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Jonathan Buchsbaum, *Exception Taken: How France has Defied Hollywood's New World Order*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017. xii + 393 pp. Images, tables, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$105.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 9780231170666; \$35.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9780231170673.

Review by David Pettersen, University of Pittsburgh.

*Exception Taken: How France has Defied Hollywood's New World Order* is an exciting new contribution to the field of French film studies and film and media studies in general. Jonathan Buchsbaum's book sets out to examine how the French film industry has during the latter half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first created conditions for a culturally specific form of cinema production to flourish in France. This achievement required resisting liberal, free-trade approaches to audiovisual regulation at the world and European levels, especially in opposition to Hollywood lobbying and American and EU negotiators. In place of unrestricted free trade, French policymakers advocated a capacious notion of cultural diversity, one that sought to balance tensions between art and industry and one that would allow individual countries to decide their own relationship to the circulation of cultural objects in a global marketplace.

*Exception Taken* advocates for an industry studies and political economy approach to the French media industry, one that is more common in the French academy than the Anglo-American one, at least with respect to French cinema. Buchsbaum focuses on the many details of policy decisions and regulatory frameworks in France, Europe, the WTO, and UNESCO, on a wealth of statistical information about different aspects of film production, distribution, and exhibition in France, and on industry studies scholarship in French, translating this material and introducing it to an English-speaking readership. *Exception Taken* is essential reading for students and scholars who work on French cinema, but as Buchsbaum argues, the project should also interest scholars, regulators, and industry representatives in other national contexts in which they too seek to resist the logic of American-style globalization and the potential for cultural homogenization implied by some free trade agreements and Hollywood's aggressive release practices and advertising campaigns abroad. Ultimately, Buchsbaum argues that national film industries cannot exist only through a handful of films that circulate on the international festival circuit; they must have a life on national soil. *Exception Taken* reconstructs the history of how one country has fought to maintain a healthy domestic film industry that continues to connect with audiences at home.

The book's first chapter accounts for Hollywood's superiority in economic and protectionist terms and then refutes some of the arguments for why Hollywood films are more popular in

European countries than domestic products. Buchsbaum first challenges the image of Hollywood cinema as not funded by public money and not protected by American trade negotiators, and then he dismantles the oft-heard claim that Hollywood cinema dominates foreign markets because of its supposedly universal storytelling. He ultimately argues that Hollywood dominates foreign markets because it is aggressively marketed and able to take advantage of the importance of English on the global stage.

In the second chapter, Buchsbaum lays out the origins of many of the current regulatory and state funding structures in France during the 1980s and 1990s, when Jack Lang was minister of culture. These years saw the increasing dominance of Hollywood at the French box office, and several large-scale policy reports on the industry's health during the 1980s called for a system that would foster domestic production at different scales: small auteur films without commercial ambitions, modest and average entertainment films, and a handful of big budget productions. Buchsbaum shows how the system of taxes on ticket sales actually turned the financial success of Hollywood films into significant funding streams for domestic production of various kinds.

Chapter three focuses on the long process of negotiating European Union policies around television as a way of understanding how culture came to be an object of dispute between advocates of protection and supporters of free trade. Buchsbaum shows that the EU's Television Without Frontiers directive was an ineffectual compromise, retaining the possibility of national quotas for domestic productions but limiting the juridical means for enforcing them. It was a moment when some policymakers, led by France, began to argue for culture as an exception to other goods in the free market. Buchsbaum argues that what Lang succeeded in doing at this time was convincing people that film was an art that depended on money and that to protect cinema required crafting laws that dealt with the economic structures of the industry. Ultimately, many believed that culture had to be defended at a national level, and France sought to occupy the paradoxical position of "unity in diversity" where this diversity was understood primarily in linguistic terms. French art films, those supported by selective aid and thus somewhat unconcerned with commercial ambitions, were seen as the best purveyors of a national culture.

In the fourth chapter, Buchsbaum extends these European debates about culture and exception to the world stage during the 1993 General Agreement on Tariffs and Trades stand-off between French and American negotiators. The latter saw the inclusion of cultural objects under the regime of free trade as a means to end France's system of quotas and protectionism. Buchsbaum reconstructs the heated rhetoric of this time through extended quotations of various position statements in France for a notion of cultural exception, including from then President Mitterrand himself. In the end, the GATT treaty made no reference to culture at all, effectively leaving it exempt but vulnerable to stipulations in future treaties. The term cultural exception continued to be used, but Buchsbaum explains that it was gradually replaced by the term "cultural diversity" over the course of the 1990s.

Chapter five turns to the history of France's first private, paid, encrypted television channel and examines its relationship to film production. Canal+ sought explicitly to rival HBO, but it had a near monopoly on private television in France for programming such as sports games. It negotiated distribution deals with Hollywood studios, it produced its own "edgy" content that it would air during unencrypted hours with advertising, and it had to re-invest 20% of its profits in the French film industry. Canal+ was eventually absorbed into the international media conglomerate Vivendi Universal for two years until the latter's collapse. Many feared that once

it merged, it would pursue more big-budget Hollywood style productions. Buchsbaum shows that in fact its support of French films did not decline and that Canal+ contributed more money to fund film production than any other television channel.

In chapter six, *Exception Taken* assesses the effects of the policies put in place thus far and examines the pros and cons of the increasing role that French television stations play in funding French film production. While the positive effect of television money is undeniable, television channels select for certain kinds of films that are television friendly and thus production is arguably not as diverse as it might be. Furthermore, Buchsbaum explains that producers do not always have to care about the quality or box office success of their films because television channels offer advance funding and a guaranteed release platform. Following the discussion of television, Buchsbaum considers the question of film distribution in theaters and the turn in France to multiplexes. He shows that government studies were recommending policy tweaks in the late 1990s and early 2000s because previous policies had created an environment in which medium-budget film production was starved in favor of small and big-budget films. Arguments for diversity in the industry meant regulatory support for films at all scales in terms of production and exhibition.

Though Hollywood was a central focus in the preceding chapters, the seventh chapter examines liberalizing pressures coming from the European Union and the fight over protection for cultural objects like films in the name of cultural diversity. The EC's 1998 decision on French state aids to filmmaking laid out broad principles for reconciling the free-market, neoliberal orientation of the EU with the Maastricht treaty's inclusion of culture and member state's desire to protect national cultural production. State aid for cultural production was deemed valid for some culturally specific films, but not for commercial productions. Buchsbaum spends much of this chapter thinking about what the term cultural diversity has meant and could mean for regulatory reform. He draws on the work of U.S. legal scholar Edwin Baker and the Swiss lawyer Christophe Germann to suggest that cultural diversity in the realm of cinema must go beyond the binary of a national cinema and Hollywood and ensure a cosmopolitan diversity of exhibition that includes films from all around the world.

In the book's final chapter, Buchsbaum steps back to assess the extent to which France's several-decades-long history of arguing for protection and exception has been worth it. He examines the extent to which state funding has helped the current generation of filmmakers who exhibit on the festival circuit; he queries the collapsing production figures for medium-budget films, he asks questions about the push to bigger budget films that would rival Hollywood, and he wonders about the usefulness of a term like art cinema at a time when 70% of French films are categorized as such. In interrogating the ongoing relevance of a term like art cinema or the legacy of the New Wave, he turns in the second half of the chapter to consider the history of film education, or the ways in which film viewing and cinephilia are taught to broad audiences in schools. The assumption is that educating audiences could lead them to demand higher quality films.

*Exception Taken* suggests at the end of its final chapter and in its conclusion that the history of state support and protectionism has been largely positive, though Buchsbaum is careful to say that the balance of regulation and state support is always in need of re-examination in a changing audiovisual and regulatory landscape. France, in Buchsbaum's view, is unique in that it actively seeks to balance between "the commercial and the cultural" or "the industrial and the artistic" sides of moviemaking (p. 225). In advocating for cultural exception, Buchsbaum suggests, France

has created the space for other countries to protect their own cultures and national film industries. Following the conclusion, Buchsbaum offers a series of helpful appendices that show how French film financing works and how France's state aid for production is and has been attributed.

As will be clear from the preceding chapter summary, *Exception Taken* is ambitious in its scope and claims. It is accessible to students and seasoned scholars alike, and it makes the case that France's efforts to protect its national industry are worth celebrating and even imitating in other national contexts. In terms of minor reservations, although the book is nuanced throughout in its portrayal of the industry's investment in cultural exception, it is clear that Buchsbaum largely defends the commitment to exception and state support. In addition to charting out what this system of protections and funding arrangements enables, it would also be worth asking more directly what this system might preclude or inhibit both at home and abroad. That said, *Exception Taken* frames itself in part as a manifesto. Consequently, a strong point of view is expected, and the book succeeds in offering much to think with.

Finally, although *Exception Taken* broaches the question of television policy, this history mostly serves to illustrate how television affected film funding, production, and distribution structures. Cinema remains the book's main investment, and television series or emerging forms of new media production and funding over the past decade remain at the periphery of the study. I do not see this is not so much a weakness in a book that already covers so much ground as I view it as an invitation for other scholars to build on and extend Buchsbaum's careful attention to political economy and cultural policy in the French media industry.

Along with Michael Witt and Michael Temple's *The French Cinema Book* and Alastair Fox, Michel Marie, Raphaëlle Moine, and Hilary Radner's *A Companion to Contemporary French Cinema*,<sup>[1]</sup> Buchsbaum's *Exception Taken* offers one of the strongest resources in English for scholars and students seeking to understand the industrial structures and regulatory histories that condition the French industry at a national, European, and international level. It is a terrific book, and I highly recommend it to scholars working in French and European film and studies and to those working in industry studies more broadly. It is also important reading for scholars in French studies who work on questions of cultural policy.

## NOTES

[1] Michael Witt and Michael Temple, *The French Cinema Book*, 2nd edition (London: BFI Publishing, 2018); Alastair Fox, Michel Marie, Raphaëlle Moine, and Hilary Radner, *A Companion to Contemporary French Cinema* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015).

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