



# Nordic Cultural Institute

Copenhagen

## **Cultural Policy in France Since 1959: arm's length, or 'up close and personal?' – by David Looseley**

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### **1. Preface**

Before I begin, I would like to clarify my approach to the subject of French cultural policy. I am not French, nor do I work in cultural administration in any form. I am neither political scientist nor sociologist. What I am is an academic working in the area of French studies, the main object of which is of course France itself. As such, I generally adopt a cultural-historical perspective in my research field, which I define as the contemporary history of French cultural policies, practices and institutions. What my perspective brings to the study of cultural policy, therefore, is a concern not just with administrative and distributive structures but with the importance the arts have been accorded in France for several hundred years. In his paper for this Tribunal, Kevin Mulcahy evokes the French state's 'strong sense of cultural mission' (Tribunal Reader, 1999, 255), while a French writer on the subject, Jean-Michel Djian, starts from the fearlessly unequivocal view that 'cultural policy is a French invention' (Djian, 1996, 11). Given this importance, my research particularly emphasizes discourses and debates, how central government and other interested parties have constructed and argued about culture's place in the national community.

In this paper, I want to address these questions of discourse and debate by paying particular attention, in keeping with the Tribunal's concerns, to the absence of the arm's length principle in France, using this absence as a guide through the history of the Ministry of Culture since its creation in 1959. However, I also want to argue, throughout the paper but in the second part especially, that this absence needs to be qualified, at least to a degree.

### **2. The absence of the arm's length principle**

In France, that 'strong sense of cultural mission' has traditionally taken the form of direct state intervention. No form of independent or quasi-independent agency exists comparable to the Arts Councils of the United Kingdom for example. And even after more than a decade of decentralization, (1) central government still intervenes energetically in the arts, and the Minister of Culture, currently Catherine Trautmann, still wields a good deal of power, with a budget for this

year of some 15.6 billion francs (around £1.5 billion, or 15 billion Danish Kroner). (2) Throughout the Ministry's forty-year history, this power has been intensified by two ministers in particular, André Malraux and Jack Lang, each of whom ran the Ministry for approximately a decade.

The main reason for the prominence of the state is the tradition of centralism dating back to the Revolution of 1789 and the *ancien régime*. Under the monarchy, kings were patrons of the arts for the sake of royal prestige. But after 1789, the revolutionary government seized the works of art and heritage formerly owned by Church and Crown and consequently found itself faced with the problem of what to do with them. It opted to preserve and open access to them, as important means of establishing a unified nation of citizens.

To achieve this, an administrative infrastructure was built up throughout the 19th century which was to form the core of today's Ministry of Culture. The activity that infrastructure was concerned with was defined narrowly, as the fine arts. During the Third Republic (1870-1940), the state saw its job as mainly to preserve France's heritage in the fine-arts and provide specialist training in them. Where new works were concerned--state commissions for example--it was content to avoid extremes and be guided by the appropriate Academies and the High Council for Fine Arts created in 1875 (Mesnard, 1990, 51). This was because the production and consumption of new works of art, in the here and now, were seen as essentially private activities, in which state intervention was undesirable. This was, then, an arm's length philosophy of sorts, embedded in the liberal ideology of republicanism. The disadvantage with it, at least in the view of some, was that liberalism simply meant neglect: neglect of the contemporary arts (particularly in their more challenging forms, which were often sacrificed to academicism), and neglect of the entire problematic of cultural inequality.

When De Gaulle came to power in 1958, establishing the Fifth Republic of today, two important things changed. First, a new constitution reduced the powers of Parliament and increased those of government and President. Second, in 1959 De Gaulle set up a full government department for the arts, under one of France's most famous novelists and intellectuals, André Malraux. What these changes meant for the cultural sector was a new age of central-government voluntarism. Two new duties of the state were added to the original ones of preservation and training: encouragement to contemporary 'creation', the production and dissemination of new works; and democratization, putting an end to cultural inequalities by taking the arts to everyone.

This basic trilogy--preservation (and training), creation, democratization--was the cornerstone of what became known under Malraux as the state's 'cultural action'. And it remains fundamental to the Ministry to this day, albeit in somewhat different form. Since Malraux's departure in 1969, there have been four Presidents and thirteen Culture Ministers; but the Malraux trilogy has afforded a basic continuity. The one minister who, for a while, looked set to revolutionize it was the Socialist Jack Lang (1981-6; 1988-93), under President Mitterrand. But retrospectively, Lang can be seen more as Malraux's heir, initiating a second decade of vigorous intervention (Looseley, 1995).

What are the precise features of this interventionism? When in 1988 the Council of Europe adopted France as the first case study in its European evaluation programme, it was prompted to comment: 'It has been said that the French system is, ultimately, a "cultural monarchy". This means that after gathering their information, where and how they wish, Ministers, whoever they might be, define their options and take their decisions in sovereign fashion, in a way according to the principles of "enlightened despotism"' (Wangermée and Gournay, 1988, 41). First, as the report points out, Parliament makes relatively little substantive impact on cultural policy. At the annual budget

debate, for example, its interventions are largely a matter of form, though it does exert considerably more influence on government bills, by means of amendments. Second, the Minister is not theoretically constrained by any outside body. Not only is there no equivalent of the Arts Council but, as the report again outlines with a hint of astonishment (pp.31-2 and p.51), there is no overarching consultative structure representative of the arts world either (though the Social and Economic Council is sometimes consulted on cultural matters). This assessment needs to be softened somewhat, as there is in reality a network of mostly sectoral counterweights to central power. When it comes to artistic choices, for example, as with acquisitions in the visual arts or distribution of aid to new films, the Ministry consults specialist commissions, councils or other types of body whose members have expertise in the appropriate field, though the balance between state experts and others varies from body to body. A growing number of permanent councils with specific consultative remits has also been set up, such as the High Council for the French Language, The High Council for Dance, the National Council for Scientific, Technical and Industrial Culture, and so on. (3) Furthermore, since 1947 France's economic development has been organized on a system of five-year 'Plans', drawn up by independent commissions and in which, from the early 1960s, culture has been included in one form or another. Some of these Plans, most notably the Sixth (1971-5), have had a significant impact on public policy as we shall later, though it must be said that their influence has weakened since the late 1960s. What ministers can also do--though it is up to them--is set up ad hoc commissions on particular topics, some of whose members are drawn from civil society. On coming to office, Lang immediately commissioned a large number of reports: on cinema, books, the heritage, regional cultures, and so on. The Centrist Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy (1995-97) set up a major commission under Jacques Rigaud on the whole future of cultural policy; and Catherine Trautmann has recently received substantial advice from a commission on pop music (*les musiques actuelles*). But such reports can also be ignored, and quite often are.

Two other factors have added to this personalization of power. One is the growing trend for Presidents to involve themselves in culture, notably by initiating major building projects. This has sometimes led to a complicity between President and Culture Minister, whose combined efforts can work against the restraining influence of Ministers of Finances or even Prime Ministers. Malraux, a personal friend of De Gaulle, was the only one of his ministers to remain in the same post throughout the entire presidency; and when De Gaulle resigned in April 1969, Malraux did too. This proximity to the President allowed Malraux to launch his ambitious (though not very successful) programme of regional arts centres known as *Maisons de la culture* (Houses of Culture). Under Mitterrand too, Lang benefited from a special relationship with the President which gave him longevity and enabled him to achieve an historic doubling of the Culture budget in his first year.

The other factor is the weight, personality and discourse of Ministers themselves. Malraux's and Lang's stature owed much to their cultural legitimacy as individuals: Malraux as an esteemed novelist and hero of the Resistance; Lang as founder of the countercultural Nancy Theatre Festival in the 1960s and controversial director of a national theatre in the 1970s. In keeping with this legitimacy, both ministers developed a charismatic rhetoric which somehow lifted cultural policy above normal political life and validated their policies. Malraux's conception of culture was unashamedly aesthetic and statist. Concerned as a novelist with the absurdity of the human condition in a godless universe, he believed that the immortality of 'the major works of humanity' (as the Ministry's mission statement put it) was the only spiritual salvation available. The policy which flowed from this was the state-driven democratization of high culture. Hence the *Maisons de la culture*, defined and parachuted into the regions by the Ministry. In *The Politics of Fun* (Looseley, 1995, 40), I sum up this philosophy, a little unfairly perhaps, in the words of one of

Malraux's collaborators: 'Put a peasant from the Corrèze (region) in front of a painting by Miró'. No need here for mediation of any sort, either between the peasant and the painting, or between the state and a Maison. Once 'democratized' in this way, this shared culture will buttress national identity against the onslaught of America's 'dream-factories'.

Lang borrowed this discourse of redemption through art but inflected it towards the restorative powers of culture, a faith he had evolved after his experiences at the Nancy Festival. In his view, culture can invigorate a nation which has fallen dormant after years of economic recession and conservatism. A society which gives individuals the chance to be creative, and encounter the creativity of others, will be better armed to beat the recession, simply because people will feel uplifted by unleashed potential and new ideas, a new sense of engagement with the world. What this discourse led to in policy terms will be fairly familiar to those who have followed cultural policy in Britain since May 1997. First, the belief that cultural activity cannot be meaningfully separated from economics, that it is a crucial factor in a post-industrial, leisure-oriented economy and should therefore be encouraged by government. From this flowed new policies for the cultural industries and a new validation of spending on the arts in terms of the financial returns they can yield. Second, the idea that culture in this instrumental sense can no longer be defined as simply high culture but encompasses practically any form of representational, creative activity which people enjoy doing or watching others do: cartoons, rock music, rap, graffiti, cuisine, circus. This became known as Lang's 'everything is cultural' philosophy.

Ministers, then, if they have the right temperament and are in office long enough, can largely impose their own ideology as a basis for policy. To those used to arm's length or federal systems, the perils of such an 'up close and personal' form of state intervention may seem obvious: opportunities for excessive state interference in artistic freedom, a sense of dispossession in the regions, and so on. And these certainly were among the grudges aired in the great upheaval of May 1968, the first major challenge to the Fifth Republic in general and to the Ministry in particular. But in a country which prides itself on its cultural achievements and has 400 years of centralism behind it, the negatives are not automatically seen in the same way.

First, the arts have been better financed, regulated and protected during the Fifth Republic than previously, to the envy of many arts people in other countries. Second, the fear of political interference in artistic freedom has generally proved unfounded and censorship has been progressively relaxed over the decades. Few today, therefore, challenge the Ministry in these terms, though there are notable exceptions which I shall return to. Indeed, many artists have over the years felt much more comfortable working with a voluntarist state than with a town council. This is because both they and the Ministry have instinctively thought of local government as instrumentalist, aesthetically and politically conservative, and generally ill-equipped to deal with cultural matters. This vexed issue came to a head in the late 1960s over the Maisons de la culture and other decentralized establishments, some of which clashed with their local authorities over aesthetic or political issues and, in one or two cases, were municipalized or lost an esteemed director. A much more recent example is the Châteauvallon affair of 1996. Here the National Front Mayor of Toulon sacked the director of a long-established cultural centre, allegedly because of the subversive nature of its programme. The director's natural recourse for support was the state, and he duly obtained it, at least from the Culture Minister Douste-Blazy. More generally, it is frequently said that local authorities are more concerned with culture for its impact on elections, tourism and inward investment, than for its own sake.

A further advantage of direct intervention is the ability to get things done. Here, the key figure is the President. Constitutionally, the French system has been described as a semi-presidential regime. The best illustration of this in the cultural field are the presidential grands projets, beginning with the Pompidou Centre. Aided and abetted by the then Minister of Cultural Affairs, Jacques Duhamel, President Pompidou railroaded through his project for a 20th-century museum and arts centre, particularly its controversial architecture by Piano and Rogers, despite the conservatism and resistance it encountered on all sides. This achievement became the model for Mitterrand's much more extensive and contentious programme of cultural buildings in the 1980s, which included the Louvre pyramid, the new national library, and the Bastille Opera where the President even chose the fabric of the seats.

Nevertheless, every silver lining has a cloud, and the view of state intervention held at local level, whether by town-councils, associations or community-arts workers, has sometimes been rather different. French Jacobinism after the Revolution smothered local cultures and regional identities in the name of a single national identity, and this has continued to influence, to a degree, how the state has been regarded locally. One criticism of Malraux's Maisons was that they imported a Parisian notion of aesthetic excellence and remained aloof from local amateur activities. A valid criticism as it happens since this was precisely their intention, Malraux being determined to prevent municipal parochialism from turning his 'cathedrals' of culture into handy premises for amateur dramatics and evening classes. As for Lang, although he began with talk of 'decolonizing' the provinces and recognizing regional identities, he too was soon accused of promoting a Parisian or international avant-garde, while the Presidential projects, most of them in Paris, were said (again accurately) to be draining resources away from the rest of the country.

Intellectuals, too, from time to time have maintained that when Culture ministers start having conceptions of culture, government aid is inevitably skewed, to the detriment of those whose work does not fit the grand scheme. Under Malraux, popular creative forms were not admitted among 'the major works of humanity', while under Lang and Mitterrand, there were those who complained of a Presidential style of architecture (the cube, the sphere, the pyramid), or that the young, the trendy or the outlandish were particularly favoured, though this is not in fact borne out by data on the apportionment of the Ministry's budget (Looseley, 1995, 240-1). Furthermore, Lang's 'everything is cultural' line caused France's culture wars in the late 1980s and early 1990s, based on the threat of cultural relativism which Lang, despite his anti-American reputation, was held to be endorsing by his willingness to accept youth tastes like rap and graffiti as authentically cultural.

Most of these criticisms were brought together in Marc Fumaroli's erudite but hyperbolic pamphlet of 1991, *The Cultural State: Essay on a Modern Religion*. Fumaroli reprimands the Ministry, but Lang in particular, for using culture as propaganda by turning the national heritage into Disney-style tourist attractions while elevating Americanized entertainments to the dignity of high culture. State intervention, he contended, has thus spawned a cultural relativism which is fatal to France's noble, republican humanism, and he looked back nostalgically to the arm's length adopted by the Third Republic. But, although the book caused a stir and sold well, this kind of attack has largely disappeared today, probably because in most people's minds Lang's excesses are occluded by his successes: in particular a greatly increased Culture budget, and the promotion of youth culture and festive events like the Fête de la musique which proved extremely popular and is now widely accepted. Today, Catherine Trautmann is introducing measures to promote techno and recognize the techno DJ as an artist, with scarcely an eyebrow being raised.

Yet this does not mean that there is no thrust for change at all. Fumaroli's book provoked a public debate which revealed other forms of dissatisfaction with state intervention and, I would argue, brought about a degree of self-questioning in the Ministry itself. Evidence of this is the report commissioned by Douste-Blazy from Jacques Rigaud in 1996, some of which Trautmann is now implementing. Although Fumaroli and Rigaud are poles apart, periodically attacking each other with barbed elegance in their successive publications, each in his way indicts the cultural state personified in Malraux and Lang, and each looks back with a degree of favour to the Third Republic. But while Fumaroli would be glad to see the current Ministry disappear altogether, Rigaud more feasibly recommends what he calls a 'refoundation' of cultural policy, the purpose being to set the existing state structure on new principles. This alternative looks back to a reading of cultural policy evolved in the late 1960s which, marking its difference from Malraux's cultural 'action', became known as cultural 'development'.

### 3. Cultural development and decentralization

(4) The model I have so far outlined, of policies driven by a hyperactive patron state, needs to be qualified to the extent that a parallel model has evolved (though without ever being properly implemented) which looks towards a degree of mediation between culture and state. Its roots lie in a well established popular education movement in France, which has been concerned to enhance workers' quality of life not only by democratizing access to ready-made high culture but also by encouraging amateur cultural and social activities of various kinds. This 'sociocultural' movement has traditionally been identified much more with the local--associations, trade-unions, town councils--than with the central. In the 1950s and early 1960s, it was also bound up with urbanization, which raised the question of how to provide 'sociocultural animation' (arts, sports and leisure activities, youth clubs, and so on) in the new residential estates springing up in towns and suburbs everywhere (Saez, in Perret and Saez, 1996, 30-31). In the late 1960s, it was marked by the strong cultural dimension of May 1968.

State centralism was the political expression of universalism. The New-Left ideology of May 1968, in rejecting centralism, rejected universalism too, in the name of a rediscovered particularism which in France had previously been associated with the Right. Hence an explosion of demands for the right to difference, to regional or ethnic identities, and to popular creativity. After Malraux's departure and a short interim period, the Centrist leader Jacques Duhamel became Minister for Cultural Affairs for 27 months in 1971, with Jacques Rigaud as head of his cabinet. Today, the Duhamel interlude is looked on as a period of relative liberalism in cultural affairs, largely because Duhamel's policies began to reflect at least some of these post-1968 concerns. To do this, he drew heavily on ideas concerning cultural development which had recently been voiced in the reports of the cultural commission of the Sixth Plan.

The Sixth Plan acted as a reasonably independent think-tank, formulating an alternative discourse to the Ministry's. In its first ten years, the Ministry had largely turned itself into a department for the professional arts. But the Sixth Plan Commission was more concerned with the creative activities of ordinary people. Today's French citizens, it argued, have become alienated and powerless in the era of urbanization and of mass production, mass leisure and mass communications, all of which have turned them into passive spectators of their own lives. For this, the Commission prescribed a good dose of culture, much as Malraux had done. Where the two parted company was that the Commission rejected the view that democratizing high culture is the only response to this alienation. There is also a need for autonomy, self-expression, and communication, a need to

participate in society yet stand back from it. And, reading between the lines of the Commission's statements, it becomes clear that in this respect Malraux's approach is deemed to have made matters worse. It has alienated those who are not equipped to decipher the codes of high culture; and it is premised on the idea of the citizen as a mere consumer of work done by professionals. Cultural development, on the other hand, implies that individuals and communities should become the agents of cultural life themselves. Especially important is self-expression, amateur creativity. This, the Commission maintained, is a vital dimension of citizenship, a notion introduced in the Sixth Plan and which remains a key concept today.

To implement these proposals, the state clearly cannot act alone. As the Council for Cultural Co-operation report puts it, 'The Sixth Plan preferred to highlight, beyond institutions, the part played by mediators and community-arts workers (animateurs). It states that it does not have confidence in the efficacy of direct state action: "cultural development", it says, "involves the recognition by government of the indispensable role as <intermediaries> (relais) played by local authorities (Communes and Departments), works committees, and cultural, youth and workers' education associations"' (Wangermée and Gournay, 1988, 35). This stress on intermediaries represents a kind of arm's length principle, though still of course within a statist structure. But what is particularly interesting here is the fact that the Commission sees the absence of the principle as damaging not to professional artistic freedom, as conventional wisdom would have it, but to amateur creativity.

As Minister, Duhamel took cultural development on board in a number of ways. His guiding principle was the need for a government-wide responsibility for culture. Since cultural development is about ordinary people being creative and fulfilled in all aspects of their lives, all ministries, and all other tiers of government, have a part to play in it. His best known initiative in this regard was the setting up of an interministerial structure, the Cultural Intervention Fund (FIC), which for over a decade provided pump-priming for experimental projects which could elicit complementary funding from other ministries, local authorities or other bodies. But most significant among Duhamel's policies from the point of view of this paper was his contribution to decentralization.

At this stage, the general devolution of funds and powers to local and regional authorities in France was still some years off. Under Malraux, decentralization had, as we saw, only meant setting up regional facilities like the Maisons de la culture and expecting local authorities to share the cost. Duhamel did not change this pattern dramatically; but, as a liberal and a moderate who believed in dialogue rather than direct state action, he took it several steps forward. Through the FIC, he encouraged mediation projects in local communities, social housing, the workplace, leisure facilities and most of all schools, where creative-arts provision was poor. He also introduced the crucial notion of contractualization: a concerted programme of projects and funding agreed between central government and a partner. A charter was signed between the Ministry and the state television authority; and three-year subvention contracts with decentralized national theatre centres were introduced to stabilize their income. But his most important idea was the introduction of contractual agreements between central government and local authorities based on an agreed plan drawn up locally, though the first 'cultural charters' were actually implemented by a later Minister, Michel Guy, before being extended considerably by Lang in the form of 'cultural development conventions'. Duhamel further assisted this process by developing the network of regional offices of the Ministry known as DRACs (Regional Directorates of Cultural Affairs) which, with 'deconcentrated' funds and powers from Paris, have the task of advising and encouraging local authorities and acting as intermediaries in negotiating and implementing the contracts. (5)

One last initiative of significance to this paper was his setting up, on the Commission's advice, of an independent consultative body, the Cultural Development Council, made up of members of civil society, including several of the more notable participants in the Sixth Plan Commission. This is the closest the Fifth Republic has come to an outright arm's length policy, and it is the first and only time it has done so. Indeed, the episode demonstrates that, despite the examples I have quoted, Duhamel's radicalism should not be overstated. For a start, he was not in office long enough to implement many of the changes recommended by the Plan. Furthermore, the recession of 1973 and the coming of a new President in 1974 with different priorities, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, swept away any chance of implementing a root-and-branch reform. But most importantly perhaps, neither Duhamel nor the Commission ever envisaged a full arm's length regime, for both remained committed to the role of the state. Although Duhamel believed in playing a more modest role than Malraux and in empowering other agencies, this belief only went so far, as his dealings with the Cultural Development Council illustrate. The Council began to have ideas above its station, wanting to continue the Commission's work on a permanent basis and help implement its proposals. But Duhamel made it abundantly plain that he had no intention of power-sharing, which caused a certain coldness between them. His successor, Maurice Druon, then chose to ignore the Council completely, prompting it to resign en masse. The initiative has never been repeated. Even Lang, himself a Council member whose early discourse was very much modelled on the Sixth Plan's, made no attempt to revive it, preferring to deploy his ministerial powers unimpeded. Nor did he even pursue a full-blooded cultural-development policy for long, slipping back into supporting the professional arts, along with the cultural industries, the 'grand projects' and, in his second term of office, heritage. It is true that the Socialist government of which he was a member did introduce historic legislation for administrative decentralization which devolved significant funds and powers to local and regional authorities. But, ironically, Lang was among a handful of ministers who successfully fought off full devolution in their own areas.

#### **4. National policy today and tomorrow**

So where does its forty-year history leave cultural policy today in France? Clearly, it remains dominated by a patron state. But, equally clearly, this is no longer the complete picture. First, although the Ministry still helps shape local policies via contractualization, the local, departmental and regional authorities together account for half of public expenditure on culture, while the Ministry alone accounts for only 19.6 percent. (6) In parallel, the DRACs serve as valuable, informed intermediaries between central and local governments and they enjoy, at least theoretically, a degree of decisional and financial autonomy, though it is often said that greater clarity and coordination are needed here. As for the contracts policy, it was not universally popular at first, partly because it was regarded as a clever way of avoiding real decentralization and keeping a fatherly eye on local affairs. In the run-up to the 1986 general election, the Right even undertook to abolish it. Since then, however, contracts have become widely accepted and have brought about major change, since they have helped to establish a relationship of partnership rather than subordination between central and local governments, and to boost cultural spending and planning at local level. Today, local and regional authorities are treated much more as equals by the Ministry, having themselves become more adept at negotiating with it. One commentator therefore describes French cultural policy today as a 'co-production' (Saez, in Saez and Perret, p.33).

A second change, since the beginning of the 1980s, is business sponsorship, which is growing though it still plays a lesser role than in the USA and UK as it has never really been a French tradition. A third and much more significant player are the ever-growing cultural industries,



particularly as multimedia technologies take off in France, albeit a little belatedly. Fourth, there has been in the last 60 years or so a growth in what the French call ‘associative life’, of local groups and associations many of which are cultural, though it is sometimes thought that the influence of such associations today is waning (Saez, in Perret and Saez, 1996, 31). Lastly, Europe is steadily entering the picture, as towns and cities begin thinking more laterally, looking for contacts and exchange networks with their European equivalents.

All of these changes point to a need for change in the Ministry itself, which is where the Rigaud report comes in (Rigaud, 1996). Since he and Duhamel left the Ministry in 1973, Rigaud has been calling for an updated cultural-development policy, one which takes stock of globalization, Europeanization, and computerization. In his report, and in the book he wrote shortly before it, *L’Exception culturelle* (Rigaud, 1995), he is clearly convinced that, given the new pluralism I have just described, which he calls ‘multipolarity’, now is the time for change.

His main contention is that the Ministry is burning itself out trying to maintain its traditional monopoly on a cultural landscape which is continually outgrowing it. He therefore believes that it should no longer try to impose its will but should be content to facilitate, co-ordinate and monitor. More specifically, he wants the resources of the DRACs increased and their autonomy strengthened and spelt out, calling for the principle of subsidiarity to apply wherever possible in their dealings with local government. He does not recommend further decentralization in the strict sense, but, instead, the reinforcement and clarification of the contractual method. The report also points out that the system of annual government budgeting is unsuited to cultural organizations which often have to make commitments several years ahead, the remedy here being systematic use of long-term funding agreements (Looseley, 1999 (a)).

It is significant, however, that, although the various measures Rigaud proposes would increase the space between culture and the state, he does not want a fully fledged arm’s length strategy. This is largely because it would go against French traditions of governance; and Rigaud is the first to admit that all cultural policies are inevitably shaped by national traditions and that no one model is intrinsically better than another. But, embedded in his notion of a ‘French cultural exception’, and indeed in French political culture generally, is a concern with national identity. France, of course, has been fighting the Americans on the cultural front ever since the First World War, when Hollywood took over from Paris as the centre of the film industry. And, today, six years after France’s apparent victory in the 1993 GATT talks, this is a very significant part of that essential continuity I mentioned earlier, linking Malraux, through Duhamel and Rigaud, to Lang and Trautmann. For, whatever else may be said about the Ministry, it is widely considered, on both Left and Right, to retain its *raison d’être* by fighting the good fight for the language, culture and soul of the nation.

However, France is in a period of profound cultural change, which Yeats’s famous phrase, ‘things fall apart, the centre cannot hold’, neatly characterizes. Arguably, the standard representation of France--as a nation with a ‘strong sense of cultural mission’ where ‘cultural affairs traditionally enjoy great prestige and are at the centre of public interest’ (Tribunal Reader, 1999, 52)--is being steadily undermined by the usual ‘culprits’: globalization, the segmentation of public taste and the domestication of cultural practices, all of which are busy unpicking the fabric of traditional nationhood. At street level, therefore, this time-honoured sense of national implication in culture may well be breaking up. If this is so, the Lang era may prove to have been the last age of state intervention in the grand style; with the Ministry drifting ever further towards either greater

mediation or greater fragmentation. In which case, May 1968, the Sixth Plan and the Rigaud report will probably prove to have been the early milestones of this transformation. For the time being, however, the idea of national identity remains intact at least in political discourse. While this continues to be the case, the political will to dismantle the Ministry, demote it, or otherwise decrease its hold on cultural life is probably a good deal more than an arm's length away.

## Notes

(All translations from French are my own)

(1). The Socialist government of Pierre Mauroy, under President Mitterrand, introduced general decentralization legislation in 1982 and 1983. Local and regional government in France consists of some 36,000 Communes (e.g. cities, towns, villages), 97 Departments, and 22 Regions.

(2). This figure is for 'culture' alone: it does not include the audiovisual sector, for which the Minister is also responsible. I shall in fact use the term 'culture' in the sense in which it is generally understood at the Ministry of Culture, i.e. covering architecture, archives, arts education, cultural development and training, books and reading, cinema and audiovisual programmes (but not the audiovisual sector as a whole), cultural industries, heritage, live performance (theatre, spectacle, music and dance), museums, and visual (or 'plastic') arts. Given this broadly artistic sense, I shall also, for convenience, use 'culture' and 'the arts' as synonymous.

(3). Such counterweights are too numerous and complex to deal with in full here. For further detail, the reader of French can consult Mesnard, 'Le Service public culturel et son organisation', in Perret and Saez, 1996, 19-23, and Mesnard, 1990. In Perret and Saez, 1996, Mesnard points out (p.23, Note 4) that in some cases failure to follow consultative procedures can lead to a decision being quashed.

(4). Much of this second section of the paper is based on research undertaken during a sabbatical granted by the Department of French of the University of Leeds (UK), and published in Looseley, 1999 (a) and 1999 (b).

(5). The French term *déconcentration* is used to designate the regional services of central government, which have a degree of decision-making power. In 1992, an important new law on territorial administration increased the proportion of deconcentrated funds and powers.

(6). The biggest share comes from the Communes (40.9 percent) but the Regions and Departments are contributing growing sums.

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