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## PUBLIC INTELLECTUALS AND CULTURAL POLICY IN FRANCE

Jeremy Ahearne<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of French, University of Warwick, Coventry, UK

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# PUBLIC INTELLECTUALS AND CULTURAL POLICY IN FRANCE

Jeremy Ahearne

*The notion of the public intellectual in France represents a form of extra-governmental cultural politics in its own right. This article begins, however, by exploring three sets of reasons that can account for the aversion of French intellectuals under the Fifth Republic to involvement in State cultural policy processes. These are: the historical counter-examples represented by intellectuals' involvement in the policy apparatuses of the Vichy regime and the French Communist Party; the positive tradition of laicity, or of a realm of free inquiry politically set off from the political field; and the often detrimental effects on academic prestige of involvement in policy processes. It then traces the incentives and institutional channels through which some public intellectuals have nonetheless been brought into the processes of cultural and educational policy development over recent decades. It concludes by suggesting how intellectuals may be conceived not simply as architects or critics, but also as objects of cultural policy.*

KEYWORDS public intellectual; French cultural policy

In an encyclopaedia entry on intellectuals and cultural policy in France, Rémy Rieffel argues that "state intervention in cultural matters has always provoked a certain mistrust on the part of French intellectuals, who are inclined to be individualist and anti-authoritarian. The figure of the intellectual as 'critic of power' has remained dominant throughout the Fifth Republic [i.e. since 1958], although one can observe the beginnings of a change in this posture with the accession of the Left to power in 1981" (Rieffel 2001, p. 342). It is certainly true that intellectuals in France over the Fifth Republic have tended to remain averse to the nuts and bolts of policy-making (cf. also Reader 1987, p. 22). I propose in this article, however, to nuance somewhat the picture painted by Rieffel: over the years of Gaullist and right-wing government between 1958 and 1981, one can observe interesting forms of participation in the policy process on the part of broadly left-leaning intellectuals; in the years after 1981, one is struck not simply by further instances of such participation, but also by a persistent reticence or hostility towards cultural policy on the part of both left and right-wing intellectuals. I shall look to probe further this aversion to the world of policy-making as such, asking why it might seem surprising to an outside observer; why nonetheless, on consideration of French intellectual history over the twentieth century, it can be seen as understandable; and how, indeed, it can in some senses be seen as all too understandable. I shall consider not just policy processes associated with the Ministry of Culture and Communication, as it is now called, but also certain policy developments issuing from the Ministry of Education, insofar as these have as much and often more bearing on the overall action that a regime directs

towards culture (understood not just as aesthetic education, but also as historical memory, the vulgarization of science, and the diffusion of information within the contemporary media landscape).

### Public Intellectuals and Public Policy: A Curious Divergence?

The figure of the public intellectual as it evolved in France over the twentieth century can be seen as representing a form of extra-governmental cultural-political action in its own right. This is not simply because, to take the inaugural case of Zola in the Dreyfus affair as analyzed by Bourdieu, the intellectual exploits symbolic capital accrued in the cultural field in order to achieve properly political effects (Bourdieu 1996 [1992], pp. 129–131). Nor is it just because the intellectual can be usefully defined, to adapt Ory and Sirenelli's terms, as a figure from the cultural world taking up a position in the political world.<sup>1</sup> Public intellectuals have not always used culture purely as a kind of external leveraging device to pursue political objectives. Instead, their interventions have frequently been characterized by a particular style and content, insofar as they can bring broader frames of reference to bear on given political problems and issues. They can take a "long view" of cardinal notions in public policy debate (laicity and religion; the cathartic or incitive effects of violent aesthetic spectacles; the purposes of education or the value of art; cultural democracy, etc.). Certainly, this long view can amount to little more than a vague view. However, where the operation is performed effectively, the broader frames of reference that constitute an intellectual "culture" as such are thereby given a political valency which they would not have if these problems and issues were the province purely of technical experts and politicians. As a persistent mode of engagement, running beneath the threshold of specific debates or interventions, this amounts to something like a "sub-liminal" form of cultural politics. As a course or style of action, the implicit message is repeatedly conveyed that a detour through the works of a cultural tradition (or counter-tradition) can give us a better understanding of the issues immediately facing us. I shall consider below how this message has found it increasingly more difficult to get a hearing amidst ambient interference and noise. Nonetheless, it provided for a long time for the French intellectual a forceful *raison d'être*.

In the light of this, it would seem logical that French intellectuals should look to position themselves in such a way that they can bring the demands of culture to bear upon the development of governmental public policy. There have been powerful precedents for this. The function of the intellectual clearly predates the invention of the name at the turn of the twentieth century, and one might cite the great *philosophe* and mathematician Condorcet presiding over the 1791–1792 Legislative Assembly's Committee for Public Instruction (often seen as drawing up the blueprint for the republican tradition in French education).<sup>2</sup> The *Cartel des Gauches* government of 1924 was famously described as the "Republic of the Professors" on account of the symbolic prominence within it of the products of the *Ecole Normale Supérieure*, the almost exclusive breeding ground of French intellectuals (Thibaudet 1927). Intellectuals and cultural organizations in general played a key role in the campaign and subsequent administration of the Popular Front government in 1936 (Ory & Sirenelli 1992 [1986], pp. 93–113).

At the same time, however, the relations between the "intellectual" and "political" fields (or between "spiritual" and "temporal" powers) have been marked by fundamental tensions. This is manifest in the theme of intellectual "treason" that runs at least since Charles Péguy (1959 [1907], p. 1116) like a leitmotif through the twentieth-century history of French

intellectuals. For Julien Benda (1975 [1927], pp. 171, 177), intellectual “clerics” committed treason when they subordinated their responsibility for the “eternal and disinterested values” of justice and reason to the temporal “passions” of nation or political party. For thinkers such as Nizan (cf. 1960 [1932], p. 123), clerical detachment was in itself a betrayal insofar as the mission of intellectuals should be radically to challenge and practically to overturn an unjust political order. For both such tendencies, however, extended participation in “really existing” policy processes would, in one way or another, amount to a form of treason. The “mistrust” evoked above as regards intellectuals’ public policy involvement during the Fifth Republic is not, therefore, without a tradition of its own.

### The Surrender and Preservation of Intellectual Autonomy

If one considers French intellectual history over the mid-twentieth century, one will find further reasons why subsequent intellectuals might want to mark absolutely their distance with regard to political authorities. Like the occupying Nazi powers in the North, the collaborationist Vichy government in the South placed the cultural “renovation” of the country high on its agenda, and was able to enlist willing intellectuals to help it in its mission. Using the example of Paul Morand, Ory and Sirinelli show how Vichy could assign to its intellectuals the classic functions of an “organic intelligentsia”: Morand could be used for purposes of symbolic “ostentation” (he had worked at the Foreign Office after the Munich concessions to Hitler in 1938, and was later named by Vichy as an ambassador at Bucharest and then Bern); he could be used as a “counsellor” in cultural affairs (he was given a place on Vichy’s Book Council); and he could be deployed in the “management of cultural life” (via the all-powerful Commission for Control of Publishing Paper, and also the Commission for Film Censorship) (Ory & Sirinelli 1992 [1986], p. 127). After the war, as Paxton has noted, “those traditionalists [at Vichy] who had occupied policy-making positions came before the High Court of Justice”, while “the fate of the overtly fascist intellectuals and party leaders in occupied Paris was even more final. Men of public platforms, their words condemned them to suffer at the Liberation” (Paxton 2001 [1972], pp. 344–345). Alongside such dramatic national stagings of intellectual complicity, there were also less clear-cut examples whose very ambiguity, nonetheless, may have exerted after the event a similarly dissuasive force on some. *Jeune France* and the leadership college at Uriage, paragovernmental organizations first promoted and then disavowed by Vichy, brought together a number of figures who would become prominent intellectuals after the war (Chabrol 1990).

The French Communist Party played a major part in the internal resistance to the Vichy regime, and this played no small part in the intellectual prestige (some speak of “hegemony”) it enjoyed in the immediate post-war years. Many intellectuals saw in it not just an alternative to fascism and bourgeois liberal democracy, but also a means of combining theoretical sophistication, as they conceived it, and political efficacy. Indeed, the rallying of intellectuals was itself a key component of the French Communist Party’s cultural policy (Caute 1964, pp. 11, 15–16). In an attempt to coin a self-fulfilling prophecy, Georges Cogniot described it in 1945 at its Tenth Conference as “The Party of French Intelligence”, and the party leader Maurice Thorez proclaimed at the Twelfth Conference in 1950 that “to those intellectuals who are disorientated and lost in the labyrinth of their questions, we bring certainties and possibilities of unlimited development” (quoted in Ory & Sirinelli 1992 [1986], pp. 151, 160). The cultural policy apparatus of the Party was extensive, and offered the possibility of practical “orientation” to any number of minor and major intellectuals and fellow travellers,

many of whom, David Caute argues, saw in communism and/or Marxism a continuation of the tradition of the Enlightenment (1964, p. 212). What is striking in retrospect is the readiness of intellectuals to suspend the legacy of the Enlightenment (Bayle's "droit de la conscience errante" – the right to a wandering/erring consciousness) in order to fall into line with the aesthetic and theoretical norms laid down by party apparatchiks. As Ory and Sirinelli note, the relations which these cultural apparatchiks, such as Laurent Casanova, entertained with regard to culture and intellectuals were purely "external" and "instrumental" (1992 [1986], pp. 159–160). For Caute, "the tragedy of French communism was not the intellectuals it seduced or those it lost, but rather those it maimed" (1964, p. 366). Interestingly, Jeannine Verdès-Leroux suggests that this intellectual abdication may be explained in terms of an inveterate malaise, a tendency of intellectuals themselves to doubt of that very culture that constitutes their identity and their *raison d'être*:

If communist intellectuals during the Cold War bowed, humiliated, lowered and cretinised themselves so willingly on the orders of the Party, it is because intellectuals in some parts of the field entertain permanent doubts not only about intellectual work but also about the value of culture; these are sometimes expressed in scholarly, rationalised, or euphemised forms, but sometimes also in brutal forms. For Nizan, "Between culture as an inheritance and symbol of an inheritance, and the proletariat, the mass of non-inheritors, no reconciliation is possible." (Verdès-Leroux 1983, pp. 23–24)

Lest one pronounce judgement in undue haste, one can clearly not through a kind of contrary dictate prevent a critically disposed "wandering consciousness" from turning on itself and uncovering the socially overdetermined composition of culture. Strands in the thinking of figures such as Tolstoy, Sartre or Bourdieu all attest to the "brutal" irruption of such doubts. But it is clear in retrospect that these doubts – and perhaps a desire to eject them once and for all out of one's consciousness – led many intellectuals during the Cold War to become footsoldiers in what one might call an anti-cultural cultural policy.

In explaining the aversion of intellectuals over recent decades towards engagement in the nuts and bolts of the policy process, one can therefore invoke, as it were, a principle of the scalded cat (who, in French parlance, looks to learn from his experience by giving boiling water – organic adhesion to party politics – a wide berth). Certainly, a detailed analysis of the immediate aftermath of the war would introduce important nuances. Significant policy thinking had taken place within the institutional apparatuses of the Resistance. Even the most anti-authoritarian of thinkers (such as Sartre himself) were for a while prepared to take part in certain more or less official "nation-building" activities on behalf of the French State (Kelly 2004, pp. 95–99). Nonetheless, the very different records of intellectuals' policy collaboration with Vichy or the French Communist Party would, like dead stars, continue to project powerful and dissuasive historical after-images.

There is, however, also a more positive tradition in French intellectual history that looks to preserve the free unbounded inquiry seen as constitutive of the cultural realm from the instrumentalizing thrust of party political strategy. A powerful and perhaps formative statement of this can be found, paradoxically it might seem, in the educational policy reports of Condorcet. It is a statement of what I would call an anti-political cultural policy: anti-political not in the sense of a depoliticization, but in the sense of a politically conditioned resistance to the short-term demands of political expediency in the name of certain longer term demands associated with the cultural realm (what Condorcet in his political theory would call the sovereignty of truth). Condorcet was writing against the model of a

“total” educational/cultural policy, and the concomitant “political religion” (1994 [1791], p. 93) espoused by the likes of Robespierre, Rabaut de Saint-Etienne, and other followers of Rousseau. Imagining they were following in the footsteps of Ancient Sparta, such figures argued for a “common education” whose function was to instill in future citizens a common set of beliefs, principles and character-traits that would ensure a cohesive, virtuous and virile republic. By contrast, Condorcet argued that the Republic should provide all citizens with “instruction” designed precisely to protect them from such indoctrination, and that active policy steps needed to be taken to institute and maintain school as a cultural apparatus set off from the political field as such in which an effective liberty of thought could be cultivated:

The freedom of such opinions would only be illusory if society took hold of new generations to dictate to them what they must believe. The man who enters society with those opinions that his education has given him is not a free man; he is the slave of his masters, and his chains are all the more difficult to break because he himself does not feel them, and he thinks he is obeying his reason when he is only submitting to that of another. [...] The Ancients had no notion of this kind of freedom; indeed the only goal of their institutions seemed to be to destroy it. They would have wanted to leave men only those ideas and feelings that fitted in with the system of their legislator. (Condorcet 1994 [1791], pp. 85–86)

Condorcet was, of course, pioneering that most misunderstood of French political notions – laicity (*laïcité*). The term itself would not be coined until the nineteenth century, but its principal elements can be found in his reports: the wresting away of control over education and culture from all agents of dogmatic orthodoxy, whether ecclesiastical or political, in order to allow individual opinions and reason to develop in a non-clerical or “lay” environment. Significantly, the term would be strongly reasserted 150 years later, in another classic educational blueprint produced by two prominent intellectuals, Paul Langevin and Henri Wallon. In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, and of the “streamlining” (*Gleichschaltung*) of the political and cultural spheres operated this time by the Nazis and associated collaborators, Langevin and Wallon were once again arguing for the institutionally guaranteed disjunction of the two:

Public schooling, like the State itself, is, in the terms of the constitution, a lay institution [*laïque* – non-clerical would be an inadequate translation], which is to say that, open to all children, it cannot and must not offer any doctrinally, politically or religiously motivated teaching. (Langevin & Wallon 2004 [1946], p. 70)

This tradition of a distance between the State and culture that intellectuals call upon the State itself to institute and maintain was further developed by Bourdieu another 50 years later. In a conversation with the conceptual artist Hans Haacke, we see him developing it beyond the reference to *laïcité* and schooling (which undoubtedly represented the most significant cultural apparatus at the time of both Condorcet and the Langevin–Wallon report) to embrace the cultural policy field as a whole:

There are a certain number of conditions regarding the existence of a critical culture that can only be assured by the State. In short, we [in the cultural field] must expect (and even demand) from the State the instruments through which we can acquire our liberty in relation to the powers-that-be – economic powers, but also political powers, i.e. as regards the State itself. (Bourdieu & Haacke 1995 [1994], pp. 71–72; trans. mod.)

There are thus good negative reasons as well as good positive reasons for French intellectuals to resist being drawn too closely into the party political policy process. Not only has twentieth-century history shown the price that can be paid for the abdication by intellectuals of their cultural autonomy, the protection of that autonomy from political control also represents an important political principle. The paradox is perhaps that this deliberate distanciation from political pressure – an “anti-political cultural policy” – could not be effectively maintained through a generalized abstention on the part of intellectuals from processes of policy formation.<sup>3</sup>

### Intellectual Play and Prestige

There are other reasons one can adduce to explain the aversion of French intellectuals to meaningful engagement in the cultural policy-making process. One can perhaps best describe these not so much as understandable as all too understandable, insofar as they can be correlated with the dynamics of self-interest and symbolic capital accumulation as they function in the field of intellectual production. In a famously clamorous debate on the “silence of the intellectuals” that ran in the columns of *Le Monde*, the leading French intellectual newspaper, over the summer of 1983, much was made of the reluctance of most intellectuals to throw their weight behind the policies of the Socialist government (see Looseley 1995, pp. 84–87). This has been explained in terms of the difficulty for narcissistically or naively “radical” intellectuals in coming to terms with the compromises required by real politics (the economic U-turn of the Socialists took place in 1983). Ory and Sirinelli also suggest that intellectuals had not identified with Mitterand’s government insofar as, when it became the first left-wing administration of the Fifth Republic in 1981, they had done little to secure its victory, having become prematurely fatalistic about the Socialist Party’s chances after its electoral defeat in 1978 (1992 [1986], p. 234). I think that much could also be made, however, of an apparently flippant remark by Philippe Sollers, a famous ex-maoist, whom the arrival of the Socialist government had pushed to the political right: “Intellectuals are on the side of the opposition. By definition. In principle. Through physical necessity. As part of their game (*par jeu*)” (quoted by Ory & Sirinelli 1992 [1986], p. 234). Admittedly, my translation skews the text a little here. “Par jeu” also evokes the intellectual “free play of ideas” that one would certainly not wish to belittle. Nevertheless, the fundamental point stands. It is undoubtedly true that an oppositional stance did for a number of decades play well in the French intellectual field – a field described by Bourdieu as “the economic world reversed” (1993, pp. 29–73) – and one need not be entirely misanthropic to see the cultivation of oppositional credentials as a prudent device for self-advancement (among many other things, of course).

The same point can be made the other way round, as it were, by examining the fate of intellectuals who have become too closely tied to policy processes for their own good, at least insofar as their intellectual reputation is concerned. The educationalist Philippe Meirieu recounts how his sustained collaboration under Lionel Jospin’s prime ministership with Socialist Ministers of Education Claude Allègre (1997–2000) and Jack Lang (2000–2002) sent his standing among his peers into freefall:

My move into the political sphere has proved disastrous in more than one sense [...]. I have, for many people, gone from the status of an intellectual reference point to that of an ideologue, a polemicist, or even simply “Allègre’s puppet”.

I am convinced that the fact of having accepted institutional responsibilities has been the determining factor in this disaffection. Traditionally, teachers are distrustful of those who get engaged in and support the development of a policy; they find it easier to identify with those who opt for the side of resistance and opposition. They think that the proper academic posture is that of critical elevation, of distance with regard to decision-makers that allows one to exercise the function of impertinence that the French cherish so much. People generally think that you need a lot of courage to say no. [...] That's clearly true when you're facing up to pressure from the powers-that-be, to prejudices, fashions and, *a fortiori*, all forms of totalitarianism. But I believe that, for intellectuals and academics, you also need a certain amount of courage to say: "Yes ... yes, I'll sign up, that's what I support." It's even, in many ways, the height of nonconformism. (Meirieu & Le Bars 2001, pp. 35–36)

Meirieu recounts in the same book his doctrinal disagreements with Régis Debray (as an educationalist promoting a "socio-cultural" and pupil-centred approach to pedagogy, Meirieu was accused by some on the self-styled "republican" pole of educational debate of diluting cultural standards in education).<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, one is struck in reading the passage above by the similarities between the experiences of Meirieu and those of Debray himself. Debray's political memoirs recount how his experience as full-time advisor to President Mitterrand over much of the 1980s – notwithstanding his own ambivalence about this – was seldom seen as adding an extra dimension to his reflection, and was often seen as simply disqualifying that reflection (see e.g. Debray 1996). It was perhaps in part due to this experience that, when Debray and Meirieu met to discuss their differences, rather to Meirieu's surprise, Debray was prepared to listen and learn, rather than simply to assert and condemn (Meirieu & Le Bars 2001, pp. 72–74).

It goes without saying that intellectuals must get involved in politics. It sometimes seems to go without saying that intellectuals must not get too closely involved in the policy process. Why might this be? In a very different context, Ian Maclean (1993) has studied the shifts that made a notion like "policy" conceivable at all over the early modern period (from Machiavelli through Justus Lipsius to Hobbes). Prior to these shifts, a ruler's actions were seen as a direct emanation of his moral disposition, or "habitus" in the Aristotelian sense. The key attribute of this moral disposition was Prudence, insofar as, again for Aristotle, "Prudence is the only form of goodness which is peculiar to a ruler".<sup>5</sup> Policy in the modern sense could only be conceived when a course of action could, as it were, be detached from the moral disposition of the ruler, stated in neutral terms and thus assessed in its own right as an artifice selected from among other artifices designed to achieve defined objectives. Maclean argues that the direct association of political action with a moral disposition constituted an "obstacle" to the emergence of "policy" in its modern sense (1993, p. 18). Now one might contend, it seems to me, to follow a rather uncontrolled analogy, that the types of politics to which French intellectuals gravitated over the twentieth century were those that could be seen directly to express a certain moral disposition or habitus. Clearly, this disposition was seldom one of Aristotelian "Prudence", and was closer to the kind of a priori oppositionalism described above (Looseley speaks of an "instinctively oppositional mind-set": 1995, p. 85). Such political moves, while occasionally no doubt disastrous, could be seen as salutary and necessary insofar as they place on the political agenda through public controversy issues that a political class would rather ignore. However, they evinced an important limitation.

A classic example, to remain within the domain of cultural policy, would be Francis Jeanson's resonant denunciation in 1968 of Malraux's policy of cultural democratization and



his evocation of the vast “non-public” represented by those whom it was unlikely ever to touch. This was an accurate diagnosis, and phrased in such a way that it could readily chime with the period’s oft-affirmed “politics of desire” (hence its place in the famous “Villeurbanne declaration” of May 1968: Jeanson *et al.* 2002 [1968], p. 71). When it came to framing realistic policy measures to address the situation, however, it was difficult to retain the same resonance (Looseley describes the text of the declaration as a “curious hybrid”: 1995, p. 44). Indeed the notion of a “policy of desire” seems, in English, rather more incongruous (the French “politique” allows the two notions to be run together and thus not to jar with each other). “Policy” as an intellectual object seems altogether less conducive to the untrammelled ostentation of high moral conscience. It is in this sense less gratifying for public intellectuals. It requires, as it were, a certain suspension of the immediately “expressive” inclinations of their disposition in order to be considered as a quasi-technical artifice statable in neutral terms and designed to take its place in a crowded field of other such policies and forces, with unpredictable side-effects or unintended consequences. Olivier Donnat, for example, a policy analyst at the Ministry of Culture, described in 1991 how well-meaning endeavours to attract fractions of a “non-public” to cultural institutions have often backfired in a number of ways. Attempts to bring in audiences from different social backgrounds are liable to have little impact on overall attendance figures as more established audiences are driven away (amongst other things, the mechanisms of social distinction analyzed by Bourdieu are obdurate and deep-seated in the cultural field). Attempts aimed at increasing overall attendances are liable to reinforce the preponderance of higher social classes among audiences, insofar as these constitute the densest pool of potential attenders in which to publicize performances (cf. Donnat 2002 [1991], pp. 142–143). None of this necessarily invalidates Jeanson’s call to arms (indeed, Jeanson was one of the very rare intellectuals prepared to get involved not just in the framing but also in the very implementation of policy, by taking on from 1967 the directorship of the *House of Culture* at Chalon; Jeanson 2002 [1971]). It does suggest, however, what is involved in a move from a classic “tribune-based” function of the intellectual (pronouncing resonantly from a raised platform – cf. the Latin, *tribunal* – on issues of public relevance) to an involvement in the refractory and often perverse world of policy. It seems at least conceivable (and this is just a hypothesis) that the impatience of the public intellectual to (be seen to) pursue a moral mission and to declaim this in sonorous terms might constitute an “obstacle” in its turn to a more alienating and less gratifying engagement with the artifices of policy.

It is true that over the last two or three decades, the “purely” oppositional intellectual has become less exclusively dominant in France. The discredit of radical “leftism” and the international communist movement that so marked the late 1970s in France opened a space for a more assertive reformist and liberal seam of French intellectuals. Such figures have congregated notably around reviews like *Le Débat* and *Esprit*, or, on the right, around *Commentaire*. In a sense, they have projected themselves in opposition to the a priori oppositionalism described above, describing themselves less as radical critics than as “competent guides” in a context of “anti-totalitarianism” and “intellectual democracy” (Pierre Nora, in Lepape 1990). They have certainly not, as is sometimes suggested, simply effaced more systemically critical intellectuals from the scene (one might cite, among such figures who have worked on the interface between culture and politics, important thinkers like Pierre Bourdieu or Jacques Rancière). They have, however, inevitably spoken in a language that is less incompatible with reformist government. Gérard Noiriel has even categorized such figures as “intellectuals of government” (2005, pp. 103–199). This seems to me to be somewhat tendentious

(indeed, the term oscillates in Noiriel's account between a useful analytic term and a term of denigration for intellectuals of whom he disapproves).<sup>6</sup> For simply to take up a reformist or liberal position within the intellectual field, or even to mix with certain political figures, is not in itself equivalent to participating in the process of government.

### Intellectuals in the Policy Process

Nevertheless, as indicated above, a number of French public intellectuals have become more or less involved in policy processes affecting the cultural domain over the Fifth Republic. Whilst this may have represented for some a degree of nonconformism along the lines suggested by Meirieu, one should not necessarily think of this as some kind of abnegation. Kingdon distinguishes three incentives for "policy entrepreneurs" to become involved in the policy process: material and personal career incentives; "purposive" incentives (the promotion of values or an ideology in which one believes); and "solidary" incentives (attracting what Kingdon calls "policy groupies" who "simply like the game", and who "enjoy being at or near the seat of power [and] enjoy being part of the action") (2003, p. 123).<sup>7</sup> Material incentives seem a pertinent consideration in many respects for their absence in the present context (though this may well warrant closer inspection in some cases). "Purposive" incentives, as far as French public intellectuals are concerned, would seem to be a generally evident necessary condition of their involvement in the policy process. But it may be worth dwelling a little more on the notion of "solidary" interests. Ory and Sirinelli note how those communist intellectuals who had most difficulty severing their links with the party were those who had been most involved in the party apparatus (1992 [1986], p. 186). Their affective investment in this apparatus, which they had, so to speak, introjected so that it constituted the core of their self-conception, made their departure into an existential crisis rather than an intellectual decision. Other less intense examples also suggest that the apparatus of policy-making can be more subjectively involving, and indeed gratifying, than it may appear from the outside (whence it may look, in Matthew Arnold's phrase, like mere "machinery"). Laurent Gayme describes the Cultural Commission of the Sixth Plan (1969–1971) as a "veritable structure of sociability" (1995, p. 67), and this is confirmed by accounts of the informal socio-intellectual networks forming around the Ministry's research unit in the years following the Sixth Plan (see e.g. Dosse 2002, pp. 443–462). Certainly, such "solidary" incentives can cloud as well as invigorate judgement. Régis Debray evokes self-disparagingly his inveterate desire to be "dans le coup" (where the action is), and the self-dispersion to which this led him over the 1980s (1996).

A number of public intellectuals in France have thus become involved in the policy process despite the general censure that has often been attached to such moves, and they have done this for a range of complex reasons. Indeed, one of the most prominent and singular of French intellectuals, André Malraux, became France's first Minister for Culture, and played a major part in "inventing" the cultural policy that became institutionalized through the country's first Ministry for Cultural Affairs. However, Malraux's case is fairly well known even outside France, and so I will concentrate in what follows on other less familiar developments.<sup>8</sup>

Some intellectuals seem to have become enmeshed fairly unproblematically in the policy process. Vincent Dubois has described a period during the 1960s that was marked by a "planning utopia" (2003, p. 26), when the higher echelons of the State administration looked to develop public policies directly informed by "scientific" expertise. This was

promoted particularly through the peculiarly French institution of “The Plan”, a then powerful advisory body officially set off from government as such, but supposed to inform the policy of government and other institutions by indicating the means for its “rationalisation” and “modernisation”. The fledgling Ministry of Culture looked to attach itself to this movement both in order to legitimate its as yet uncertain existence and to secure extra funding for its projects. In this way, principally through their participation in those commissions of the Fourth and Fifth Plans dedicated to cultural policy, a number of social scientists were drawn into the development of policy. Some of these could be described as public intellectuals. The prime example would probably be Joffre Dumazedier, the president of the popular education movement “Peuple et Culture” and generally seen at the time as the leading expert on the “sociology of leisure”. Dumazedier’s major discursive achievement was to pioneer and consolidate the acceptance of a broadly conceived notion of “cultural development” as an adjunct to the established categories of “economic” and “social” development, and as a proper object for governmental concern.<sup>9</sup> It is true that the notion ran counter to Malraux’s insistence on a more restrictive understanding of culture, but the category would in due course be taken up not just by the French Ministry of Culture (it would become a guiding notion for the Duhamel administration between 1971 and 1973), but also internationally (notably via UNESCO).

The collaboration of academic social scientists would become an enduring component of the development of French cultural policy due in large part to the work of Augustin Girard. Having collaborated with researchers in his role as a *rapporteur* for the Plan, Girard set up in 1963 a dedicated research unit at the Ministry of Culture, which he would subsequently direct for thirty years. I have suggested elsewhere how this unit (now called the *Département des Etudes, de la Prospective et des Statistiques* (DEPS)) became the prime mover in the fostering of a highly developed cultural policy research ecology in France. Antoine Hennion describes it as playing a “decisive” role in mobilizing researchers around particular themes or programmes, and gaining a position as a “privileged interlocutor” for academic researchers in their relations with “political powers and the State with regard to cultural questions” (1996, pp. 3, 5). It allowed, as Jean-Louis Fabiani has put it, researchers, administrators and cultural agents to “co-produce” over time a set of intellectual “tools” for the critical understanding of cultural policy issues (Fabiani *et al.* 2003, p. 310).<sup>10</sup> It has provided, as it were, a niche in which particularly acute forms of cultural policy expertise could develop (one might cite just a few names – Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe, Raymonde Moulin, Olivier Donnat, Pierre-Michel Menger, Antoine Hennion, Pierre Mayol, Jean-Louis Fabiani ...). However, the focus of the present article is not cultural policy expertise as such. It is, rather, the role of the public intellectual within cultural policy processes. And the figure of the public intellectual cannot be subsumed under that of the expert. On the contrary, there is a basic difference, and not infrequently an antagonism between the two (with, of course, predictable strategies for mutual belittlement). For public intellectuals can be defined, for better and for worse, by a will to move beyond their range of expertise, to throw themselves about and, in Sartre’s classic phrase, to “get involved in things that are none of their business” (Sartre 1972, p. 377). How have such figures been involved in policy processes?

The first point to be made is that the dividing line between the “expert” and the “public intellectual” is neither clear-cut nor stable. Particularly in such an elastic domain as the cultural field, where does expertise begin and end? Virtuosity in the statistical and sociological apprehension of the cultural field can co-exist with considerable naivety in the approach to cultural content – and vice-versa. Moreover, it is a peculiarity of French cultural policy

debate that certain specialist products of the Ministry's research unit have themselves become the objects of a widespread debate that has transcended specialist interpretation (a statistical synthesis published in 1990 sold 11,000 copies: Dubois 2003, p. 28). Finally, the role of the Ministry's research unit is not best understood as that of a well-oiled supplier of up-to-the-minute evidence dovetailing neatly with the demands of government. It has tolerated and even nurtured – sometimes against the inclinations of government – considerably more refractory and contrary approaches to policy engagement.

I have studied some of these at considerable length elsewhere (Ahearne 2004), and so will just briefly evoke them here. The work for Pierre Bourdieu's classic study from 1966 uncovering the sociological determinants of art appreciation, *The Love of Art* (Bourdieu & Darbel 1991), was partially sponsored by Girard (Poirrier 1997, pp. 31–32). It seems that the research itself, at the time, met largely with bemusement and indifference on the part of policy-makers (Poirrier 1997, pp. 31–32), though its subsequent influence has been such that it has become a classic reference point in policy debate, and can even appear as mere "common sense". Interestingly, at the time, Bourdieu would omit any mention of his contacts at the Ministry when the book was published, while Girard himself was apparently obliged to conceal the publication from his superiors (Moulin 1993, p. 69). Although Bourdieu at the time was effectively a sociologist of culture rather than a public intellectual as such, this work clearly played a role in his accession to a more public stage. Similarly, Michel de Certeau was able to develop the groundwork for his classic 1980 study *The Practice of Everyday Life* through a succession of formal and semi-formal arrangements with Girard's unit over the 1970s, at a time when the prevailing neo-liberal government would have been hostile to his agenda of broadening cultural policy programmes to integrate a wider range of practices. Again, Certeau's studies have since become a classic reference point in cultural policy debate. The point I want to underline here is that engagement in public policy processes does not necessarily imply total absorption into a State conceived as a homogeneous entity. A point made by Kingdon in reference to American politics could equally well be applied to the research unit at the Ministry of Culture: "Civil servants in locations like planning and evaluation offices continue to work on proposals of various kinds, keeping them ready for the opportunity that will be provided by a receptive administration to push the idea into prominence" (2003, p. 32). In other words, the labyrinth of the modern liberal State can be seen as holding potential interstices, maintained by different kinds of agents, within which public intellectuals can on occasion access resources and pursue agendas that can contradict or at least unsettle official governmental agendas of the time.

At other times, public intellectuals have looked to take a more prominent role than that of working covertly within the interstices of the system within a more or less long-term horizon. In the wake of May 1968, one even sees an effort to impose an official forum for policy deliberation that would rival that of the Ministry itself. This began with the Cultural Commission for the Sixth Plan (1969–1971), which took on a much more critical stance with regard to the State than the equivalent commissions of the Fourth and Fifth Plans (designed to cover the periods 1962–1965 and 1966–1970). This was driven in particular by the "Long-Term Group" of the commission, with input from intellectuals such as Joffre Dumazedier, Jean-Marie Domenach, Michel de Certeau, Pierre Bourdieu and Edgar Morin. Laurent Gayme has argued that the Commission could even be seen as a kind of "counter-ministry" (1995, p. 72). Interestingly, the propositions of the commission were at first positively received by the incoming administration of Jacques Duhamel, who found their reports conveniently fresh on their desks precisely at the moment they came into office.<sup>11</sup> One of the propositions

initially implemented was the creation of an advisory body called the Council for Cultural Development designed, as Gayme puts it, to perpetuate “the domination of intellectual and cultural networks” over policy (1995, p. 74) (the Council contained notably a lot of ex-members of the Cultural Commission for the Sixth Plan). Inevitably, however, relations between the Minister’s cabinet and the claims of what they saw as an unelected and unpredictable rival policy-framing forum grew increasingly strained, and the Council eventually dissolved itself in 1973 when it became clear that the more hardline minister Maurice Druon was simply sidelining them. Since then, public intellectuals have not been given a comparable public platform within the policy process itself. The Plan itself has also diminished very substantially in importance due to changes in the conduct of politics as a whole, and thus the milieu that allowed the Cultural Commission of the Sixth Plan to assume such prominence subsequently faded away.

This has not prevented intellectuals from setting up in a more autonomous way their own collective platforms in order to push particular policy agendas. I have already evoked the classic example of the “Villeurbanne declaration” from 1968, when the directors of the Houses of Culture collectively expressed their lack of confidence in Malraux’s resolutely top-down strategy for culture. More recently, Pierre Bourdieu looked over the 1990s self-consciously to institute federated platforms for intellectuals designed to promote forms of cultural “counter-policy”, organized around themes such as autonomy in publishing or the reform of the university (see Ahearne 2004, pp. 67–68). The difficulties that have beset such enterprises in the long term derive from the individualism (or spirit of independence) that characterizes autonomous intellectuals as such (cf. Noiriel 2005, pp. 203, 234–241).

It is also worth bearing in mind here the capacity of the traditional “commission” assigned to an intellectual to function as a public platform in sometimes unpredictable ways. A minister or even a president may ask an intellectual to head up a particular commission charged with looking into a particular topic. Such a commission will gather evidence, canvass opinion and come to a view. Sometimes that view will be grist to the minister’s mill, but sometimes the outcome will be less politically convenient. The commission may function a little bit like a “garbage can”, in the sense memorably assigned to the term by Cohen, March and Olsen (1972). All sorts of issues, agendas, interests and sundry ideas may be thrown into the mix, and what finally comes out when the lid is lifted off may reconfigure the political agenda in unpredictable ways. Example of such commissions presided by intellectuals that would repay closer study are those charged with looking into the educational curriculum by Pierre Bourdieu and Frédéric Gros (2002 [1989]) and by Edgar Morin (cf. 1999, pp. 9–11); that charged in 2002 with investigating the relations between television and violence headed by Blandine Kriegel (2003); that charged in 2001 with considering the provision of non-religiously inspired religious education in State schools by Régis Debray (2002), as well as the Commission on *laïcité* set up in 2003 by President Chirac on which Debray among others sat (Debray 2004).

Such examples underline the fact that one should not, when trying to assess the input of French public intellectuals into public policies for culture, limit one’s research to the domains administered by the Ministry of Culture as such. It should have become clear over this article that the domain of education constitutes a fundamentally important site for the articulation of policies affecting the culture that is transmitted to succeeding generations. Certainly, the Ministry of Education in France has its own experts and technicians, and Philippe Meirieu notes how the great majority of educational reports are produced via these “in-house” channels (Meirieu & Le Bars 2001, p. 144). Nevertheless, one is struck by the capacity

of those reports written by public intellectuals whose authority transcends local expertise (Condorcet, Langevin and Wallon, Bourdieu and Gros ...) to become enduring reference points in subsequent policy reflection (cf. also van Zanten 2004, p. 72). And insofar as these reports focus not just on specialized knowledge, but on what Langevin and Wallon call "general culture" (Langevin & Wallon 2004 [1946], pp. 20–21), they can be seen as important cultural policy statements.

Policy experts are prone to castigate the "generalities" contained in the reflection of public intellectuals on public policy. Intellectuals themselves seem perpetually frustrated by the reception of their work by politicians: their ideas are misunderstood, distorted, misleadingly packaged, binned, etc. They suffer perhaps from what Robert Damien calls a "Syracuse complex": like Plato in Syracuse, they want to derive directly from ideal principles a blueprint for an ideal republic (Damien suggests that the inductive empiricism of a Machiavelli or a Bacon provides a more modest starting point) (Damien 2003, p. 9). I think that both of the principles of dissatisfaction outlined above need to be reframed. Intellectuals' "generalities" should not necessarily be seen as vague notions that need to be firmed up by expert knowledge. One can just as legitimately see expert knowledge as sectorally bound information that needs to be integrated into a more general context for its implications and relative importance to become apparent, and one could see public intellectuals in their overhastily derided traditional role as those best equipped to do this. And while it is important to take account of the limitations of their influence on policy development, such influence as they do exert can best be appreciated in terms of a dispersed and long-term framework (rather than simply observing whether this or that report or proposition was accepted by this or that minister). There is not space to pursue these two notions in the present article.<sup>12</sup> It is enough simply to have indicated in this section the kinds of incentives and institutional channels through which public intellectuals have become involved in cultural policy development during the Fifth Republic.

### Intellectuals as the Objects of Cultural Policy?

I have considered in this article French public intellectuals in their quasi-traditional role as external critics of State cultural policy (speaking truth to power – though I have suggested that other less noble considerations may also apply). I have also considered the ways in which some intellectuals have become involved in policy development of one kind or another, and the tensions and sometimes abdication that this can produce as regards intellectual autonomy. I will conclude with some brief remarks on intellectuals as a potential object of cultural policy. We have already seen a negative manifestation of this. A key objective of the French Communist Party's cultural policy was to rally intellectuals to its cause so that it could present itself as the "Party of French Intelligence". When the soon-to-be German Ambassador Otto Abetz arrived in Paris in 1940, he is reputed to have said that to take control of the *Nouvelle Revue Française* (a leading intellectual journal) would be as important as taking control of a Ministry (Ory & Sirinelli 1992 [1986], p. 134). Clearly, public intellectuals constitute a potentially influential though unruly element that politicians can look to bring under control through their cultural policies. But we can also conceive of public intellectuals (or at least the resources required for public intellectual debate) as potential objects of cultural policy in a rather different way. Régis Debray has noted how the current cultural climate, dominated by the demands of image, instantaneity, rapid response and limited attention span (he calls it the "videosphere"), is inhospitable to the

public intellectual. In Debray's account, the public intellectual evolved in a climate where the dominant medium was print and the dominant institution the education system (the "graphosphere"). In such a milieu – and Debray is self-confessedly looking at this through a veil of nostalgia – complex chains of reasoning and broader frames of historical reference could more easily be unfolded in the public sphere (Debray 1991). Pierre Bourdieu argued in the 1990s that he found it virtually impossible to say anything worthwhile in the fora offered him by standard television channels (1998 [1996]). Are Bourdieu and Debray simply relics of a previous cultural technology, fish out of water condemned to mental asphyxia in the contemporary mediasphere? Or must we necessarily assume that technological progress equates with cultural progress? It seems eminently plausible that some kinds of technological progress, along with associated shifts in cultural and educational markets, facilitate as side-effects certain kinds of intellectual regression. It would seem an entirely appropriate objective for a cultural/educational policy to look to work against such side-effects. This has traditionally happened at the level of curriculum design, or in the public provision of dedicated media platforms for intellectual content of a kind that would be unfeasible in an unfettered cultural marketplace. By defending and building on such contested traditions in a policy environment that is, as Jim McGuigan puts it, "dominated by economic reason" (2004, p. 1), the kind of intellectual ecology can be sustained in which the interventions of public intellectuals can obtain an informed critical hearing. In this way, intellectuals would be not so much the direct objects of cultural policy (surely the kiss of death) as its indirect object.<sup>13</sup>

#### NOTES

1. Their definition in French runs as follows: "Dans notre ouvrage, l'intellectuel sera donc un homme du culturel, créateur ou médiateur, mis en situation d'homme du politique, producteur ou consommateur d'idéologie" (Ory & Sirinelli 1992 [1986], p. 10).
2. The committee's *Report on Public Instruction* was presented to the Assembly on 20 and 21 April 1792. A fuller exposition of Condorcet's educational policy thinking can be found in Condorcet (1994 [1791]).
3. It may be worth underlining that the principles I am isolating here combined in complex ways in the concrete existence of individual intellectuals. Both the psychologist Henri Wallon and the eminent physicist Paul Langevin were members of the French Communist Party. After many years of close association, Langevin had finally decided to join in 1944 (after, among other things, the execution of his son-in-law and the deportation to Auschwitz of his daughter, both communists) (Caute 1964, p. 156).
4. When one reads certain foundational texts of the "republican" tradition in French education, such as Condorcet (1994 [1791]), or Langevin and Wallon (2004 [1946]), one is struck by the somewhat artificial nature of recent divisions between "republicans" and "pedagogists" in French educational debates.
5. For Aristotle on "habitus", see *Nichomachean Ethics*, ii.4, 1105 b; and on the ruler's Prudence, *Politics*, iii.4.17–18, 1277 b (both cited by Maclean 1993, pp. 6, 10). I capitalize "Prudence" to distinguish it from its dominant sense of "caution" in contemporary English. The Greek term *phronesis* signifies "practical wisdom" or "common sense", and the term might also in such discussions carry the notion of foresight. Cf. *Nichomachean Ethics* (Aristotle 2004) notes at pages 150, 312. My thanks also to Ingrid de Smet for enlightenment.
6. For a discussion of such intellectuals in English, see e.g. Jennings (1997, pp. 75–79).

7. I engage much more fully with Kingdon's "multiple streams" model of the policy process in Ahearne (2006).
8. On Malraux's role in the "invention" of cultural policy, see Urfalino (2004 [1996], pp. 39–108). Urfalino also underlines the complementary and contrasting role of another intellectual, Malraux's friend Gaëtan Picon, in this process. For discussions of Malraux as minister in English, see Looseley (1995, pp. 33–48) and Lebovics (1999).
9. For an extended treatment of the relations between 1960s cultural policy and State planning (including the role of Dumazedier), see Dubois (1999, pp. 189–231). For Dumazedier's thinking on "cultural development", see e.g. Dumazedier and Ripert (2000 [1966]).
10. See also Ahearne (2004, pp. 10–11).
11. See the comments of Duhamel's cabinet director, Jacques Rigaud, in Duhamel (1993, p. 10).
12. For an extensive discussion of the two notions, see the reference in note 7 above.
13. For further indications regarding such an "ecology", see Ahearne (2004, p. 72).

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**Jeremy Ahearne**, Department of French, University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL, UK.  
Tel.: +44 (0)24 7652 3331; E-mail: j.n.aharne@warwick.ac.uk