establishing a France of grandeur, a product of the celebration of individuality and creativity among the French people. Using these historical moments in French cultural history, I attempt to contextualize a comparative look at the reception by the cultural establishment of two imported forms of music in France--American Rock in the 60's and Techo/Electronic music in the 80's/90's in order to show the effect of French l'exception culturelle upon the development of French music throughout the 20th century. Evidenced by certain measures taken by the ministry of culture to control, censure, or support certain musical genres, I attempt to demonstrate that l'exception culturelle, although its primary aim is to protect culture and further national unity, has played a major role in the frailty of the French music scene today and the necessity of many French musicians to tour, record, and reside outside of France’s borders. I will argue ultimately the French have used the control of culture as a means to solidify national sentiment and to maintain its image as a long standing world power. In effect, an attitude of exclusion and cultural exceptionalism has so persisted that the productivity of musicians and organic development of musical genres has been highly effected, resulting at times a certain loss of community and national cohesion among the musical community--the very things that exception culturelle claims to foster and create.
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Introduction
In a work that seeks to reconcile a debate over music theory and method, French theorist Jacques Attali notes that “music is a herald…” positing that “change is inscribed in noise faster than it transforms society.”¹ To ground this statement, he points out that the mass production of pop music in some ways foreshadowed what he considers to be the “meaningless stockpiling of commodities that characterizes advanced global capitalism.”²

His words are powerful and thought provoking, and as I ponder their positive and negative connotations in the context of my studies of French musical history, it is evident to me that not only can ‘noise’ indeed be the first indication of social change, but that it is often through manipulation of this ‘noise’ that society is changed. In France, culture, in particular, music, has often been used by the cultural establishment to either bolster national identity and values, or to further political aims abroad, establishing a notion known as exception culturelle. It seems to me that, while the first indications of social change often do historically appear in the musical realm, harnessing music for political ends removes it from the prophetic status Attali assigns, rendering it a tool that perhaps interrupts the natural current of social change—in the name of establishing traditional cultural values. This is essentially what the notion of exception culturelle seeks to protect—‘protect’ being a word that becomes quite shifty throughout the history of French music. The reflex to guard a certain cultural purity is indeed understandable. For example, the advent of the internet has created an expansive outlet for the mass production of music, some-

² Cited by Attali, Ibid, 5
thing that seems to mirror the intense value placed on commodity in today’s society, embodying the prophetic current to which Attali refers above. In such an immense array of product, quality and authenticity are certainly important issues to consider. However, there are two sides to this coin. This global outlet in the musical community has had positive effects, in some ways eliminating the confines of national border, creating musical community and autonomy where there may not have been before. So, it seems as though this ‘noise’ exists on two levels, one in which it does seem to be a herald for change in different ways, and the other, in which it is merely an apparatus used by different establishments to catalyze change.

Many questions come to mind in pondering this dichotomy: in the midst of this global musical atmosphere where so much music is at everyone’s fingertips, how is musical or cultural authenticity defined? Should this authenticity be protected? Purposefully shaped? If so, by whom? Are the issues that globalization pose for musical authenticity a herald for changes in how future generations will define their own national identity? If so, are the changes that this indicates positive or negative? The difficulty in assigning a “positive” or “negative” to some of these issues can be seen for example, in considering how the advent of do-it-yourself recording software and ease of music publication and purchase online have effected how music is understood globally. This ease of access to music and to music making capabilities can be seen as a gift of musical autonomy, or a return to the heart of music from what musicologist Richard Middleton considers to be “the emergence of the concept of musical works (rather than practices)[…
and the] construction of a canon of ‘masterpieces’ associated with a selective list of (white, male) Great Masters” who in large part wrote compositions that were commissioned by members of the aristocracy and European royalty.\(^3\) He argues that this gave rise to such an elitist world of music that the role of the amateur musician became obsolete; hence his consideration that present day music practices are a sort of “return” of music to the individual. Could we then assume, if what Attali holds to be true, that perhaps on some level, this change in musical autonomy indicates a heightened awareness of human beings’ own ability to forge their own identity, regardless of their nationality? Perhaps. But what of the seemingly negative side to this culture of mass musical production and globalization? Middleton maintains that music in our society is an “immaterial pleasure turned commodity” and that “show business, the star system, and the hit parade signal a profound institutional and cultural colonization.”\(^4\) It is very difficult to see the value in this seemingly vapid culture of commodification, but also difficult to see the downside of musical autonomy. It is the space between these concepts and questions posed above as they have existed in and relate to French musical and cultural history that I explore in this thesis, particularly as they relate to concepts of national identity and cultural authenticity. The notion that music is subject to a sort of internal institutional colonization, while at the same time existing as a prophetic current, embodying shifts in authenticity, language, cultural memory, and the political order,

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makes it an incredibly rich subject of study. Furthermore, from this respect, France represents a formidable case study as it is a particularly wealthy country in terms of its musical relationship with language, cultural memory and politics. So, through an analysis of certain moments in French cultural history, I attempt to contextualize a comparative look at the reception by the cultural establishment of two imported forms of music in France—American Rock in the 60's and Techo/Electronic music in the 90’s and 2000’s in order to show the effects of exception culturelle upon the development of French music throughout the 20th century. Evidenced by certain measures taken by the Ministry of Culture to control, censure, or support certain musical genres, I attempt to demonstrate that the exception culturelle, although its primary aim is to protect culture and further national unity, has created limitations for artists who seek to be innovative, which inevitably involves appropriation of different musical styles—those styles usually being imported from other countries. Crucial to this study is to examine the above concepts keeping in mind France’s role as a colonial power, for I will argue ultimately that as its colonial ventures drew to a close in mid-20th century, around the time American rock and roll posed a threat to what the cultural establishment considered to be “authentic” French music, the French colonial gaze turned inward, using the control of culture as a means to solidify national sentiment and to maintain its image as a long standing world power. References to the traditional chanson française genre play a role in this discussion as an example of the "mythic" quality of exception culturelle. This is evidenced by chanson’s legitimation throughout the 20th century and consideration by many as the only truly authentic form of popular music when, at its origin, it was seen much the same way as yé-
ye and techno were at their early stages—a sub-par, non-literary genre that posed a threat to national unity. It is partly this slippery quality of national authenticity and the tendency of the French cultural establishment to shift its designations of what is truly authentic to fit its political aims, that I argue has made life difficult for many musicians in France. Thus, I attempt to show that, despite a huge amount of talented acts and musicians that have risen in France and despite the efforts of more progressive ministers of culture such as Jack Lang and Katherine Trauttman to support these musicians in comparison with ministers such as the more traditionalist and Gaullist André Malraux, an attitude of exclusion and exception culturelle has so persisted in the French cultural establishment that, paradoxically, the quality of the most visible musical output in France—or should I say audible—has, at certain points in the 20th century, been viewed as mediocre. The productivity of musicians and organic development of musical genres has been highly effected, resulting at times a certain loss of community and national cohesion among the musical community—the very things that exception culturelle claims to foster and create. However, keeping in mind my estimation that the French cultural establishment in a way colonized French culture as a way of bolstering its national image, which is not to say that certain infrastructures were not put in place that greatly aided in the development and propagation of many art forms, particularly theater, I argue ultimately that the language of the musical world can been seen to follow certain patterns and fit within similar models as do colonized languages, particularly the model of creolization that Edouard Glissant presents in his Caribbean Discourse.
L’exception culturelle plays a major role in my conclusion since the very notion that there is a cultural hierarchy has to do with the supremacy of the national culture over the non-national. Thus, it is only by taking a close look at when, and what creates/created the very sense of nationality and/or national borders as they are understood in France today, which include factors such as language and cultural memory, that it is possible to make any claims about the state of modern French music and what it may or may not represent. At the heart of this issue also is the question of musical authenticity and what factors contribute to the definition of that authenticity—something that, in France, goes hand in hand with conversations about nationality, as we will see later. Thus, in this introduction, I will begin by detailing, and will continue throughout this thesis to reference, several historical aspects of the French musical and linguistic world that I feel play a major role in the development of what is and was considered to be authentic French music in the 20th century and today and which give evidence of the tendency of the French cultural establishment to seek to control culture as a means of a solidification of national identity at home and abroad.

The idea that a nation and its music are inextricably linked or that the state has a duty to guide or control the music of the people were not new concepts during the 20th century by any means. In De Institutione Musica, the first musical work to be printed in Venice around 491, Boethius summarizes ancient Greek thought on music and the importance of musical concord which, in keeping with Plato’s beliefs, he held united the very soul of the universe. He discusses how different types of personalities are drawn
to certain musical modes or scales, pointing out how carefully music must be controlled by the state as music can, in a sense, alter our very human nature. Somewhat nostalgically, he recalls music from the past, saying,

“Music was prudent and modest when it was performed on simple instruments; but since it has come to be performed in various ways with many changes, it has lost its mode of gravity and virtue, and having almost fallen into a state of disgrace, it preserves almost nothing of its ancient splendor. For this reason Plato prescribed that boys must not be trained in all modes but only in those which are vigorous and simple. Moreover, it should be especially remembered that if some melody or mode is altered in some way, even if this alteration is only the slightest change, the fresh change will not be immediately noticed; but after some time it will cause a great difference and will sink down through the cars into the soul itself. Thus Plato held that the state ought to see that only music of the highest moral character and prudence be composed, and that it should be modest, simple and masculine, rather than effeminate, violent or fickle.

It is through these early thoughts of the Greeks, reiterated by Boethius, that we can begin to understand what a deep-seated connection music has to the the nation state—preceding even a solid conception of nation itself. The thoughts of Plato above have an uncanny resemblance to attitudes towards pop music in France, evidence that no matter the time period, the socially transformative power of music is very real. However, there seems to be a certain purity in the reasons that Plato gives for state control of music—mainly that of keeping peace. I would argue that throughout French history, the aim of this goal at times has resembled a mere power struggle wherein the state seeks to control culture, not necessarily in the name of peace, but in the name of national solidarity and international prestige.

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5 Boethius, *De Institutione Musica*, Book 1. Accessed April 18, 2016. ahttp://cmed.faculty.ku.edu/private/boethius.html
Perhaps it is no accident that this more pointed control of music becomes increasingly solid as the concept of the nation state becomes more solid. It was during the 18th century, a century which produced what are considered to be the greatest composers of all time, that the musical atmosphere of Europe was morphing from a more fluid theater where musical styles were not necessarily bound to the confines of a particular national border, to one that was becoming increasingly segmented. In discussing these concepts of national fluidity versus solidification as it pertains to music, Rollo Myers, in his work *Modern French Music*, points out that “until roughly the end of the eighteenth century, music had always been a kind of international *lingua franca* spoken with little more than slight variations in accent of inflections from one end of Europe to the other” ⁶ He describes, for example, 16th century Europe where a musician from Tudor England would have felt equally at home in Flanders, France, or Italy—where said musician would have encountered very little resistance to his musical forms no matter his nationality or how far he had wandered from his own territory. In what was then France, the popular music of the troubadours and trouvères of the 13th and 14th centuries also created a sense of aristocratic belonging that was transnational. Edouard Glissant discusses a similar phenomenon in regards to literature, in *Les Entretiens de Baton Rouge* where he describes the Middle Ages as an age that exhibited *une esthétique du détour* which he considers to be the “source réelle de l’œuvre littéraire.” ⁷ Though he

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references literature and not music, Glissant makes an observation that during the Middle Ages, the notion of nation and the very conscience of language was only just beginning to form—however they were not yet, as he explains “encore restrictive ni dominatrice” and thus led to “une pensée de l’errance”. The mention of language here is profound for two reasons. Firstly and more generally, it must be noted that it is language that played, then and now, a crucial role in our understanding of identity within the confines of the nation state. The fluidity of national sentiments that Glissant references directly parallels a time when all educated men and women, regardless of their location, had one language in common—Latin—as well as a time when regions of Europe demonstrated a large variation of dialects such that multi-lingual realities were the norm and a person's identity was not concretely defined by their ‘mother tongue.’ Secondly, and more specifically related to French music, it would be language that would become one of the most important factors that contributed to what was considered to be “authentic” music in France. For example, what is considered by Myers to be a “new era in French music,” an era in which France would begin to set itself apart from other country’s musical stylings, commenced in 1892 with the first performance of composer Claude Debussy’s *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un Faune*, the subject of which was taken from the French poet, Stéphane Mallarmé. This set a precedent for a close relationship in France between literature, music, and dance. In keeping with this notion, it would be the

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8 Ibid.,108
9 Ibid., Myers, Rollo, 5.
general propensity of the 20th century French cultural establishment to associate the literary quality of music with its authenticity.

This link between language and music is primarily what makes France such an interesting case study when analyzing the French cultural establishment’s effort to pin down musical authenticity in an effort to solidify a certain national sentiment. Determining how France’s linguistic and political histories have played a role in determining what is firstly, considered to be French, and secondly, what is considered, within the confines of the “national” label, to be authentic is crucial in understanding the tendency over the last century of certain types of music or musicians to be marginalized based on their performance language of choice. And so, the question arises, at what point did the music of France begin to deviate from the 15th and 16th century musical models? Myers, Middleton and many others, agree that this shift is undeniably linked to the rise of the aforementioned musical giants such as Bach and Handel towards the end of the 17th century, creating a sort of musical epicenter in the German and Austrian regions. However, they agree as well that the response to this Germanic epicenter was not entirely in response to a concrete presence of German nationalism in music, but rather in response to the sheer volume of artists from this region that were rising to the forefront such as Mozart and Beethoven, followed by Schubert, Schumann, Wagner, and Brahms. Due to the veritable volume of artists alone, Germany became somewhat of a musical authority in Europe until the early years of the 20th century, for a time, overshadowing other great works from composers such as Gabriel Fauré and Claude Debussy in France or Czech
and Hungarian composers Antonin Dvorak and Franz Liszt. The emergence of Germany as this musical epicenter would prove to have a profound effect on France, as composers, in competition to this epicenter, attempted to clearly identify and hone what set French music apart from German music. In a sense, there was a need to address what exactly defined their own national and musical identity in competition with the force of this host of German and Austrian musicians.

As far as the French quest for identity during this time of German/Austrian musical domination, Jane Fulcher links this shift to the German epicenter as well, yet in a slightly different way from Myers for whom the 1894 “Dreyfus Affair” in France represents the springboard that launched French musical culture into a situation where it became “occupied” by political culture. Zola’s publication of his radical letter in 1898, _J’accuse_, represents one of the first instances of modern intellectual engagement in the realm of public opinion. His rendering of this situation into the public eye engaged major political, intellectual, and literary figures on both sides of the Dreyfus argument, hurtling into the lime light issues that had bifurcated France since the Revolution. Fulcher maintains that this was a question of whether or not “the authority and tradition of the state, the army, the aristocracy, and the Church take the precedence over those principles and rights that had been defined so emphatically by the French Revolution,” turning the real question of the time into not “What is France” but “What cultural values are

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10 Ibid., Myers, Rollo H., 6.

This polarizing questioning resulted in the upheaval of political order, giving birth to new political organizations particularly, the *Ligue de la Patrie Française* and the *Action Française*, who continued the conflict that was catalyzed by the Dreyfus affair, opposing any political party who they felt would lead to a less-unified society.

Members of these leagues were predominately members of the intellectual elite. Fulcher reasons that it is this quality of their membership that caused them to turn to the domain of culture in order legally to prolong the war over contested conceptions of essential French values. Cultural criticism thus became, for them, a form of political intervention and action, a means to articulate and indirectly diffuse their conceptions of the “authentic essence” of France.” This meant recruiting intellectuals and artists alike to propagate their political goals through output of their writing, music, and art, setting a precedent regarding the tie between culture and politics that has been strong in France ever since, a precedent that I argue made it possible for the state to later play such a powerful role in using culture to propagate national values—values determined by the state. Fulcher explains that at the end of the 19th century “not only was the musical world ‘invaded’ as a part of the cultural aggression of these two leagues—the Republic ‘had’ to respond,” resulting in a penetration of political ideology that was so overt and direct that it “recalls the politicization of music during the French Revolution”—a time during

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12 Ibid, 11.
13 Ibid., 5
which music was rendered in complete control of the state. What occurred in the musical world during this period was, at its core, a battle of musical institutions to determine first, what music belonged to the official canon of French music, and second, what methods, styles, and genres of music would be included in official musical instruction—which at that time existed only inside the state institution, the Conservatoire National de Musique. As the above mentioned leagues challenged everything about the existing state institutions, another school of music was formed in opposition to the Conservatoire of the Republic called the Schola Cantorum, first led by composer Vincent d’Indy, which not only defined what it considered French national musical values to be, but established what Fulcher calls a kind of “code” that linked these values with genres, styles, repertoires, and techniques, “manifesting nationalist values through a potent symbolism that was inherently bifocal—that is, simultaneously resonant in involving the fields of both French politics and art.” Simply put, the goal of both schools was to determine which music would be considered authentically French. Would the French musical canon include, for example, the music of the Troubadours, the wandering artists whose music precedes a modern sense of nation, whose music was not necessarily written in French or within the confines of what constitutes today’s French national territory? Would it include, as the proponents of the Schola maintained it should, the music of composers who had had an undeniable influence on current French composers such as the


15 Ibid., 6.
German composers mentioned above, as well as religious music dating back to the Middle Ages, a type of music that had been shunned since the religiously diffusing Revolution? Or should the French Revolution, as the Republican Conservatoire maintained, be seen as the birth of truly French music, establishing composers such as Gossec and Sarrette as the fathers of the French canon, explicitly ignoring what came before this period? David Looseley in his work *Popular Music in Contemporary France* maintains that it was after the Dreyfus Affair that “The national becomes a criterion of aesthetic judgement,” what Fulcher describes as “a return to tradition and an elevation of classicism as the French ‘national style.’”  

Situated at the center of this conversation is the question of how history is to be interpreted, which raised then, and still does now, yet another issue that comes to the forefront in the quest for national authenticity of music—that of the construction of cultural memory.

This tendency of the French political camps to either attempt to ignore certain histories or to over-commemorate certain events when determining artistic authenticity has long been a characteristic of the French Republic. Charles Forsdick in his article *Colonialism, Postcolonialism and the Cultures of Commemoration*, recalls the Bicentenary celebration of the French Revolution in 1989 which, he points out, came at a time when there was an increased sensitivity and focus on memory in “literature, cinema, and intellectual debate.” In explaining the arrival of this “memory movement”, Forsdick

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16 Ibid., Fulcher, Jane F., 32
discusses the fascinating work of Pierre Nora, author of *Les Lieux de mémoire* (1984), a collection of essays that focus on influential ‘sites’ —which he defines essentially as places, people, monuments, emblems, books, ceremonies, and events—of the collective French historical experience. Interestingly, Forsdick points out that later in 1992, Nora admits that France had entered “une ère de la commémoration” in which considerations of history were eclipsed by a near-obsession with memory”¹⁸—a memory that often exaggerates certain aspects of its history in order to either eclipse or overshadow aspects of its past that are, for lack of a better term, unsavory. For example, the celebration of 50th anniversary of Victory in Europe (VE) day which occurred on May 8, 1945, eclipses the massacres by French troops of pro-independence demonstrators in eastern Algeria that occurred on the very same day. I argue that a similar pattern can be detected in the French cultural establishment’s treatment of musical genre, particularly its borderline over-commemoration of the *chanson française* in an effort to ignore or discount other genres that appear more influenced by imported musical styles, mainly those of the American variety. This gives evidence of the selective or fluid quality of national memory—a type of memory that Jan Assmann defines as “a collective concept for all knowledge that directs behavior and experience in the interactive framework of a society and one that obtains through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation.”¹⁹ She posits that cultural or national memory can be understood to follow the same patterns

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¹⁸ Ibid., 271

—and suffer the same maladies—as the singular, human memory. And so it is through this parallel with singular memory that we see how the equally erratic quality of national memory can result in what physiologist James Lampien describes as the tendency of the human mind to erase traumatic events from memory or explicitly re-remember certain events in order to either exaggerate or downplay their importance—a tendency that leads directly to myth-making, a concept that will prove very important to the creation of national sentiment, especially after World War II.

In light of the above historical introduction, this thesis will be divided into the following sections, each one examining specific moments in French history that function as contributors to the sentiment of *exception culturelle* in France following the Dreyfus affair as it relates to, what I call, an internal cultural colonialism. I find that in each of these moments, a certain tension can be detected between what I will call an “organic” development of French music and intervention by either the French government and other politically affiliated bodies—what I will refer to as the French cultural establishment—to reflect values specific to those particular forces. I will show in some of these moments a deep-seated connection between the literary and musical world, as well as an involvement of politics in all things artistic that gives proof of the (at times), overbearing nature of *exception culturelle* that attempts to define cultural authenticity in a world where the notion is remarkably elusive.

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20 Lampinen, James M., and Denise R. Beike. *Memory 101*. Print, 281
In the first section of this thesis, which will be comprised of two chapters, I will explore the political atmosphere that followed the second World War, a time during which Charles de Gaulle asserted his romantic views of France as a nation of “grandeur.” Creating the Ministry of Culture in 1959 would be a crucial step in this affirmation of nation and symbolically, the importance of literature and language in determining cultural authenticity. I will then examine the reception of American rock and roll by the cultural establishment and French youth, a discussion which leads inevitably to the events of May 1968 as they relate to this discussion on culture, and the perceptions of both the *yé-yé* and *chanson française* genres.

The second half of this thesis, which include one chapter and my conclusion, will discuss the effects of the tensions in the music industry between the policies of liberation and restraint under the Jack Lang ministry of culture. My conclusion will analyze the responses and implications of the arrival of electronic music in France, showing the similarities between its reception and that of *yé-yé* in the 60’s. This style of techno and electro, created by bands such as Daft Punk, M83, Air, and Justice, has never garnered an authenticity stamp from the French cultural establishment. However, according to fans and musicologists alike, the French specificity of these band’s interpretation of techno and electronica is uncontested. If the treatment of certain musical genres by the French cultural establishment has been so fraught throughout the 19th and 20th, and 21st centuries, how has this genre risen above the constraints to find international community, defying tradition? What does this mean for France’s future musicians? What, if anything,
does this “herald” to use Attali’s word, for the future of French values? It is these questions that I seek, not necessarily to answer, but to approach in this thesis, hoping to gain some understanding of the effects that exception culturelle can have on culture, for the better or the worse.
Part I: Shifting Musical Authenticity in Post-War France
Chapter 1: Culture and the Political Milieu in Post-War France
Important to the task of tracing the development of l’exception culturelle as it relates to French culture, particularly music, is the history of the idea or the myth of France. Similar to the debate during the Dreyfus affair concerning the constitution of the French musical canon, debates around what defined the French nation often seemed to be reduced to what occurred before or after a certain date, namely 1789. In his article Nation et nationalisme du Moyen Âge à l’Époque moderne, Jean-Marie Moeglin summarizes that throughout history, in approaching the question of the existence of a sentiment of nation—be it of France during the Middle Ages or of modern France—two attitudes generally emerge:

“D’un côté, l’on trouve ceux, en général spécialistes de l’époque contemporaine, qui soutiennent que les nations sont une invention datant de l’époque de la révolution française, cela au mépris de toutes les manifestations, remontant à des époques antérieures, d’un sentiment d’appartenance et d’attachement à une communauté nationale ou régionale. D’un autre côté, l’on trouve ceux qui soutiennent certes que les nations et le sentiment national se développent dès le Moyen Age, les nations contemporaines n’étant que les héritières de ces nations de l’époque médiévale et moderne, mais dont l’attitude se heurte cependant aussi à de sérieuses apories; je les résumerai en disant qu’il n’a pas existé au Moyen Âge et à l’époque moderne de véritables guerres nationales, c’est-à-dire provoquées par l’exacerbation d’un sentiment proprement “nationaliste” dans différents pays, cela même si certain épisodes peuvent parfois paraître s’en approcher…”

Moeglin’s summary of this debate, which is in no way resolved today, can be seen throughout France’s history, particularly in the after-math of World War II, a time in France that will become crucial in establishing the notion of l’exception culturelle in the arts at the time General Charles de Gaulle was elected president in 1958 and the first minister of culture, André Malraux, was appointed in 1959. The years that preceded

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these events were not only tumultuous due to the economic and political havoc brought on by World War II, but due to an intense internal conflict that arose over this subject of nation between the emerging political leaders at the time. In *Death of the Fourth Republic*, Ronald Matthews compares the national visions of Marshal Philippe Pétain and Charles De Gaulle. Pétain was well known for invoking a charged Anglophobia by which Britain was portrayed as “the Other,” the antithesis and enemy of French values which he considered divinely inherent to the French people. He would call this regeneration his “Révolution nationale,” a return to a myth of France which he considered to have been tainted over time, particularly since the Revolution.  

For Pétain, France needed to find unity from within, the world outside being hostile and damaging to the, what he considered to be inherent French values that were in desperate need of recovery. In contrast, De Gaulle praised the greatness of France, portraying the struggle for an affirmation of nation to be a world-wide fight for a democratic nation in which France would serve as the anchor. In his work, *De Gaulle’s Legacy*, William Nester quotes from De Gaulle’s *Memoirs of Hope*, in which De Gaulle perfectly summarizes his view, saying, “We have seen created in France a sort of mystique whereby we are the center and which unites, little by little, all that might resist it. It is in this way that we become, by the force of things, a moral French entity.”

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that excluded reliance upon Anglo-American economies. The complicated interactions between these two men as they relate to the Vichy Régime, the Resistance, and the establishment of the Fourth Republic certainly exceeds the scope of this thesis; however, what is important to note is that although the national ideals of these two men were certainly contrasting, as were the ideals of those who participated in the Dreyfus debate, there existed in both men the belief that the French nation was to be protected from Anglo-American influence and that in order to reinforce values that were seen as inherent to the French nation, French artistic and intellectual output were essential in both re-establishing those values and affirming France as a central European presence. These beliefs would prove to have a profound consequences in establishment of a quite oppressive exception culturelle in the domain of music.

When he was elected as the 18th president of France in 1958, thus founding the Fifth Republic, De Gaulle brought with him his dynamic vision of what it meant to be a nation. Nester presents in great detail De Gaulle’s beliefs on this issue quoting De Gaulle to have said that “War gives birth and brings death to nations.” De Gaulle maintained, referencing Rousseau’s notion of a nation’s “general will,” that the only force that advanced a nation’s grandeur more than war were a man’s great deeds and his character —and therefore, the great men who rise up as leaders must mobilize the general will of the people and “impose the common interest of the people” on everyone.  

\[24\] Idid., 12  
\[25\] Idid. 13
considered the fatal flaw of France to be “the multiplicity of viewpoints which is peculiar
to [its] people by reason of [its] individualism…[and] diversity” which he thought
reduced the State to being “no more than a stage for the confrontation of amorphous
ideologies, sectional rivalries, semblances of domestic and external action without
continuity or consequence.” The remedy for this “stage of confrontation” was,
according to De Gaulle, for France to “embrace all French generations, and first of all…the living generations,” insisting that “France cannot be France without grandeur.”
It is this notion of grandeur that pushes this national debate into the realm of culture, for,
according to De Gaulle, it was through personal achievement through creativity that men
can realize both their individuality, and contribute to the grandeur of the nation.
Because of his views, he considered globalization to be the biggest threat to this grandeur.
At this time, he felt the French nation needed a new way to assert its prominence that did
not involve territorial domination. Thus, it is not surprising that one of De Gaulle’s first
priorities as president was to create a government cabinet dedicated to the protection and
propagation of French culture in 1959, the first minister of which was his long time
friend, established French writer and former soldier, André Malraux. Among other tactics,
De Gaulle would use French cultural prowess to combat what he saw as a constant
Anglophone threat to French identity.

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26 Ibid. 14
27 Ibid., 15
28 Ibid., 35
Malraux’s views on national grandeur were closely allied to De Gaulle’s. In August of 1945, one year after the Liberation, he stated that “Dans le domaine de l’histoire, le premier fait capital des vingt dernières années, à mes yeux, c’est le primat de la nation.”29 And so, as Minister of Culture, he became the director of all government festivities that related to the celebration of the French nation and invited the French people to unite according to their national sentiment. He quoted Michelet saying, “Tu en feras autant, tu n’oublieras jamais que ta mère est la France.”30 Impregnated with Michelet’s notion of nation, Malraux considered the act of commemoration to be an essential element in establishing nation and a ritual of unity, believing that the lived emotions of the masses give the individual a sentiment of belonging to a certain collectiveness.31 The celebration and commemoration of the French language, historical monuments, writers, musicians, etc., became of utmost importance to the Ministry of Culture, contributing the aforementioned legacy of commemoration that in some ways overshadows some artists’ output if that output did not fit with what was considered to be authentically French. It is this legacy, in addition to the view that American products were the driving force of global capitalism and a certain cultural hegemony, that would play a major role in the celebration of the Chanson music genre. This was a genre thought to be in danger of being eclipsed by Anglophone genres, namely Anglo-American rock, despite

30 Ibid., 123
31 Ibid., 124
the fact that the *Chanson* genre, as we will see later, had a history of rejection in terms of its French authenticity up until globalization threatened to introduce an even more “inauthentic” genre of music.

In his book, *Popular Music in Contemporary France*, a book that is considered among musicologists to be one of the most through analyses of contemporary French music to date, David Looseley discusses the complicated but inevitable appearance of American rock in France in the late 1950’s. He suggests that, contrary to how this scenario is commonly portrayed, the arrival and subsequent popularity of American rock in France was in no way a “surprise invasion.” The pervasiveness of American rock had begun with the proliferation of jazz by American soldiers during and after the First World War and although jazz was originally disapproved of by the French authorities, it was very popular in France, influencing well known artists such as guitarist Django Reinhardt and jazz pianist Édouard Rouault, better known by his Americanized name, Eddie Barclay who would later become one of the most important fixtures in the French music industry. During the occupation, he opened France’s first discotheque and would later launch one of the most successful record labels in France.\(^{32}\) In referring to the arrival of American rock as a “surprise invasion”, as it was thought of by De Gaulle, Looseley raises an interesting question—*was* this an invasion or was this a by-product of France’s complicated history as an ally with American and British forces during World War II? From an economic standpoint, it is not difficult to understand the facility with which

\(^{32}\) Ibid., Looseley, David., 16
American products made their way into French territory given France’s acceptance of the Marshall Plan. On June 5, 1947 American Secretary of State George Marshall presented a plan stating “our policy is directed not against any country or doctrine but against hunger, poverty, desperation, and chaos,” adding that “its purpose should be the revival of a working economy in the world so as to permit the emergence of political and social conditions in which free institutions can exist.”

On April 3, 1948, President Harry Truman signed the Marshall Plan granting $5 billion in aid to 16 European nations, France being one of those nations. This plan relates to the proliferation of American rock in that the goal with this plan was to break the traditional trading patterns between Eastern and Western Europe, binding the Western European countries in closer political and economic relationship with the United States. The Americanization of the French music industry and French music tastes can be seen as a logical by-product of the implementation of this plan due to the fact that it became an economy that was largely dependent on consumer goods. The fact that De Gaulle employed these funds to bolster the economy, while at the same time fiercely fighting against inevitable American cultural influence, is evidence of a nearly neurotic difficulty among the French cultural establishment to embrace change and cultural diversity, tendencies that, in light of war time devastation, and later, the changes that the Algerian War would bring, created a

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34 Ibid., 1
culture of stubborn stagnation that would be key factors in the event of May 1968, which I will discuss further in Chapter 2.

What furthered the effects of aforementioned ease of access to American products was a large population of French youth who appropriated this musical style and the image that came with it, creating a new French youth culture all their own, something that De Gaulle and Malraux did not foresee, nor plan to include, in their vision of a France of “grandeur.” As a result, many of their acts became purely reactionary against what was considered to be a threat, Anglophone influence, as opposed to acts that purely sought to strengthen and propagate French artistic output. According to Keith Reader in an article about the rise of Edith Piaf, the main accomplishment of André Malraux as Minister of Culture was his institution of the *Maisons de la Culture* in order to extend the audience for high culture, which, Reader considers was in direct response to what was seen as an onslaught of American mass culture that was entering the French border through music and films. Gerber affirms this reactionary creation of Malraux’s *Maisons de la culture*, describing how Malraux constantly reminded the French of the specificity of their culture, which he called their “*exception culturelle,*” to hopefully incite popular reaction against the imperialism of the United States.\(^{35}\) However, Hugh Dauncy points out in *The French Music Industry: structures, challenges and responses* that for Malraux, the role of the Ministry of Culture was centered around the democratization of the “plus hautes œuvres de l’esprit” which constituted the preservation and rendering available to the

people, masterpieces, rather than encouraging “création par tous.”

Reprimanding the United States’ “vanity” in asserting itself, Malraux spoke of the inclusivity of the French nation saying “le monde dans lequel nous vivons est un monde de nations, et toute pensée politique qui consiste à ne pas poser d’abord ce monde tel qu’il est, est une pensée vaine.”

It is quite clear that, in the wake of decolonization of African nations, as well as the reconstruction of France after the war, the time during which France could assert their territorial dominance was at an end. Thus, this new strategy of inclusive dominance became one that was directed towards the French population itself—an assertion of an elite style of culture against which every cultural product of the people would be held to determine if it was worthy of the adjective “French.” It is interesting to consider the point of view of Moeglin once more here as he, in discussing the tradition of the writing of French history through les chroniques, maintains that the history of nation in France can be seen as the story of the elite, stemming from the 14th/15th century idea that,

“le prince est le représentant de Dieu sur terre, qu’il a le devoir de protéger son peuple, de le nourrir matériellement... il me semble que vient se surimposer la dynastie comme une sorte de pôle unique qui tend à intégrer tous les autres. L’idée s’impose dans ces chroniques dynastiques etnationales que le pays se confond avec la maison princière et avec la personne du prince.”

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37 Ibid., Gerber., 168

The De Gaulle administration certainly seemed to actively embody this role of “pôle unique” as De Gaulle considered it the duty of the great men in power to guide the people to a realization of their own greatness, often going so far as to use radio and television censorship to “protect” the general population from exposure to anti-nationalist sentiments that either showed up in the form of American influenced music or protest songs by French chanson artists such as Léo Ferré or George Brassens. However, the national vision that De Gaulle and his administration had in mind for France was a far cry from what a growing population of youth had in mind.

In France, by 1964, one-third of the population was under the age of twenty and Looseley maintains that “by adopting rock’n’roll as a call sign, the teenager, particularly male, began to assume a sociological significance which had not been bargained for.”39 He notes further that the 1959 increase of the school leaving age from fourteen to sixteen, as well as the expansion of higher education, created a new type of teenager and consumer—one that had more money and time to spend on entertainment and fashion related items. But there are several key differences in the way that French youth reacted to this “invasion.” Looseley points out that the youth consumer society was considerably more advanced in America than in France and that many of the “rock myths” that came along with American rock’n’roll—such as back-seat smooching, riding in motorcycles, drive-in movies, and surfing—meant little to the lives of these French youth who could not even drive until eighteen and who were living in the aftermath of two destructive

world wars. In addition to this, American rock, especially of the South, was often times in reaction to explosive racial tension, something that had little to do with the French reality at the time. Furthermore, the linguistic barrier, coupled with a very conservative education system and a prevalence of traditional Catholic values, created a sort of necessity of posturing for those who wished to participate in this new musical form. French sociologist Paul Yonnet maintains for this population of French youth there were few other options than to imitate a barely understood American style thus creating sort of “mask” culture. Jonathyne Briggs in his book on French musical genre, Sounds French describes how in France, the conception of rock and roll was very general, and that “divisions between pop, folk, and rock emphasized in the American context was lost in translation” as artists produced very formulaic rock tunes that often employed common traits of early rock such as hand claps, electric organ, and back-up singers. This is not to say that copying and appropriating of musical style is a negative occurrence or is in any way uncharacteristic to the normal musical process of an artist. However, the by-products of this rock style appropriation did not seem to develop into what critics would interpret as a specifically “French” iteration of this rock style simply because, as Loosely highlights, French teens did not have ease of access to the same musical equipment, practice/concert venues, and radio/television programs that the American teens did. In addition to this, and what sets the French rock varieties apart from British iterations of

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rock, is that by and large, the English language was considered by many to be the authentic language of rock and roll, creating a linguistic challenge for French artists in the fact of a cultural atmosphere wherein anything English was considered a threat to French cultural values. Loosely points out that due to this “threat” that imported rock and roll posed to what the cultural establishment considered to be authentically French, there was absolutely no ministerial support for popular music and no traditional locations where poets, lyricists, musicians, and singers who were drawn to this rock and roll style could meet to collaborate. Thus, the main methods of participation in this new trend were the purchase of record players, records, and fanzines, and as well listening to the popular radio show, *Salut les copains*—thus mainly consuming, and not producing music, became the order of the day.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Verse of Vartan version:</th>
<th>First Verse of Little Eva version:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prenez le premier train qui vous fera danser</td>
<td>Everybody's doing a brand-new dance, now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invitez les copains qui savent bien twister</td>
<td>I know you'll get to like it if you give it a chance now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vous allez par devant et puis vous reculez</td>
<td>My little baby sister can do it with me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vous twiztez en marchant ce n'est pas com-</td>
<td>It's easier than learning your A-B-C's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plique</td>
<td>So come on, come on, do the Loco-motion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venez danser tous le locomotion oh oui</td>
<td>with me</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This monumental radio show, created by Jean Frydman in October of 1959, was presented by Frank Ténot and Daniel Fillipacchi on French radio station Europe 1, launching the success of the rock and roll in France—a genre that would eventually come to be called *yé-yé*, referencing the “yeah, yeah” that often occurs in sixties American and

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42 Ibid., Looseley, David., 118.
British rock songs. The name *yé-yé* itself indicates one quality of this genre of music mostly likely causes Yonnet to assert that French rock culture was a “culture of the mask”—that of copying—since many of the most popular hits by the stars of *yé-yé* were somewhat bizarre carbon copies of the hits of their American or, sometimes British, counterparts, the only difference often being that the lyrics were re-written into French, the meaning and context kept as close as possible to the original. For example, singer Sylvie Vartan, a Bulgarian born artist who had only learned French a few years before releasing her first hit, recorded her version of the American song, *The Locomotion*, in 1962, calling it rather *Le loco-motion*. Not only does the tempo, instrumentation, and vocal styling of her French version sound identical to the American version, the lyrics, although not a direct translation, attempt to invoke the same mood, theme, and rhyming patterns:

Another example of an even more exact replica is Egyptian born singer Claude François’ version of American duo The Everly Brothers’ tune, *Made to Love*:

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The list of songs such as these go on and on, with numerous American hits showing up in identical musical form on the French scene soon after their American release. The copying continued in other forms as well. Jean-Philippe Smet and Christian Blondieau, who originally called themselves *les blousons noirs* to go along with the American bad-boy rock and roll image, even changed their names to be more American sounding, giving rise to iconic performers such as Johnny Hallyday (Smet) and Long Chris (Blondieu). But this culture of copying, as valueless as it seemed to some, was the seed of change for this large population of youth, embodying the view of Fabian Holt who observes that musical genre is social by nature and that, despite the apparent stylistic shortcomings of the French interpretation of rock in its early states, it became a successful genre in its ability to “unify performer and listener through shared emotions.\(^\text{46}\) This was more than evident when over 100,000 young people gathered at Place de la Nation in Paris on June 22, 1963, clamoring to see the rising stars of *Salut les*

\(^{46}\) Ibid., Holt, Fabian., cited in Briggs, 11
*copains* perform the twist, particularly Vartan and Hallyday, all of France becoming aware that change was in the air.

According to Briggs, during the above concert, organized by *Salut les copains’* host Filipacchi, artists performed on make shift stages, dancing and cranking the volume of their electric guitars to such a volume that members of the audience were rendered into an ecstatic, at times violent, frenzy.47 A photo featured in *Sounds French* pictures of the aftermath of this concert where one can see torn shop awnings, damaged trees, and perplexed onlookers dressed in suits. In due course, the French parliament moved, unsuccessfully, to ban these types of events, indicating, that despite its failure to put a stop to this behavior, a strong resistance amongst the cultural establishment to this new genre that had young people behaving in such bizarre and unpredictable ways. Even *chanson* singers, who at the time were not especially favored by the ministry due to the anti-nationalist quality of many of their songs, opposed this new musical behavior, evidenced, according to Chris Tinker in his article on the careers of Léo Ferré and Georges Brassens, by songs such as Ferré’s *Épique époque* (1964) which reflects mounting fears of American cultural imperialism and the proliferation of American mass culture.48 It would be this common “anti-globalization” attitude that, I argue, would ultimately link *chanson* to the Gaullist idea of a grandiose France, something that would aid in the canonization of *chanson* as a genre in the eyes of the establishment, despite the

47 Ibid., Briggs, Jonathyne., 14

48 Tinker, Chris. “*Chanson engagée* and political activism in the 1950’s and 1960’s: Léo Ferré and George Brassens.” *Popular Music in France from Chanson to Techno: Culture, Identity, and Society*, 2003., 145
highly anti-establishment nature of the lyrics, as well as the generally “global” quality of musical styles that *chanson* artists employed, something I will discuss more in Chapter 2.

Considering De Gaulle’s views on globalization and the threat it posed to French culture, one can surmise that the copying and posturing of American musical and fashion styles, which brought with it a host of American slang, would be seen by De Gaulle as dangerous to his “grandeur de la France.” In contrast, Briggs notes the embrace of rock and roll in many other European countries, particularly Germany and Italy, quoting Paolo Prato, who highlights the importance of the arrival of rock and roll as an indicator of a nation’s integration into what he terms “pop modernity [to be a] shar[ed] a feeling of modernity not only with schoolmates but also with buddies of other countries, who would speak foreign languages but know exactly the same songs, dance to the same rhythms, cheer the same artists or the same typology of artists.” If we for a moment consider the use of the word *copain* in the title of the French radio program, as well as the similarities between the above song examples, it is probable that the French youth did indeed see themselves as members of a much larger community of young people outside of France—or as Briggs puts it, as members of a “global youth community.” Loosely echoes these sentiments claiming that this music created a new kind of class, “which defied classification in standard sociological terms and homogenized young people nationally and internationally.”

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49 Ibid., Briggs, Jonathyne., 17
50 Ibid., Briggs, Jonathyne., 17
51 Ibid., Briggs, Jonathyne., 30
efforts of a large population of youth to create community and connect with other populations of youth who were feeling the same tensions between pre- and post-war orders, seeking to forge their place in a modern society. In 1963, the genre does not yet resemble what Loosely considers "yé-yé" to have been, an "anodyne" genre lacking in authenticity and embodying the "culture of the mask" that knows not the true essence of its identity. It was not until after the intervention of the French cultural establishment, or lack thereof in certain ways—in the sense that no attention was paid and no financial aid given to the propagation of certain types of music—that I feel "yé-yé" was truly born, taking on an entirely different message than this population of youth, teeming with energy and emotion, most likely intended to convey. So, with the threat of this "global community" infringing on inherent French values, what was to be done?

One strategy of Malraux from a Ministry of Culture standpoint was essentially to not recognize this music as an art form, therefore giving it no attention, funding, or government support like many other art forms received, particularly that of architecture, literature, opera, theater, and fine arts. Also, the traditional system of music education established at the Conservatoire left young students who were interested in pursuing more "modern" musical approaches seriously lacking in venues in which to do so—a situation that remained problematic until the 1990’s. In addition to these non-efforts of the Ministry to propagate this music in any way, around the same time of the 1963 concert at Place de la Nation, other strategies to combat this "dangerous" imported music

52 Ibid., Gerber.,168
appeared in 1961 in the form of thinly veiled copies of *Salut les copains* created by various organizations such as the *Nous les garçons et les filles* sponsored by the Communist Party and *J2 Jeunesse* sponsored by the Catholic Church, which, unified in their hostility of post-war American imports, sought to diffuse the “eroticized youth culture” that was being presented by *Salut les copains*.\(^{53}\) These programs featured singers of the American rock style devoid of the sexually charged “look” that had originally been adopted by singers of this style. Thus, the *blousons noirs*, became tailored suits that resembled the look of the uniforms worn by young conscripts enlisted in the war in Algeria, and the provocative dress and attitude of the American diva transformed into modest dresses for the girls that enhanced their demure, virginal attitudes. Thus, the culture of the *copains*, instead of continuing in its trajectory for societal change, was morphed into a sort of tool for inclusivity of the French republic. Briggs points out that, in the wake of decolonization, particularly that of Algeria, this genre began to “imply a form of French whiteness that ignored the demographic shift of the French populace and asserted a normalcy that was young, urban, and white, despite the African-American influences within rock and roll.”\(^{54}\)

It is at this moment that *yé-yé* seems to give rise to a “culture of the mask,” contrary to what Loosley maintains was its flaw from the beginning. It is true that this population of French youth did not completely understand the cultural context of this new

\(^{53}\) Ibid., Loosley, David. 28

\(^{54}\) Ibid., Briggs, Jonathyne., 18
music, especially upon arrival of the Beatles and Bob Dylan who brought with them the “hippee” movement and a rampant drug culture around 1966. However, journalist Michael Lancelot, author of a book devoted to the hippie movement in 1968 (*Je veux regarder Dieu en Face*), was of the opinion that, although France lacked a true connection to the American youth movement, the efforts of the government to prevent the prevalence of American culture actually contributed to the culture of copying that arose, resulting in a scarcity of reliable information on the hippie movement, which in turn meant that the French, in appropriating these misunderstood values, would undoubtedly produce inauthentic products.\(^{55}\) He points out that in Gaullist France, TV censorship was very prevalent, maintaining that this censorship was the result of a France entrenched in its own rationalism.\(^{56}\) He then ponders where this sort of pathological head-in-the-sand policy will end, accusing the French establishment of being reactionary to anything that upset its Cartesianism.\(^{57}\) He strikes a poignant chord here suggesting that the efforts of the State to protect and control national culture is actually symptomatic of a damaging mental condition or obsession, recalling Assman’s and Lampien’s view from the Introduction on the correlation between national and human memory.\(^{58}\) It is for this reason that it seems plausible to assert that in a battle against what it deemed inauthentic, the French cultural establishment essentially established an environment that made it very

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\(^{56}\) Ibid., 24

\(^{57}\) Ibid., 24

\(^{58}\) *See page 17.*
difficult for French artists to organically arrive at an authentic genre that both appropriated imported style while at the same time valuing French traditions and producing something truly new and authentic.

The thoughts of musicologist Virginia Danielson are valuable here in understanding music’s role in identity enactment as she maintains that music operates as a “constitutive factor in the patterning of cultural values and social interaction,” going on to say that this nonverbal sound as a cultural production does not “reflect” social or cultural values but rather helps to constitute them. The point to be made here is that by attempting to interrupt the natural process of the musician, which includes copying and appropriation of different styles, the French cultural establishment was essentially interrupting a new patterning of cultural values which, for French youth at that time, included a more global understanding of their identity. However, I argue that, in keeping with Attali’s theory about the prophetic nature of “noise,” this process may have been interrupted but not halted. And in the case of yé-yé, the estimation that the genre was devoid of what were considered to be authentically French values at the time was also unfounded when we take a look, for example at yé-yé star François Hardy’s timeless song, *Mon ami la rose*, written by French and Canadian song writers, Cécile Caulier and Jacques Lacome. This is a song that poetically treats themes such as the fleeting, but at the same time eternal, quality of beauty with lyrics such as “On est bien peu de chose/et mon ami la rose /me l’a dit ce matin...tu m’admirais hier/et je serais poussière/pour

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toujours demain,“⁶⁰ words which are encased in a profoundly beautiful melody and style that seem to fit more within the more literary chanson française model than any imported American or British model. This difficulty in determining into which genre a song like this belongs indicates, if nothing else, the ability of music to transcend imposed constrictions and to defy labels. There will be more evidence of this in the second half of this thesis of the fruits that grew from seeds of originality planted in the 60’s by artists, which, I argue, overcame stereotypes and authenticity labels to create an entirely new French style, le french touch.

It is these notions of authenticity and the nuances thereof in the realm of French music that I will discuss in the next chapter. For, as we have seen, the sixties in France was a decade in which pop music began to take on new meaning for the general public in the sense that they became true consumers of music, therefore, music begins to become an extremely influential aspect of cultural identity. Most importantly to note is how this growing population of youth who were intoxicated by these imported Anglophone forms of music certainly did not fit with the mythic image of grandeur that De Gaulle was seeking to establish. It was French cultural values he wished to further, not those of American Rock. For Malraux, a man who placed great importance on the written word, this infiltration of English language songs and slang posed a threat to the very fabric of the French language. But what if French values were morphing? And if so, what did that mean for musical authenticity? It is the question of how the political tensions affect the

⁶⁰ Caulier, Cécile, www.paroles.net
idea of musical authenticity in France that I will address in the coming chapter, and how, in effect, the importance placed on determining the construction of that authenticity, in turn transforms the interplay between politics and creativity in the coming decades.
Chapter 2: The legitimation of Pop during the 60’s and beyond: tensions between national myth and reality
“Interdit d’interdire. La liberté commence par une interdiction: celle de nuire à la liberté d’autrui.” This famous graffiti slogan written at the Sorbonne in May of 1968 summarizes the sentiments of that tumultuous month in France during which angry students and factory workers protested all over France, but mainly in Paris. The situation had such revolutionary energy that De Gaulle himself secretly fled to Germany for fear that if a revolution did occur, his presence at the Elysée Palace would only incite violence. His flight from France, although for him a seemingly practical flight of safety, in one way stands as a metaphor for the end of his era of values since the volatile desire among the youth and members of the French left was for liberation from the confines of the Gaullist national model that we saw in the previous chapter. Julian Bourg in his book, From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought, explains that at the heart of these events was a challenging of norms, which, for those involved in the tumultuous protests, were the “smoke and mirrors of bourgeois culture—consumer society, work, nationalism, family, religion, and morality”—to be dispelled by the revolution. He goes on to reference Jean-Marie Domenach’s observations of May 1968 who said that the uprising occurred “in the name of the desire to live, to express oneself, to be free.” For Domenach, the “values” of the moment included “imagination, human interest, communication, conviviality, expression, enjoyment, freedom,

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62 Ibid., 7
63 Ibid., 7.
spontaneity, solidarity, de-alienation, speaking out, dialogue, non-utility, utopia, dreams, fantasies, community, association, anti-authoritarianism, self-management, direct democracy, equality, self-representation, fraternity, self-defence – and romance."  Thus, Bourg and Domenach would most likely both agree that, in short, the May events acted as a sort opening toward self-realization for the French population, predominately the young adult population. But what is interesting to note, and one reason why De Gaulle’s flight is only in a certain respect metaphorical for the end of an era, is that many of the values listed above are very closely linked to what the De Gaulle administration sought to instill in French citizens, particularly that of creativity, self-expression, and fraternity. So what was there to change? In this discussion about the role of politics and the “establishment” in the creative process, what rises to the surface is the notion that the definition of true creativity and community according to this population of rebelling youth was in opposition to what the establishment considered to be the “national” definition of those concepts. However, in addition to these ideological clashes, the participants frustrations were augmented by growing economic difficulties. We see the same clash of values going on in the music realm as well, ideas of authenticity in flux, despite the notion amongst the cultural establishment these values were fixed in some way.

Michael E. Haskew in his historical analysis of the De Gaulle administration, *De Gaulle*, details that by the spring of 1968, De Gaulle’s popularity, although still higher than that of his rivals François Mitterand or Jean Lecanuet, had lessened due to certain of

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64 Ibid., 7
his policies that resulted in limited economic expansion and a rise in unemployment. His attitude of economic inclusivity went against the grain of the Fourth Republic’s economic strategy which capitalized on Marshall Plan funds and open trade agreements, leading to a period of prosperity in France 1958 until 1967. This desire for inclusivity can be seen in the two main objectives of the De Gaulle Administration, the first of which being complete French independence in political, military, and defense making policy—an objective that led France to possess “world power” status, the second of these objectives being France’s rise as the leader of a cooperative political, military, and economic system called the European Common Market.65 Askew points out the anti-Anglo-American nature of De Gaulle’s desire is evidenced by De Gaulle’s use of his veto power on matters of policy to exclude Great Britain from the Common Market as long as the nation retained close ties to the United States.66 When it came to cultural policy, the same overtones of inclusion persisted.

Although these economic difficulties to which De Gaulle’s inclusive policy contributed were one catalyst of the May events, it was culture that was at the core of the uprisings. In May, students began protesting the increasing lack of access to an educational system that could not accommodate their growing numbers. Soon after, labor strikes commenced that, together with the student uprisings, threatened to result in revolution. Haskew maintains, “It was difficult for the aging president to grasp the

66 Ibid., 177
individualism and freedom of expression that were sweeping the globe during that turbulent year...the upheaval [being] the very antithesis of order, allegiance to a strong state, and a nation of grandeur.” During these uprisings, De Gaulle, for the first time in his political career, seemed not to know how to proceed. At this time, Prime Minister George Pompidou led a government effort to negotiate with the unions, rising as a potential leader if De Gaulle were to step down. De Gaulle’s May 29th hiatus to Germany certainly led the public to question his intentions. However, upon his return to France on the 30th, he announced that he would not retire but rather dissolve the National Assembly, putting the office of President to a vote once more. In the elections that followed, the Gaullists won by a landslide. However, his referendums for education reforms, among others, were met with much opposition, and eventually defeated, by members from his own party. De Gaulle stepped down on April 25th, 1968, making way for Pompidou to take office. However, the difficulty in passing the above referendums indicate, as does Bourg, that the events of May ’68 were not as politically transformative as they are often thought of as being by the general French collective memory. Bourg points out that the real transformation came amongst French intellectual circles, saying that, “What matters, as Michel de Certeau has said, is not ‘the historical object’ of May 1968 but ‘the instruments of thought and action that it brought forth.”67 It is almost as if the general population became aware that the exception culturelle that pretended to bind the nation ever tighter was in fact stifling, particularly to music. Interestingly, Loosely

67 Ibid., Bourg, Julian., 7.
highlights that although music did not play a very large part in the uprisings—the main musical event being a benefit concert for strikers, the États généraux des variétés held on the 21st of May—culture, in both the artistic and anthropological sense of the word, was central to the events, stemming from the thoughts of Althusser and Bourdieu that high culture was “an apparatus of bourgeois ideology and social reproduction—though they were equally opposed to mass culture since it too was deemed bourgeois, diversionary and alienating.” This fell in line with the point of view of many of the chanson artists, creating an odd paradox within the chanson community wherein members rejected certain Gaullist tendencies or ideas—such as the use of censorship on state radio—and acceptance of others, such as the belief that musical authenticity had a great deal to do with its literary quality and distance from the commercial world.

Musically, since the values of this May revolution were entangled with the Anglo-American counter-culture that valued personal creativity and sexual liberation, and since many chanson artists had migrated away from Paris to the countryside in an anti-urban movement in reaction to this American rock craze, Anglo-American music became the soundtrack to these events, particularly The Beatles Sergeant Pepper, as well as Bob Dylan’s poignant protest songs and Jimmy Hendrix’s sexually charged, avant-garde guitar stylings. However, keeping in mind the “culture of the mask” as a sort of by-product of yéyé music, it is crucial for our impending discussion on musical authenticity not to gloss over the fact that both yé-yé and chanson voices were largely absent from this

68 Ibid., Bourg., Julian, 7.
cultural revolution. As far as performers of the non-politically charged yé-yé were concerned, they had no interest in causing a stir since there had been a near legislative crackdown on public performance the last time things had gotten out of hand in 1963. Popular performers Johnny Hallyday and France Gall expressed frustration that their concert schedule had been compromised by the events and later relief that it was all over. But even chanson artists, who typically wrote very pointed political lyrics, kept out of the conflict. In an article about Léo Ferré and George Brassens, two of the most celebrated chanson artists in French history, Chris Tinker points out that even these two artists, whose lyrics were very anti-nationalist and highly critical of the Gaullist state, such as Ferré’s 1968 song “Paris je ne t’aime plus,” which laments the state of French universities, refused to be a part of the 1968 demonstrations, undermining, in the eyes of the demonstrators, their validity as musicians and true mediums of change. In addition to the general disregard of these protest songs by the student protestors who, in a sense felt abandoned by the chanson artists, most chansons de contestation by artists such as Ferré, Brassens, and particularly Jean Ferrat, were censored from state radio and television from 1952 until 1970, leaving little question about the reason for this revolutionary musical vacancy.

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70 Tinker, Chris 141
71 Tinker, Chris 141
This musical vacancy seems to be an indicator that the measures taken by the cultural establishment to protect the French music scene from the, at times, anti-nationalist message of the *chanson* singers, as well as from the rebellion-inspiring sounds of Anglo-American rock, had succeeded not in bolstering national musical authenticity, but in merely creating a blank space. It is also important to note here that one hope in the re-direction of American rock to the creation of the *yéyé* genre was to homogenize the large population of potentially rebellious French youth in an effort to steer them away from both chaotic activity and Anglophone influence. What these events did indicate however was that the youth were far from complacently homogenized and, more importantly, that there was much more to their actions than simply the influence of rock music. Thus, it seems as though these rebels were lacking the community that came with musical genre. Briggs maintains that many French progressive rock acts arose out of a revolutionary counter-culture such as Noise, Komintern, and Maajun, who scoffed at *yé-yé* as an inaccurate depiction of the rock music music, feeling that their music offered “an example of a new type of society in which cultural distinctions, which had continued to divide the French despite broad prosperity, could collapse in a miasma of noise and rhythm.”\textsuperscript{72} However, the fear of rock as the originator of rebellious activity persisted. The French authorities tendency to highly police concerts of this nature, going to such lengths as to cut the power while bands were in the middle of performances, quelled even these voices. Briggs quotes Françoise Jouffa, a music critic for *Libération* and *La Cause du

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., Briggs, Jonathyne., 81
People who observed, “The lack of festivals in our country is due not to some
disaffection from the public for a certain form of music and manner of presentation
but...the interdictions and harassment from the police has pushed away great numbers of
hesitant or curious people.”

Given the presence of a passionate counter-culture that
wanted little to do with the anodyne, politically vacant messages of yéyé, and their
rejection of the traditional chanson, the fact that performers from these genres remained
stars into the 1970s— at which time the American disco style began to be reproduced
much the same way American rock was in the 60’s—is also indicative of the somewhat
damaging effect of state interventions that rendered musical genres in France in
opposition to one another. Loosely speaks of the intellectualization of chanson during
this period maintaining that was rooted in “defensive rhetoric” based on French reactions
to pop.

In my opinion, the legitimation process of chanson française in the 1960’s is one
of the best examples of the difficulty determining what falls under the designation of
“culturally exceptional.” By the 60’s, George Brassen, Jacques Brel, and Léo Ferré, often
called “the big three,” had such a status of authenticity that their songs were anthologized
in the Seghers Poètes d’aujourd’hui series, their lyrics appearing on baccalauréat syllabi.

However, as Loosely points out “chanson only becomes aware of itself as a genre in
negative, defensive opposition to its other, particularly yé-yé. In his article In from the

73 Ibid, 86
74 Idid, 29
margins: chanson, pop and cultural legitimacy, he goes on to describe the first half of the 20th century as being filled with three important institutional innovations that transformed the chanson of the first half of the 19th century from being a mostly amateur activity to being a solid profession that actually gave rise to popular music, which includes yé-yé.\textsuperscript{75} When you consider as well the aforementioned impact of the Dreyfus affair on music in the public eye, as well as musical institutions, the first half of the 19th century proves to be a tumultuous time for the musician simply because it was filled with change. Originally, this amateur musical activity of which Looseley speaks took place in singing clubs—called caveaux for members of the middle class and goguettes for the working class—which met in the backrooms of restaurants and cafés in Paris. The caveaux became associated with republicanism and the goguettes with either anarchism or revolutionism. In these venues, musicians would meet to share and perform their new compositions, often satires sung to already well-known melodies. With the arrival of the Sociétés des auteurs, compositeurs et éditeurs musicaux (society of music, authors, composers and publishers) of SACEM in 1851, everything changed.\textsuperscript{76} This was an organization formed to protect the rights of composers of melodies and lyrics by paying them for performances thereof, thus “introducing” according to Loosely, the notion of intellectual property in France. For the first time in history, an artist’s performances, a somewhat intangible product in comparison to a piece of sheet music or a record, had

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., Looseley, David. In from the margins, 28.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., Looseley, David. In from the margins, 28.
monetary value. It was at this time that popular songwriting became a way of making a living, giving him or her the option of being remunerated both for their scores and their performances.

By 1852, by order of Napoleon III in an attempt to suppress the revolutionary spirit, both the goguettes and caveaux were banned, giving rise to the creation of the famous café-concerts or the caf’conc’ as they came to be known, the most famous of which were (and some of which still are) L’Eldorado, Le Bat-ta-clan, Le Moulin Rouge, and Les Folies-Bobino, also known as Le Divan Japonais. Artists would entertain a drinking and dining audience. Sheet music called petits formats were sold so that the audience could participate. But, as anyone who has ever performed in a busy restaurant knows, the audiences’ involvement were sure to have been seen as superficial at best. Loosely quotes G. Coulonges who in his book, La Chanson en son temps de Béranger au juke-box says of the caf’conc’:

“Under these conditions, it is quite obvious that, from this rudimentary audience, rudimentary artists were content to elicit the most rudimentary reactions to exploit the most rudimentary emotions by seeking out their simplest manifestations; the aim was to make people laugh or make them cry.”

This is not to say that their musical contributions were not more valuable than to simply elicit dramatic reactions from the audience, but rather that at the time, these songs were considered to be of much less cultural and artistic value by the Ministry of Culture than

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77 Ibid., 29
78 Ibid., 29
those of composers such as Debussy or Ravel or of operatic works, widening the gulf between pop music and music that had the blessing of the Institut.

It seems to be no accident that this genre began to be seen as much more legitimate around the arrival of American rock and roll. Later, the deaths of artists associated with this chanson were acknowledged by political figures and celebrities alike, their funerals televised and the journals announcing the death of yet another ‘last’ troubadour. In chanson’s morphing from what was considered to be a low-class pop genre with left-political leanings, to a genre whose value seemed to be determined by its worthiness of inclusion into the rich body of French literature, I argue that other types of music that perhaps did not at first excel in a literary way, were deemed inauthentic and less valuable to society by the Ministry of Culture. This is not to discount the quality of chanson artists’ contributions to French music. Not in the least. But rather to point out the ambiguous nature of the term authenticity wherein the actual musicality of these types of music—instrumentation, vocal talent, innovative style incorporation, production value, etc—as well as their political message, were only secondary to their consideration by the cultural establishment to have national authenticity, which mostly directly related to poetic lyrical content, language of choice, and whether or not an artist’s influences were overtly Anglophone.

So should, or can, the authenticity of French music really be defined? Looseley maintains that the above legitimation process of French chanson during the 60’s “raises an important theoretical issue—the nature and definition of ‘authenticity’ in French
popular music.” The issue being that if a type of music grows more authentic over time, how can the term even be applied at all? At what point does a type of music achieve authenticity? It seems that if authenticity is something to achieve, then it is not innate. If it is not innate, do the connotations of the very word “authentic,”—something predetermined, nearly spiritual—not seem to deteriorate? Perhaps this is why Loosely, more than arriving at a firm definition of the word, claims that the word ‘authenticity,’ when it comes to popular music, is a “slippery term whose meaning is constantly renegotiated” by society. On this issue, Looseley references Roy Shuker who, in his work *Key Concepts in Popular Music*, determines that authenticity is defined by a series of dichotomies such as the notion that a creative or self-expressive work is more authentic than manufactured commercialism; or that the independent sector of music is more authentic than the major sector; or that live music is more authentic than recorded music; etc. But what stands out in considering these dichotomies is, again, the fact that even what constitutes the extremes of these dichotomies are constantly in flux. Another dichotomy of authenticity that seems to come to the forefront in studying French music, especially in the 1960’s,—and one that is perhaps more pertinent to this discussion—is that of *national* authenticity. This type of authenticity is determined simply by location and language, something, we have seen, that began to be actively addressed during the

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80 Ibid., Loosely, David., 10

81 Ibid., 10.
Dreyfus affair. Questions arise such as this: in determining national authenticity, are works in French by French-born artists considered more authentic than those produced by French-born artists performing in a language other than French? As we have seen already with the tensions that arise with the arrival of Anglophone music in France, there appears to be a certain difficulty of the French cultural establishment in maintaining an attitude of inclusivity—or as Loosely puts it, a difficulty in “tolerating the industrialism, commodification and globalization of the arts in general and of music in particular.”\(^{82}\) As we saw in Chapter 1, De Gaulle himself considered globalization to be a threat to the very idea of France, which according to Jonathyn Briggs, was “the logical outcome of Adorno’s fear of a standardized form of musical aesthetics.”

Adorno’s theory on art in culture seems to play a major role in the attitudes in France, a theory that he developed, along with Max Horkheimer in their 1944 work *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. They hold that popular culture is nothing more than a factory producing standardized cultural goods such as films, radio programmes, magazines, etc. that are used to manipulate mass society into passivity.\(^{83}\) They consider pop culture to be dangerous to the more technically and intellectually difficult high arts, which in the case of music, would connote classical music or music produced by musicians with formal musical training. They theorized that the consumption of culture as a commodity, in the rise of the capitalist society, masked the true psychological needs of human beings

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\(^{82}\) Ibid., 10

established by psychologist Herbert Marcuse: freedom, creativity, and genuine happiness. This theory has hints of the previously mentioned Platonien view we find in Boethius’ work, views that the general populous should be protected from music that might lead them astray from a positive, wholesome way of being. For Plato, this had to do with thinking that one particular scale was more beneficial to the ear, and in the end, to society. For Adorno, it had to do with thinking that music that was less complex, too accessible, a mere commodity, was damaging to the ear, and in the end, to society. One can see how this Adornian view could quickly polarize the perception of musical expression, linking commodification and simplicity with inauthenticity (low-art) and the creation of complex art and the existence of art for its own sake, with authenticity (high-art). There was also an element of anti-American sentiment to this theory as one example these theorists give as an illustration of the domination in post-enlightenment modern society by monopoly capitalism or the nation state, is American film culture. In France, this Adornian fear of mass-culture since the 1940’s is very often visible, but paradoxically, the remedy for it is often the imposition of control of culture not by the economy, by merely by another system of power, the nation state. Thus, these sentiments in the elite/educated sector of French society led to a certain pervasive attitude in France, something that can be seen as a sort of “Adornian pessimism” adopted in resistance mainly to imported forms of pop music. I argue that it is in part due to this way of thinking about culture as a sort of spectrum of values that led to the development of the

84 Ibid., 47
idea of *exception culturelle*—something cultural economist Joëlle Farchy describes it as the belief that books, films, and musical works are not simply goods which can be abandoned to the laws of the free market;\(^{85}\) the opposite of which seems to embody the very foundation of capitalism. She goes on to designate three types of criteria in determining if a work of art is genuinely authentic or not, and thus, if it is “culturally exceptional”: is the work of art created by the artists him/herself? is the work of art unique? and is the work of art new? \(^{86}\) It is implied in her criteria that the work is produced in the national language by a citizen of said nation, making this quite a complicated labyrinth of determining factors. For example several of the *yéyé* stars were not French\(^{87}\) nor was French their first language, nor were many of their songs composed by them originally, nor were those original versions composed all in French—as I said, a labyrinth. But Farchy does not acknowledge the complication of these designations, being of the opinion that *exception culturelle* is necessary to the preservation of a national culture (a culture determined by the cultural establishment, particularly the Ministry of Culture), as were De Gaulle and Malraux—almost as if these authentic determiners becomes a wall that protects the national culture from outside influence. But what her view does not account for is the reality of cultural diversity, nor does it consider the borderless nature of musical creativity and the necessary appropriation, be it intentional or un-intentional, of differing musical styles in the creative process. For example, this set


\(^{86}\) Ibid., 10-11

\(^{87}\) Sylvie Vartan was Bulgarian, Claude François, born in Egypt, Petula Clark, English
of criteria becomes problematic simply based on the fact that with the advent of recording technology and the proliferation of radio and musical commodification, musical works take on an extremely collaborative quality, especially during the sixties. Even the adored chanson genre was highly influenced by American jazz music, a quality that is rarely, if ever called into question in regards to it being a subverter of its authenticity. This indicates yet again, that it was not necessarily always the musicality that was seen as a threat to authenticity, but the values that a certain style represented or the language of the lyrics.

A good example of the difficulty in applying Farchy’s simple criteria in determining French artistic authenticity would be to consider one of the most popular songs of beloved French singer/songwriter, François Hardy, Comment te dire Adieu, an artist whose authenticity, be it national or merely artistic, is rarely, if ever, questioned. This song was originally written by Americans Arnold Goland and Jack Gold and was first recorded by Margaret Whiting on her album The Wheel of Hurt in 1966. At the request of Hardy, Serge Gainsbourg, an equally notable French artist, created an adaptation of the song in French. Comment te dire Adieu was the product of this adaption and was the most popular track on Hardy’s 1968 self-titled album. If one considers for a moment the fact that this song was neither new, nor was it an original song by Hardy, but rather a collaboration on a previous collaboration, it is clear that it would not be

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considered ‘authentic’ by Farchy’s criteria. If you then consider the involvement of the sound engineer who recorded the track in the studio, the contributions of the studio musicians, and the marketing efforts of musical distributors to overcome the high costs of such a musical production, while at the same time earning a profit for Hardy and themselves, the theory that there is a simple way to place an authenticity stamp becomes even more problematic simply because there are so many people involved in the production. From a national authenticity standpoint, what is to be done with the fact that the original version of the song was in English performed by an American, even though Hardy’s version is in French, sung by a person of French origin? The authenticity abyss widens. I chose Hardy as an example for several reasons, the most important of which is her status as, without question, a French artist and cultural icon, compared to the origins of her success in France, born out of the yéyé movement. Today, Hardy’s songs Mon ami la rose and Comment te dire adieu are recognizable French folk classics. The interesting thing to note here is that while Hardy’s, Vartan’s, and François’ music does not fit with the criteria of Farchy, they are still considered by the general French cultural memory as authentic French icons, especially Hallyday and Vartan, just as much as Brassens, Brel, or Ferré, although they are vastly different. Briggs, who describes a 2009 concert in Paris by an aging but still extremely popular Hallyday, admits that Hallyday’s music instead of representing authentic French style “reifies the notion of Americanization […] thanks to the seemingly obvious connection between rock and roll and American culture.”

Ibid., Briggs, 5
However, this reification seems to matter very little to the throngs of French fans present at this last concert, who embrace his identity as an authentic French artist. It is the space that the yéyé genre occupies, along with Chanson, in the collective French memory, or the extent to which these genres have been under or overcommemerated as being the most or least authentic French genres when at their origin, neither were considered to be such, that is so fascinating. This is not to say that these under or overcommemorations indicate actual lack or surplus of quality of the music in question—although that is often the resulting impression—but it raises the question of whether or not these commemorations, that in large part stemmed from the French cultural establishment, actually reinforce French cultural values. I argue that it does not, but rather that it worked to actually skew the trajectory of genre development, that in the end, hindered the outlet through which artists could be creative, as we will see in Part II of this thesis, who choose to utilize lyrical content or styles that do not fit within the authentic French model. This seems to cause a certain blindness to other musical realities, creating genres that do not achieve the same level of inclusion within in a national framework, giving rise to a confounding system of musical legitimation in France wherein what was once considered inauthentic achieves authenticity at the moment that the threat of even more authentically inferior genre rises to popularity.

This, in a way, undermines the legitimacy of the notion of *exception culturelle*. The goal of De Gaulle to unify the nation state and solidify national values through defining what was considered to be of value to culture, merely sets up a system of
musical limitations based on shifty ideas of authenticity. It is true that assessing the value of music is something that occurs, consciously or subconsciously, every time a song is heard. We decide that value. But upon what that value is based varies from person to person, depending on their nationality, language, musical background, personality, etc. Similarly, Attali confesses that music at its essence “has no usage in and of itself, but rather a social meaning expressed in a code relating to the sound matter music fashions and the systems of power it serves.”

So, keeping in mind our own constant personal assessment of a song’s value, Attali seems to argue that it is through the machinations of music by various systems of power that its meaning or value is arrived at socially. This further thwarts the notion that music carries with it any sort of innate authenticity as Plato would argue, but rather suggests that it is always assigned. Just as Sartre would argue that human beings only become conscious of themselves beneath the gaze of the Other, so too, according to Attali, music only becomes meaningful under this same gaze—the important thing here being that this meaning depends entirely on who—which system of power or which person—is doing the gazing. In the case of the French musical realm, the Ministry of Culture of De Gaulle decided value based on what types of music would bolster his party’s ideas of what the the national image and national sentiment should resemble.

We see throughout French history examples of the use of culture to bolster national sentiment, particularly during the Revolution during which the domain of

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91 Ibid., 24
cultural control shifts from the music publisher to the Nation State. It was during the rise of Robespierre that a desire arose, on the part of the revolutionaries, to protect music and musicians from the Free market entirely in the name of artistic purity. To accomplish this task, the Convention created the Institut National de Musique, creating the Conservatoire de Musique under the direction of composer Bernard Sarrette in 1793 which gave the State complete ownership of music and which was called upon to, as quoted by Attali, “regulate music everywhere, to arouse the courage of the defenders of the fatherland and increase the ability of the départements to add pomp and appeal to civil ceremonies.”\textsuperscript{92}

Therefore music was placed, under complete control by the Nation State. Goesssec, the official composer of the Revolution was a passionate proponent of this system which he felt would shift the performance of music from the concert hall, which was a bourgeois invention, to public squares where everyone could hear his and other musicians’ compositions.\textsuperscript{93} The decadent and extremely orchestrated fêtes révolutionnaires that took place throughout the Reign of Terror consisted mainly of hundreds of musicians and singers who performed revolutionary hymns, a tool to unite the people under the Republic and to reinforce and demonstrate the vision that the Revolutionaries—mainly Robespierre—had for the Republic. However, as the Revolution crumbled music became the property of the “new rich,” its control and, therefore value, was re-defined—a process that we see became particularly realized during the Dreyfus affair. Over time, we see that

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\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 54

definitions of French musical authenticity are constantly subjected to the constraints imposed by these systems, systems that in many ways overlap, particularly that of the Free Market and the government who benefit from the wealth produced by the commodification of culture such as films, music, and literature. When considering this Adornian fear of art as commodity, a way of thinking embraced by Malraux, it is perplexing that the members of the intellectual elite and the state did not more fully acknowledge the fact that artists had, for centuries, navigated the dialectical nature of producing pure art in a world where the fate of this art oscillated from the confines of the free market to the political order of the day.

In an article on what arguably is the best-known voice France has ever produced, Édith Piaf, Keith Reader discusses the French cultural establishment’s disdain for popular culture in the 1960’s, with the “significant exceptions of the cinema, le septième art and chanson treated as a branch of poetry.” He goes on to discuss the revelatory contrast between André Malraux and Jack Lang, the first and second Ministers of Culture in the Fifth Republic, the first of which instituted Maison de la Culture in order to broaden the nation’s audience for high culture while Lang “built his career on broadening the remit of his ministry to encompass rap, strip cartoons, and even the circus.” In Part Two, it is into this very “Jack Lang era” that I would like to delve, with the goal of exploring whether or not the long tradition of French national inclusivity within in the realm of

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95 Ibid., 206
music, especially the tradition of *l’exception culturelle* established during the De Gaulle era, continued and continues to affect the development of musical genres in France.
Part II: The Question of French musical Authenticity from the 80’s Until Today
Chapter 1: Tensions between liberation and restraint during the Jack Lang era and after: Electronic music and the authenticity debate
During the years that came between Malraux and Lang, although there were some improvements in the world of music, such as the establishment of an esoteric institute for experimental music at the Pompidou Center in 1981, very little attention was paid to non-classical forms of French music by the cultural establishment. Loosely maintains that at this time, “The problem with cultural development was that it did not address a number of the issues which were to dominate the coming decades: unemployment and social exclusion; economic liberalism and the globalization of trade; gender and multiculturalism.”

It seems that the one sector that had indeed attempted during the 60’s to incorporate multi-cultural styles was the pop music sector, but due to the multi-layered interventions of politics, or lack thereof, music did not emerge as a theater upon which a nationally recognized inclusion of cultural diversity was to be played. Augustin Girard, the head of SER (Service des études et de la recherche), pointed out in his 1978 policy essay that the government neglect of certain cultural industries was both undemocratic and damaging. He points out that during 70’s, surveys show that the number of people listening to recorded music was soaring, no matter the genre. However, in the late 70’s, these numbers fell due to a crisis in the record industry that resulted in very high prices. The crisis was due to many factors—the fact that the large youth population had already amassed their collections as well as the oil crisis which limited production due to the necessity of oil residue to make records—but the critical reason for the crisis was,

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96 Ibid., Loosely, David., 121
again, seemingly fueled by the very tradition of economic inclusion established in the De Gaulle era. There was still much disdain for the influence of Anglophone products, particularly American music, therefore a very high luxury goods tax was imposed (33.3 percent compared to West Germany’s 11 percent and Britain’s 8 percent), targeting mainly the record industry.  

As the government reaped the benefits of the 900 million francs this tax amassed, the French music industry was in crisis. Loosely summarizes the rise of English language music on the radio with the disco movement of the seventies saying, “Since the Francophone market could do little to protect itself without government support, the solution was simply to change languages. French record companies duly signed up or manufactured disco acts by the dozen, irrespective of quality.”  

Thus, in the wake of the record crisis, radio became an ever more crucial factor in the propagation of French pop. At that time in France, radio stations were not yet privatized, the government having ultimate control of station content, except for four periphery radio stations that broadcast from transistors just outside of France, but who were directed towards and listened to by all of France—Inter, RTL, RMC, and Europe 1. These stations began pumping out English language disco at such a rate that French artists, be they rock, varités or chanson, had no voice since the nationalized French radio was in no way invested in the success of pop music.

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98 Ibid., Loosely, David., 124
99 Ibid., Looseley, David., 125
Soon after this record crisis, in the style of Zola’s *J’accuse* during the Dreyfus affair, an article entitled *Complot contre la chanson française* appeared in *Le Monde* by journalist Henri Chapier, pushing this issue into the public eye. Chapier accuses the presidents of the aforementioned four periphery radio stations—Claude Brunet (Eur 1), Monique Memarcis (R.T.L.), Janine Leroy (Fr. Inter), and Albert Emaslem (R.M.C.), whom he calls “la bande des quatre”—of cluttering the French airwaves with English-language pop at the expense of rising chanson talent, not seeming to recognize the fact that these same “rising” acts had been highly censored by State radio throughout the 60’s. He discusses the responsibility of these leaders for the very existence of French music in no uncertain terms, saying that they have “sur toute nouvelle chanson française droit de vie ou de mort” but that instead of taking their duties seriously, they invoke “la loi du marché, à savoir le chiffre de ventes d’un disque, censé traduire le verdict du public.” He discusses the example of the famous Jean-Michel Jarre, a French artist who is famous for his instrumental performances with dazzling show lights and synthesizers who is still an inspiration to many electronic French bands of today. He compares his success and radio reception, the height of which came slightly before the above record crisis and onslaught of English language disco on the airwaves, to those of French artists trying to rise amidst the radio obsession with English language music, saying that “[Ils] seront définitivement jetés dans l’oubli à la fois faute d’avoir vendu, et

101 Ibid., Chapier., Henry. 133
pour la bonne raison qu’aucune radio, y compris France-Inter, n’a cru à leur destin.**102

He fails to point out that Jarre’s music is mainly instrumental, an interesting quality given the fact that Chapier places great emphasis on the question of language in French music. He demands the pointed question later, “existe-il des recours? […] Il est évident que, faute de prendre des mesures radicales en France, on ne sera pas surpris de voir considérablement baisser le prestige de la chanson française à l’étranger.”103 What is interesting about his assessment of the situation in France is that he, somewhat too simplistically, lays all the blame for the problem on the four Radio stations in question, claiming that it would be “enfantin d’imaginer que le ministre de la culture et de la communication tient les clés de la crise.”104 However, as we have seen, it would be impossible not to consider the fact that the actions—or rather lack thereof—of the state to help create avenues wherein French popular music could grow and flourish, as well as its somewhat archaic view that *Chanson Française* is the only French genre worth nurturing when many French artists preferred to perform more experimental rock music, played a major role in the inordinate about of English language music on the airwaves in the first place. Geoff Hare supports this point of view in his article *Popular Music on French Radio and Television* saying that from the end of the Second World War to the arrival of President Mitterrand in 1981, the development of French popular music was highly inhibited by the scarcity of licensed radio stations in France, most of which “were closely

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102 Ibid., Chapier., Henry. 133
103 Ibid., Chapier., Henry. 133
104 Ibid., Chapier., Henry. 133
controlled by the government [wherein a] particular cultural ideology dominated.” It
is mostly the Adornian distaste for popular culture to which he is referring, explaining
that the attachment of French public service radio to a “programming policy of
privileging elite culture restricted outlets for French popular music.” In the wake of
the record crisis, French public radio, entrenched in its elitist views on high and low
culture, was in many ways just as poor a proponent of rising French acts as the periphery
stations. Part of the reason for this, as Hare points out, was the fact that the state
controlled stations at that time were obligated to present not just music, but programs
featuring news, current affairs, game shows, comedy, drama, etc.—an obligation that was
a result of De Gaulle's post-war efforts to communicate directly to the mass of French
citizens, bypassing parliamentary and party politics. But what is interesting is that, much
in the same way that music was nationalized during the Revolution to remove it from the
grips of the Bourgeois control dictated by the free market, Hare maintains that the
decision to nationalize radio stemmed from the left-winged anti-collaborationist Vichy
régime government that had allowed broadcasting to be beholden to the powers of money
and big-business. Hare quotes, “It was not until the election of the first left-wing
President of the Republic in 1981 and the installation of a Socialist-dominated
government

106 Ibid., 59
(including four Communist ministers indeed) that the state monopoly was to be broken, and large numbers of independent radio stations were to be authorized.”

So, what Chapier does not consider in his estimation that the leaders of the periphery radio stations function as the downfall of French music are the above limitations of the elitist and behind-the-times State radio stations and the inordinate taxes placed on records which put much stress on the somewhat feeble French music industry, unable to hold its own in the Free Market. What seems on the surface to be the fault of the “gang of four” seems to quickly become the fault of a cultural establishment who, for decades, perpetuated and acted upon notions of the French exception culturelle, thus creating a vacant music scene and music market that was even more prone to the dominance of imported musical forms than it probably would have ever been before. In considering this, it is important to note that it is rarely the actual quality of the music that is ever in question, but that of the language in which the music is sung. Therefore it is no surprise then that Chapier deems the solution for the shortcoming of radio to re-ignite the chanson tradition, allowing an infiltration of English-language music, to be the introduction of television and radio language quotas—something that is indeed carried out with the Pelchat Amendment, also know as the Toubon Laws, in 1994 which stated that,

“La langue française est un élément fondamental de la personnalité et du patrimoine de la France […et que] dans la désignation, l’offre, la présentation, le mode d’emploi ou d’utilisation, la description de l’étendue et des conditions de garantie d’un bien, d’un produit ou d’un service, ainsi que dans les factures et quittances, l’emploi de la langue

107 Idid., 59
française est obligatoire[...et] les mêmes dispositions s’appliquent à toute publicité, écrite, parlée, ou audiovisuelle”.\textsuperscript{108}

This ultimately meant that 40 percent of the music heard on State radio would have to be in the French language. Chapier felt this would bolster the neglected French music that he admits is superior to “les variétés médiocres” from America that threatens to—he uses the word colonize—the French music culture in general.\textsuperscript{109} Besides a general distaste for American music founded upon a fear of a sort of cultural colonization, there are several problems with Chapier's assessment of the source of this music (or shall we say language) problem, but one flagrant one that even Loosely fails to mention, is the fact that there is an assumption in naming language quotas as the best solution, that all music performed in other languages are done so by non-French artists—which is certainly not the case. It also is highly directed towards limiting one main language—English—not accounting for the prevalence of immigrant languages, namely Arabic, in which many artists perform—especially as genres such as Algerian Raï music became popular in the 80’s and 90’s as well as Arabic rap. It also does nothing to get at what seems to be the core of the problem at this time in French cultural history—such a disdain for pop-culture and globalization in the cultural establishment that no heed is paid to the plight of the musician, which included lack of music venues in which to perform, high taxation on new albums and music equipment, lack of more avant garde music education in the

\textsuperscript{108} Journal officiel de la République Française, 5 aout 1994

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., Chapier, Henry, 133
Conservatoire, all of which would have perhaps worked to legitimize musicians’ efforts to create community and successful, quality French musical genres.

In addition to this, Hugh Dauncy points out in an article about the French music industry, that music business in France is and has always been more fragmented compared to other countries, particularly the United States and Britain. He references Mario D’Angelo who claims that the system was in the late 70’s and 80’s not only fragmented, but vulnerable—a vulnerability he also attributes to France’s belief that they possesses a tradition in music which sets it apart from an increasingly globalized world.

In this way, the French music system becomes vulnerable to the threat of commercial and cultural globalization despite the high interest of the French population in music, which proved during the seventies, eighties, and now to be of greater interest to the population than even film.\textsuperscript{110} It is impossible to go into great detail about the inner workings of the French music industry in this thesis, however D’angelo sees developments in the industry such as CD’s, mini-cassettes, mini-discs, and later MP3 players as especially challenging in France because of the lack of influence needed by French record companies in order to direct these technological advances in ways that would suit France. Why? Because of the complex way in which the normal tensions of the music industry—tensions between music labels and artists, tensions between labels and distributors—interact with state political interests and competition in France, as well as an idiosyncratic French legal

approach to the collection and distribution of intellectual property rights that differed from the more streamlined interactions of American and British music labels and stores.

When Jack Lang was named Minister of Culture in 1981, it was all of the above tensions within the music industry that were his top priority to address. There seems to have been a realization that tolerating instead of either ignoring or attempting to re-fashion the cultural preferences of the youth population, as was the case with the ye-ye movement, was a way of, as Loosely puts it, “tackling urban and suburban disaffection.”

Thus, Lang’s first monumental act came in 1982 when he doubled the budget for the pursuit of cultural democracy for creative forms hitherto unrecognized—pop music being one of those—and for the preservation of French theatre and opera. But what does it mean to be an un-recognized musical form? One example would be jazz music, a genre which, although it was firmly, aesthetically established in French culture by the 1980s, no official policy was in place that would grant a qualification to a jazz instructor to teach at universities or conservatories, as well as no budget for grants or public commissions to be awarded thus encouraging new original works. In comparison to rock or variétés, policy making was fairly simple for an established genre like jazz. For variétés, which at the time meant most any genre that was not considered chanson, this was much tricker.

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111 Ibid., Loosely, David 128
112 Ibid., 134
At the national assembly on November 17, 1981, Lang emphasized the importance of the state to work with the private sector to achieve four main objectives. The first two were nothing new—the democratizing of access to art and encouraging creativity. But what was different was the objective of this plan to include hitherto unrecognized art forms, an objective that was less entrenched in French *l’exception culturelle*. The other objectives were, however, quite unheard of. Lang wished to reconcile creation with market while at the same time preserving national identity—this mainly meant legalizing private radio stations in November of 1981, followed in 1984 by the authorization of advertising on those stations. Once again, as we have seen throughout this thesis, there is yet another shift in the French government mindset regarding the control of culture—or as Loosely quotes Farchy to have said, art was no longer seen as a luxury but as an “investment which fosters growth in the form of jobs, spending, and overseas income[…] a shift that only fully made sense if mass culture and the creative industries were welcomed under the umbrella of culture.” With this brought an ideological pull away from the Gaullist attitude of inclusion, for if music was to be treated as an investment, a strong French product would need to exist that had the capability of standing on its own in the global market. This required not only development of genres, but of a stronger French music press that could compete with the likes of *Rolling Stone* in France and abroad.

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113 Ibid., 131

114 Ibid., Farchy, Joelle., 187
Mat Pires, in an article about the popular music press in France, highlights that until this shift in attitude, popular music was severely marginalized in the press, the main journal being *Rock and Folk* that focused on male musicians, who had predominately male readership, and which mainly focused on rock, not folk as well as the name would suggest. In 1986, a group of frustrated students who felt that there was a severe underrepresentation of musical genre in the press, began *Les Inrockutibles (Les Inrocks)*, which became a great success. What is interesting about its role in the cultural legitimation of various forms of music is its highly literary style and incorporation of cinema and politics. Pires quotes C. Andrews who speaks of *Les Inrocks’* as having a “highly metaphoric and allusive style, wearing its literary credentials prominently while flouting the rules of fine writing.” For example, the album reviews of one issue from 1993 contain references to *Gargantua, The portrait of Dorian Gray*, Rilke, Apollinaire, Burroughs, and Rimbaud to name a few. The attitude of people like Chapier who held that the only French genre of note was *chanson* and that the only deciding factor for that value was language and literary value, seemed outdated in comparison to Lang’s energetic opinions and the rise of witty, literary journals like *Les Inrocks*. However, the fact that Lang and Chapier are contemporaries indicates that more traditional Gaullists attitudes toward what constituted legitimate French music and the involvement of the

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116 Ibid., 94

117 Ibid., 94
ministry of culture in music at all were still very much present. No changes would come overnight and Lang had a great many challenges and deficiencies to address. For example, in 1980, the majority of the 300,000 primary school teachers in France had no musical training at all. This meant that most children went on to high school without any competence in music whatsoever. Once in high school, they joined an environment in which music was considered an inferior subject of study to math and science. Furthermore, out of 66 universities in France, only 18 offered music degrees, and access to any kind of research of a musical nature was limited. Maurice Fleuret, Director of Music and Dance during the Lang years, in pondering the absence of musical participation among youth, created what perhaps was the most monumental change to come out of this era. In keeping with Richard Middleton’s view that we saw in the introduction that in order for music to flourish, it must be returned to the amateur, Fleuret argued that French society, at that time, only produced people who could listen—not enough people who could create music. Thus, he created the Musical Action Division that worked on behalf of all marginalized musics, particularly world and regional folk music. The hope was that this would lead to changes in education, especially since a survey showed that, despite the lack of music education, there were over 5 million instrumentalists in France, half of which were young adults. So, in order to celebrate this fact and draw attention to the fact that France had much more talent within its borders than it seemed judging from the French music output on the airwaves at home and

118  Ibid., Loosely., David., 126
abroad, Fleuret devised a one-day street festival whose sole goal was to celebrate music making of any kind. This festival, called the *Fête de la musique* and organized by the newly created Musical Action Division, took place on June 21, 1982. Amateur and professional musicians of any level and every genre were invited to simply flood the streets and make music. Lang’s main goal for the festival—a festival that has since become an annual fixture—was to prove that France was indeed musical and that it could become a stronger nation through music, harkening back to the grandiose festivals of the Revolution. In addition to this, Lang hoped this festival would function as a sort of advertisement to other government industries that funds directed towards his musical goals would be well spent, in the end bolstering France’s internal national solidarity and its image abroad.

Given the nature of the inner-workings to the government ministries, it would take much cooperation across ministries for the changes Lang had in mind to take effect. For example, lowering the high luxury tax on albums and instruments would have to be approved by the Ministry of Finance. Improving the presence of French music on the state Radio waves would have to come from the Ministry of Communication. And reforms in music education would have to come from the notoriously slow moving Ministry of Education. In short, to decrease the influence of the traditional attitude of the nation state regarding French music, the nation state had to paradoxically become perhaps even more intensely involved. Musicologist Phillipe Teillet points out that in a

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119 Ibid., Loosely, David. 156
way, France was pioneering quite a different model of cultural policy in comparison to the United States and Great Britain who focused on music initiatives in so far as they promoted things like tourism and local history (concert halls, historic musical sites, recording studios, etc.), as well as celebrating artists of any genre who largely contributed to the field.\textsuperscript{120}

In France, the involvement of government in culture was, as we have seen it had been for quite a long time, usually united by efforts to establish a firm national identity, or in the case of music, a national musical style that would be recognizable as being French outside of French borders. The Lang era, despite its efforts to be more open minded and supportive of musicians, was no different due to the opposition Lang faced and by his own goals of using pop culture to reinforce national ideals. But what happens if French musicians do not associate their national identity with the music they choose to listen to and to play? A 1984 report commissioned by Lang on cultural action published by an animator Jean Hurstel, confirms that since the birth of rock and roll, the values of youth culture vary drastically from that of traditional culture, which is what the Ministry represents.\textsuperscript{121} He goes on to argue that this youth culture is a locally heterogenous culture that resists normalization. Given the high immigrant population in France, it is not difficult to understand the existence of a resistance to French cultural normalization. And from a French musician’s point of view, they needed no proof from

\textsuperscript{120} Teillet, Phillipe., “Rock and Culture in France: ways, processes and conditions of integration., 184

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., Loosely, David., 137.
the government that they were musical and did not necessarily want to rehearse and practice in spaces that were organized by the Ministry. Hurtstel points out that despite the flourishing of institutional youth facilities specifically designed to give young people a safe creative space, they still preferred to invent their own social spaces. His suggestion was to close these fixed locations and open up bars and bistros as cultural centers, to open up radio stations wherein musicians could record and experiment, or to revamp abandoned industrial buildings into sound proof practice spaces. He held that the institutionalization of culture had little appeal to youth and that festivals, if they were to be used to bring people together, needed to be revamped to represent conviviality and sociability, not a blatant example of how culture can be used to bolster the national image. In the end, when Lang’s policy on pop music—called “une politique des lieux” was implemented, it fell a bit flat, the main goal being to create new places dedicated to the training of perpetuation of the chanson genre, not electronic music, most of which were unsuccessful. So in 1985, there was still a huge lack of spaces wherein musicians could actually play their music. When a rock band was evicted for practicing their music four floors underground, Lang intervened, politicizing this music, as it was in the 60’s, as members of the extreme right denounced the “loutish music.” ¹²² In addition to this practice location problem, which mainly affected amateur musicians, there was also the problem of a lack of venues for professional musicians. It was for this reason, the Paris

Zenith was created at the Parc de la Villette that held 3,000-6,000 spectators. Others of the same name were built all around France but in the end, did not do much for the development of a home-grown music culture. Loosely summarizes that throughout Lang’s tenure and afterwards with Ministers Léotard, Toubon, and Trauttmann “The social policy for pop and the notion of cultural development through youth music were in fact de-centered by policies for career musicians, professionalization and the music industry, in all of which pop was being viewed primarily as an economic activity.”

Throughout the Lang years, the culture debate still raged, prompting philosophers such as Alain Finkielkraut and Marc Fumaroli to write works such as La Défaite de la pensée and L’État culture which both criticize the attempts of the government to legitimate pop culture, which they see as an affront to high art and French nationhood in general, harkening back to the point of view of Malraux on these issues who did not, as Lang did, consider everything to be of value to French culture. Although these thinkers did not have much of an influence on the policies of Lang and those that followed him, especially Catherine Trauttmann in the 90’s who came to the defense of pop and other genres even more than Lang had, they are important to point out because they represent the ever present view among French intellectuals that certain musical forms have no value and that pop music is the anti-thesis of culture, especially if it is in any way connected or influenced by American culture. From the point of view of the musician, what is maddening about this culture debate on both sides of the issue is the tendency of

123 Ibid., Briggs, Jonathyne., 121
these policy makers and thinkers to generalize, assigning value based on non-musical aspects of the music such as language, or origin of musical influence. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, one important quality of musical genres is their ability to morph into something steadily more complicated and interesting that reflect both artistic progress and social interactions, often turning into a mere echo of all the different types of music that played a role in its development. Thus, the question becomes, how has the French music scene responded to this in tendency of the French cultural establishment to “protect” the somewhat mythically solid French musical forms such as chanson, amidst constant debates about high culture versus low culture, French values versus global community, English language versus French language? Much more could be said on the policies and inner workings of the ministry of culture from Lang until now, but a more in-depth look at the musicians that inherited the results of some of the aforementioned policies are far more revealing than the policies themselves. In the conclusion, I will examine artists that were at the forefront and who currently are involved in the creation and proliferation of what is now called le french touch, a genre that encompasses French techno and electronic music, a genre that is seen by many to be arguably one of the most valuable contributions of France to the global musical community. I will discuss both the reality of French musicians who perform in this genre and the limitations and challenges they face and have faced within the confines of the French music industry, as well as arguing that it is perhaps the very restrictive quality they experienced in France that gave rise to the excellence of this genre in France.
Conclusion: Product of Liberation and Restraint: Techno/Electronica and the Future of French Music
In reading the discourse that exists on the techno/electronica\textsuperscript{124} phenomenon in France beginning in the very late 80’s but primarily in the 90’s, one main observation I note among scholars is that the development of the genre in America, Britain, and Germany—the countries that are considered to be the originators and/or the forerunners of the genre—made sense within the context of their musical histories, particularly in America and Britain who shared a language, as well as a long history of fruitful musical interactions. And although Germany shares some common qualities to the French scene, the general embrace of imported music forms gave rise to experimental German electronic bands such as Krautrock, Can, Neu!, and Kraftwerk in the 70’s and 80’s that made up a strong industrial scene.\textsuperscript{125} As for France, the eventual status as French techno/ electronica as one of the best in the industry, which eventually became known as \textit{le french touch}, made little sense given the historical development of musical genre and industry in France. As we have seen, the scene in France, both economically and politically, was fraught with musical limitations throughout the 20th century that had both to do with language and style. But one main limitation stands out, which Lang attempted to address, that being a lack of \textit{lieux} wherein musicians could convene to create. I argue that it is this very absence of space that perhaps, in part, gave rise to a strong French presence on the techno scene; for, a common theme among many French techno musicians who detail

\textsuperscript{124} Although purists would assign many more sub-genre distinctions within this genre, for the purposes of this chapter, I will use the techno/electronica label here fairly loosely to encompass the disco/club sounds of Daft Punk or Justice, as well as the ambient and experimental quality of bands such as Air and M83, as well as the techno interpretations of jazz by groups like St. Germain.

\textsuperscript{125} Birgy, Phillip 225
their creative process is the simple fact that this sort of music could then and can now be made in the confines of their own bedroom. In an interview featured on French radio station, Inter, with what is arguably the most well-known French group nationally and internationally, Daft Punk, one member of the duo mentions that they did not even record their first studio album until their most recent album *Random Access Memories* in 2013. He explains that since the bands’ formation around 1992, “On a toujours travaillé avant dans une maison…au départ dans une chambre d’enfant qui a été transformé un peu en studio de fortune…d’une manière très rudimentaire…” He goes on to say how they preferred working in these confines for a long time, only venturing into the studio after having been exposed to a more cinematic way of composing their music when they composed the music for the film *Tron*. However, when you listen to the early albums of Daft Punk, the last adjective that comes to mind is “enclosed.” In fact, the words “outer space” are most likely to come to mind, the concepts of liberation and restraint in constant opposition in their powerful, grounding beats and spacey synth lead melodies.

Another French electronic band, Phoenix who formed around the same time, mentions this lack of space as in influence on their style as well in an interview for the magazine *Hybrid* saying, “We first started making records in our bedrooms. When you record track by track like that — it sounds really dry… but you hear everything, all the parts.” You can certainly hear this dry but very clear quality in their music, a clarity that definitely plays a part in the *french touch* sound and that can be heard in bands like Justice and St.

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126 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1K_CCsh7wP8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1K_CCsh7wP8)
Germain as well. When asked about this quality of their music, members of Phoenix mention that even though their success that would allow them to record in any studio they wish, they still record the same way they did in the beginning stages of their career, staying away from large spaces. One member says, “I think that comes from the way we made records in the beginning. We grew up in a culture with a do-it-yourself approach to art.” 127 The lack of space and venues for music making and performance at the time of these bands formation inspired them to create in enclosed spaces, liberating them from the limitations that rock and punk bands felt with full force. Even les free parties (raves) wherein this music was originally performed took place in abandoned warehouses and club basements, away from the eyes of the “establishment.” And when the famous record shop in Paris, Rough Trade, began primarily selling dance imports, in effect offering a meeting-place where ideas could be exchanged and new discoveries could be made, these musicians found community and liberation both inside and outside of their bedroom studios. It is interesting to note, given this juxtaposition of liberation and restraint, that, with the help of virtual technology and the independent sector, this type of music was much less centralized than yéyé had been, with cities like Avignon, Lille, Montpellier and Toulouse becoming alternative hubs of creation. So although this music was being made and performed almost “in secret,” the community that was formed was more expansive than any community associated with any genre had been before in France. In many ways, techno/electronica, although it was mistrusted by many in the progressive rock and

punk scenes in France due to its association with the disdained *discothèques* that featured poor American disco knock-offs, the movement seemed to embody something that French youth had been striving for since the arrival of rock and roll on French soil—a global movement that would connect young people, breaking down what were considered by many to be constraining national sentiments. Phillips Birgy in his article *French Electronic Music* asserts:

“what is remarkable and probably unique with techno—and this applies to France as well as the rest of Europe—is that though it covers a wide variety of styles, sounds, and practices, all these distinctions do not fragment the community as a whole and estrange its members one form another: participants never question the basic assumption of their belonging to a single overall movement. The *esprit de corps* is reinforced by the tenor of their common ideology, which extols the virtues of universality, hybridity and acceptance of difference…”

As we have seen throughout this thesis, these virtues that Birgy mentions certainly were not in line with the way the French cultural establishment viewed the role of music. Even for someone as progressive as Lang, the goal still seemed to be to use music as a reinforcer of national sentiment—something that, although these artists were proud of their heritage as we will see later with people like Anthony Gozolez of M83, expressions of nationhood were not the driving force, nor was it even really on the radar, of these techno musicians. It is this French iteration of techno and electronica, *le french touch*, and the global community it inspired that makes it so interesting in the context of French cultural history. I argue that, because of all the limitations the French musical scene endured, that at its essence, it can be seen as a sort of creolized musical language, born

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out of the cultural colonization imposed by the French state. According to Edouard Glissant’s theory found in his *Caribbean Discourse*, in the process of the creolization of languages there is always *une langue imposée* and *une langue non-posée* which creates a tense linguistic situation that in effect provides, for the individuals involved, opportunity to renovate, dynamize, open, and overcome classical concepts of identity and culture that were based, in essence, on universalism and ancestry.¹²⁹ Thus, I would argue that throughout the 20th century, the French cultural establishment’s oppressive idea of what constituted authentic French music was imposed much in the same way that colonial language is imposed in Glissant’s theory. Therefore, the efforts of a large population of French youth to navigate their national identity while at the same time appropriating imported musical styles from America and elsewhere, becomes the *langue non-posée*, creating the aforementioned tensed linguistic situation—a situation involving both musical language and spoken language. I further argue that despite the restrictive nature of the French cultural establishment, the rise of French techno and electronic music from the 80’s until today onto the the national and international forefront serves as an example of a type of musical creolization, raising questions about the interactions between nation and authenticity. This is a relationship that has typically been very closely linked in France. In the end, I argue that this sort of internal colonial model was created by French techno. The rise of French iterations of techno and electronic music from the 80’s until today, iterations that are considered to be entirely original and authentic even though the

genre technically originated elsewhere, seem to embody the same qualities as creole language and culture that Glissant maintains are symbolic for a type of new understanding of creolized language which,

“[arises] out of the contact between different, fragmented language communities and has no singular, organic origin but is instead organically linked to the worldwide experience of Relation. It is literally the result of links between different cultures and did not preexist these links. It is not a language of essence, it is a language of the Related.”

In its ability to both inspire community through its highly energetic, rhythmic quality, as well as its capacity to appeal to an international audience due to its often lyric-less songs that seek merely to communicate with melodies and rhythms rather than words, French techno becomes the sort of herald of social change inscribed in noise to which Attali refers, for it was shortly after its rise in popularity that the age of the internet dawned with its gift of heightened interpersonal connection, propelling the issue of globalization into the limelight, a concept that heightens awareness for many about just what constitutes national identity, especially in terms of music. In its amalgamation of styles and language, in addition to spacial limitations, the birth of le french touch seems exactly what Glissant considers a Creole language to be—origin-less and relational. Because of this origin-less quality, it is difficult to explain the difference between the sound of french touch and of other forms of techno and electronica. It is very subtle and to the uninformed ear may seem exactly the same as American or German forms of the same music. However, my own observations, which I feel are valuable as I approach this with years of experiences as a musician indicate that there is a certain smoothness, a certain

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close comfort in the *french touch* sound that is unmatched internationally. It is without question, nostalgic, many of the artists even admitting that the goal of their sound is exactly that—nostalgia for times past, particularly, their childhood—the “Frenchness” of which is usually referred to with extreme fondness, particularly Gonzalez of M83 who devoted his entire album *Hurry Up, We’re Dreaming,* to his French childhood. When asked about this quality of their music, which one interviewer calls “un monde de chaleur, de bonnes vibrations, de climat ensoleillé…un sort de nostalgie, de mélancolie” the members of Daft Punk explains their philosophy,

“*Il y a quelque chose qui nous a intéressé dans l’idée effectivement de faire dans la musique de danse un certain relief émotionnel… la manière la plus pertinente d’exprimer un emotion musicale c’est quand on est à cheval entre la tristesse et le bonheur parce qu’à ce moment-là il y a un contraste entre quelque chose de joyeux et quelque chose… c’est des larmes…un peu à cheval entre des larmes de joie et des larmes de tristesse et pour nous peut-être le plus grand artiste du 20e siècle c’est Chaplin…et Chaplin est exactement ça…cette confusion permanente entre la chose la plus triste au monde et la chose la plus drôle aussi*"

The intelligence and profundity of such thoughts begin to draw one out of thinking that this sort of music is shallow or mindless, adjectives the have become associated with this type of music. Their words also bring to mind, yet again, the interplay between opposites in this music—space and enclosure, happiness and sadness, lightness and heaviness. The albums of artist Anthony Gonzalez inspire the same feeling of nostalgia and deep connection with the past with his sometimes playful English lyrics juxtaposed with grand orchestral arrangements mixed with heavy synth riffs, while at the same time including spoken word French prose as he does in the song “Echos of Mine”: 
“je prends un chemin que je ne connais pas:
un petit sentier qui longe les usines et la ville entre-coupant par la forêt.
Je commence à peine à entrevoir la nature, lorsque tout d'un coup, la nuit tombe.
Je suis plongée dans un monde de silence, pourtant je n'ai pas peur.
Je m'endors quelques minutes, tout au plus, et quand je me réveille,
le soleil est là et la forêt brille d'une lumière éclatante.
Je reconnais cette forêt. Ce n'est pas une forêt ordinaire, c'est une forêt de souvenirs.
Mes souvenirs. Cette rivière blanche et sonore, mon adolescence.
Ces grands arbres, les hommes que j'ai aimés. Ces oiseaux qui volent, au loin, mon père disparu.
Mes souvenirs ne sont plus des souvenirs.
Ils sont là, vivants, près de moi, ils dansent et m'enlacent, chantent et me sourient.
Et j'aime comme je n'ai jamais aimé.\(^{131}\)

Perhaps it is this nostalgic quality that gives French techno the ability to inspire
community through its effortlessly smooth bass riffs and lo-fi synth samples. Regardless,
it has proven to have the capacity to appeal to an international audiences as well perhaps
due to its often, but not always, lyric-less songs which incorporate a wide variety of
stylistic influences,—rap, reggae, hip-hop, funk, punk, jazz, and disco to name a few—
varied instruments, and even film samples, as well as bringing together other
marginalized artists such as jugglers and acrobats into the shows. This genre truly
became a “global” musical form, appealing even if by sound alone, to emotions felt by
everyone. It is accessible and moving. But the tendency of this music to be above
constraints, be they stylistic or linguistic, raised some interesting questions within the
French authenticity debate.

\(^{131}\) [http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/m83/echoesofmine.html](http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/m83/echoesofmine.html)
Before I address the question of authenticity and French techno among the French establishment, a bit of background on the early stages of this genre in France is necessary to understand the slight shift in political position by the Ministry of Culture on music in general in France which indicates a couple of things. Firstly, the fact that a government Ministry was forced to address, not ignore, this more global view of reality, is a positive thing given the diversity that France boasts as a country and the issues that *l’exception culturelle* causes among many communities. Secondly, we will see that the positive measure taken by Ministers such as Lang and in techno’s case, Trautmann, are indicative that perhaps the re-evaluating of cultural authenticity to include a more broad spectrum of definitions is occurring in France. This brings to mind Attali’s words yet again that, “music is a herald…” positing that “change is inscribed in noise faster than it transforms society.”\(^{132}\) As for the background on this genre, one factor that stands out in the success of Techno is the creation of two French labels, Rave Age (1989) and F. Communication (1994) that fostered this style of music, allowing artists to remain inside of France instead of seeking a label that was more well suited to their needs, which had been occurring throughout the 60’s and 70’s as artists sought label support in Great Britain or the United States. Also, Radio FG, what Birgy calls “the mouthpiece of the gay community” which had been previously impeded by the French authorities, was reconstructed in 1991, becoming a very important channel for the diffusing of electronic music. Keeping in mind the fact that privatized radio only became legal in 1981, the development of such

\(^{132}\) Ibid., Attali
stations were instrumental in the health of this scene. Soon after in 1993, another station
called Radio Nova began to award residencies to popular DJs and with other major
stations like Maximum, Syrock, Energy, NRJ, and Fun broadcasting techno, the 90’s saw
the development of an entire economy surrounding this music—activities, festivals,
fanzines, graphic design, club wear, artistic decoration, etc. However, in 1995, an official
ministerial warning was issued to mayors and the police, urging them to be vigilant
against the “dangers” of techno gatherings, as well as encouraging them to refuse to
cooperate with raves, which were called free parties, organizers. In fact, free parties fell
under the category of variety shows and dances, which in 1995 were still subject to the
1945 legislation that required them to attain municipal authorization in order to take
place. In addition to this, most requests sent to municipalities regarding permission to
have these parties were turned down, or if they were accepted, proceedings were taken
against those who did not exactly follow the rules. In one case in particular, party
organizers were fined for employing security guards without paying the required 2,000
francs in social security contributions. The penalty for this oversight was a 15,000 franc
fine and an 8 month suspension from having events. For the authorities, free parties
became associated with drug use, unrestrained styles of dance, an eclectic, multicultural
dress code, and erratic behavior—designations that recall the reactions to the yé-yé
festivals of the 60’s where the twist was the “unrestrained” dance, the “eclectic dress”

133 Ibid., Loosely, 186

134 Frische, Arnaud. Aspects juridiques: interdiction-répression in Terradillos and Martin. (eds), La
Fête techno. 73-9. (Loosely 186)
was the *blouson noir*, and the erratic behavior was the storming of young fans to the stage, regardless of existing trees or signposts.\(^{135}\) In 1996, over 40 years after French parliament moved to ban gatherings such as the one mentioned in Chapter 1, things seemed to have come full circle when a major gathering called *Polaris* was prevented from taking place by the authorities.

It is interesting to note that these repressive policies were taken on with an immense solidarity among fans and artists alike when they formed *Technopol*, an association whose goal was to simply promote “electronic cultures.”\(^{136}\) Cohesive, non-violent, organized initiatives such as these greatly helped change the governmental attitude towards the scene as they realized there was more to this movement than rampant drug culture and erratic behavior. These were true artists defending their art. When *Technopol* organized *Planète*, a night that would take place during the Rennes festival, *Les Transmusicales*, even Catherine Trautman, the Minister of Culture at the time, as well as Jack Lang, were present. As Trautmann began to acknowledge techno’s cultural status, she began to make some changes in the way this type of music was seen. In 1997, 15 million francs were allotted in the Ministry of Culture for the promotion of “*musiques actuelles*.”\(^{137}\) This meant primarily television spots advertising certain musicians, as well as programs on State radio featuring techno. Soon after, the music industry saw, for the first time in years, a surge in record sales, aided by this State sponsored aid in the

\(^{135}\) Ibid., Loosely, 201.

\(^{136}\) Ibid., Birgy, Phillip., 229.

\(^{137}\) Ibid., Birgy, Phillip., 240
commercialization of techno, something that wasn’t necessarily seen as valuable to many
in this underground community since there was a deep-seated mistrust of the government
when it came to their recent and historical efforts to suppress concerts and festivals.
Also, for many of these artists, this music was more about community than commodity.
Bands such as Daft Punk, Justice, and Phoenix claim in separate interviews that they
worked and played for years before ever having any success or even considering that they
would one day have success. 138

The mistrust of the Techno community of the Ministry was not unfounded, for
soon after Trautmann’s supportive measures, a 2002 amendment to a security bill was
passed that reintroduced the authoritative measures against unauthorized raves. 139
However, with or without ministerial aid, for the first time in French history, a French
genre of music had the full attention of the national and international community,
influencing everything from American hip-hop to Algerian pop-Raï music. Loosely
points out that even with more ministerial support, some groups, such as Phoenix and the
Micronauts, eventually rejected the French labels by going with British labels since the
French labels adhered to a traditional marketing strategy of seeking out only Francophone
markets, lacking the confidence to target the Anglophone world “without a sense of
inferiority.” 140 Étienne de Crécy, whose hit Superdiscount became an award winning
song in Britain before it had any success in France, commented, rather blandly that “If it

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138 see Interviews
139 Loosely, 187
140 Loosely 185
works in London, Europe starts caring about it,” suggesting that French techno’s success outside of France was the catalyst of its success within France—as if now that France had a genre that was garnering international attention, its quality uncontested, it was ready to embrace as it had never before embraced a musical genre.141 This is a slightly simplistic way of interpreting the reason for French artists to seek British or American support, particularly for music distribution purposes since it is important to remember that it was the historical non-support of imported genres in France, as we have seen, that had itself led to a somewhat feeble market that did not, even if it wanted to, have the capacity to distribute this music far and wide. The strict radio quotas under which 30 percent of the music on prime time radio had to be in French, also posed a problem as well as many of these bands performed in English, even if it was often in snippets, such as the Daft Punk hit that simply repeats the words “One more time…”142 Bands such as Phoenix who wrote songs in the regular verse/chorus form had particular difficulties with their decision to utilize English. One member in an interview with Pitchfork Magazine says “We fought so much to sing in English in France. We never even really choose to sing in English. Its almost like how opera is mostly in Italian… its just the language of the music we are doing.”143 Anthony Gonzalez, the creator and songwriter of the M83 project goes so far as to say, in an Mtv interview with John Norris that “I just don’t see

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141 The Face, 16, 121—Birgy 232
142 Toubon Article
myself singing in English. It’s not natural. It’s weird to say that, but it’s not natural.”

He goes on to mention that he is proud of his French identity and he feels that his French accent when he sings is indicative that is is not American or British. For him, what is more important to him as an artist is the overall sound. As for using English, it is almost as if he views the English language as merely one of the instruments used in this style of music. For many of these artists, singing in any other language besides English in this genre would be just as odd as trying to play this music without using a synthesizer. In this way, language can be seen not as a determiner of nation but as an instrument. For Gonzalez, it seems to be merely a stylistic choice that has little bearing on his national identity, creating a music that contributes to his nation’s global musical contribution. As we saw above with his song, “Echos of Mine” he is not afraid to express himself, very poetically, in French as well. But his English lyrics, as do Phoenix’s lyrics, are often equally as poetic, despite their designation as pop, putting them into a category of musicians that seem to defy, as François Hardy did with her song Mon ami la rose the typical “emptiness” often associated with techno music—such as the lyrics to Phoenix’s song 1901 which often recall existentialist thought: “Counting all different ideas drifting away/past and present they don’t matter/now the future’s sorted out/watching her move in elliptical patterns/think it’s not what you say…I’ll be anything you ask and more.” The fact that these bands did not settle for mediocrity in their genre, rising above stereotypes and forging their way to a position wherein they were considered the most authentic of

their genre world-wide, is evidence, as Guillaume Bara says in a 1999 edition of *La Techno*, that “A new utopia, both cultural and social, is appearing in the ferment of the electronic arts.”\textsuperscript{145} Loosely takes a more pragmatic approach to what techno “is” saying that it is a far-reaching, community-inspiring musical form that ceases to adhere to the confines of pop, and that “techno brought itself into existence by constructing pop as its other, just as *chanson* had done in the early 60’s”\textsuperscript{146}

Somewhat though, among contemporary French composers like Pierre Schaeffer, Pierre Henry, and Boulez, this type of music is still seen as a “low art” hearkening back to what sociologist Amparo Lasén believes is the Adornian view that all dance music is minor music and, therefore, not born of a genuine creative process since the music responds merely to the immediate needs of dancing.\textsuperscript{147} However, this way of thinking assumes that the way music is listened to and interpreted and the way it is created are one in the same, which is not the case. Aficionados of techno and electronica I dare say hear in this music just as much precision and profoundly complex melody and chord structure as someone listening to Debussy or Satie—in fact the band Air claims Debussy, Ravel and Satie as some of their main influences, in addition to Phoenix whose debut album is named after one of the greats—Wolfgang Amadeus Phoenix—and who affirm that they think about making this music as if they were composing classical tunes.\textsuperscript{148} Considering

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Birgy, 185 Bara, Guillaume La Techno
\item Ibid., Loosely 189
\item Lasén, Amparo, “Une filation bâtarde.” *Cultures en mouvement.*, no. 21 (October 1999) 50
\item Ibid., *Hybrid Magazine Article*
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
this classical music influence, it is striking to listen to the music of these bands thinking about the location in which they were written and produced. For bands such as Air, M83, and Daft Punk, the albums recorded in France in their early years are certainly indicative of an innovative style, creating what we now know as *le french touch*. However, several later albums recorded in the United States in large studios featuring complex orchestral arrangements, is indicative that once this innovative style was given room to breathe, something entirely new still was created. For example, when Anthony Gonzalez’s grandiose orchestral, vocal, and synth creation *Outro* is held up against the celebrated *Requiem* by French composer Gabriel Fauré, or Justice’s song *Genesis* next to Eric Satie’s *Véritables préludes flasques (pour un chien)*, the similarities between these elettronica artists and these pillars of French authentic high art collide, blurring the lines between ‘low’ and ‘high’ art. What is striking about these bands is that, hearkening back to Richard Middleton’s view in the introduction that in a way, the 20th and 21st centuries have seen a return of music to the amateur, these artists seem, through a history of creative restraint and oppressive views concerning amateur music versus “high art” music, to have found a way to blur the line between amateur and professional, live and recorded. They have widened access to creative musical practice by making the passage from fan to artists, from listener to creator, easier. Technology has, in effect, decentralized everything about this type of music production, allowing artists the freedom to create, produce, distribute, and perform their music, if they want, free of the confines of the music industry or the cultural establishment. What is most interesting about techno in
France, however, is its ability to embody many different discourses, particularly those concerning authenticity, be it national or artistic, and nation.

As we have seen, the presence of national myths can be seen in many aspects of society; however, as music plays such a profound role in the everyday lives of individuals, I find that the patterns and occurrences therein, though they are extremely complex and can be examined from many angles, are what lead to the propensity of the French state to use culture as a powerful tool that works to solidify national sentiment by entering into the very fabric of national memory. This tendency is perpetuated by France’s belief in its own grandeur, which, in the absence of colonial territory, turns inward, perpetuating a somewhat antiquated attitude of the legitimacy of French colonial power. Thus, the success and proliferation of the *french touch* genre has put the cultural establishment in an interesting position. After going to as many lengths possible to protect the linguistic and cultural integrity of French music, evidenced by radio censorship, and later the implementation of radio quotas, as well as practices of concert banning, the French cultural establishment finds itself now in an interesting position—that of acknowledging a type of music that is virtually absent of any characteristics that, throughout the 20th century, made music “national.” This brings us full circle, back to the era of the Dreyfus Affair when people began asking themselves the question, “What cultural values are French?” This begs the question also, what makes music national? The more important question that follows is this: does solidifying these values, and in turn, holding musical output to the stands decided upon, ameliorate creative output or
protect musical quality? I think this thesis has shown that it does not necessarily do either of these things. But paradoxically, the question arises, would this iteration of French techno have come into being without a history of limitations that caused artists to turn inward, to explore their lack of space, to find solidarity where there once was none? What is evident here is that the presence of this global music and the community from which these French artists have taken inspiration and whom they have in turn inspired, seems to suggest that perhaps the restrictions of the notion of exception culturelle blind people from the freedom to imagine and create identity according to what rhythm moves them, not according to what language they speak, in (which location they were born, or under which system of power they reside.
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Vita

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