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Between Cultural Theory and Policy: The cultural policy thinking of Pierre Bourdieu, Michel de Certeau and Régis Debray

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Overview

This study explores the cultural policy thinking of three major French theorists. The introduction surveys relations between different types of research and cultural policy making both in the anglophone world and in France, and places the decision to focus on these three thinkers within a wider context of cultural policy research in France. Chapter one, which will cover a certain amount of ground familiar to specialists in the field, traces how the cultural policy reflection of these figures emerges against or negotiates the policy model represented by André Malraux. Chapters two to four, which constitute the main substance of the study, move across these three oeuvres with a sustained focus on their cultural policy implications and prescriptions. The summary and concluding remarks draw together the elements of a ‘triangulated’ framework for cultural policy reflection developed over the study as a whole.

Page references in square brackets refer to English translations, where available. Details of these translations are given in the bibliography at the end of this study.

Introduction

Intellectuals and cultural policy

Few would contest the assertion that intellectual practice has a political dimension. Indeed, for many analysts (notably in France), the concept of the ‘intellectual’ as such (as opposed simply to the scholar, scientist, expert or teacher) involves precisely the exploitation of cultural capital in order to produce a range of effects in the political field. However, the relationship which intellectuals should or should not adopt with the specific apparatuses of public policy (the ‘politico-administrative field’) is a more contentious issue. This has been particularly evident as far as cultural policy in the anglophone world is concerned. Within the fields of cultural studies and the sociology of culture, there has been a vigorous ‘debate concerning the roles of intellectuals and the relationships they should adopt in relation to the bureaucratic and political processes through which cultural policies are developed and put into effect.’¹ Such debates have tended to oppose those advocating practical engagement in policy processes and those for whom such engagement implies the abdication of critical integrity on the part of the intellectual. Even when the poles of the ‘critical’ and the ‘practical’ (or ‘technical’, or ‘administrative’) have not been dichotomised, they have tended to structure and propel the ongoing debate.² Of course, not all anglophone cultural policy research falls under the framework of the ‘critical cultural policy studies’ branch of cultural studies or the sociology of culture. Mark Schuster, for example, in his extensive survey of the ‘research and information infrastructure’ set up across the world to generate ‘policy-relevant research’, makes scant reference to such domains. Schuster traces how a series of research units with greater or lesser proximity to government (notably in Canada, Britain, France, Germany and the Netherlands) negotiate the twin commitments of building a ‘knowledge base’ regarding arts and culture according to criteria of ‘pure social science inquiry’ and ‘adding value’ to processes of cultural policy-making concerned increasingly with ‘evidence-

¹ Tony Bennett, *Intellectuals, Culture, Policy: The Technical, the Practical and the Critical*, Pavis Papers in Social and Cultural Research (Milton Keynes: Faculty of Social Sciences, The Open University), no. 2, 2000, p. 1

² A helpful thread for an outside observer to follow in this respect is the extended ‘debate’ between Tony Bennett (working in Australia, and then Britain) and Jim McGuigan (working in Britain) over the last decade or so – see e.g. McGuigan, *Culture in the Public Sphere* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996); Bennett, *Culture: A Reformer’s Science* (London: Sage, 1998); Bennett, *Intellectuals, Culture, Policy: The Technical, the Practical and the Critical*; McGuigan, ‘Postscript 2000’ in J. Lewis and T. Miller (ed.), *Critical Cultural Policy Studies: A Reader* (Oxford, Blackwell, 2003), p. 39.

based' strategies.³ However, the kinds of critical questioning that, in the anglophone world, have crystallized around the institution of cultural studies are pointedly absent in Schuster's mapping document.

It might seem to many anglophone observers as though cultural theory in France (where there has been no institutionalisation of 'cultural studies' as such) has tended inexorably to form around the purely 'critical' pole of the dichotomy sketched out above. Keith Reader has described the 'non-étatiste [non-Statist] view of politics' adopted by many of the most publicly visible left-wing intellectuals, and the tenuous connection between much of their theoretical output and 'the nuts and bolts of day-to-day [political] activity' (putting to one side the relations between intellectuals and the Communist Party up until the 1970s).⁴ While the writings of Barthes, Foucault, Deleuze, and other prominent French exports clearly articulate forms of cultural politics, they do not as a rule link this up in any practical way with the apparatuses of public policy.

At a less visible level, however, there has evolved in France over the last forty years a highly developed cultural policy 'research ecology' (to use Schuster's term), whose prime mover in many respects has been the research unit of the national Ministry of Culture (the *Département d'Etudes et de la Prospective*). One should not identify the overall work of this unit too readily with a function of politico-administrative subservience. Founded in 1963, it had to struggle over at least a decade for its continuing existence against hostility or indifference not merely outside but also within the Ministry of Culture. Moreover, the research it produces has often implicitly challenged prevailing policy orientations (Etienne Grosjean has spoken of a 'patient and prudent provocation'). Philippe Urfalino has analysed its role in terms of a 'secant marginality': it has occupied a 'marginal' role in a number of worlds (academic research, cultural administration, political decision-making), but through that very 'multipositionality' has brought agents, concepts, and programmes together which otherwise would have remained apart. Similarly, Antoine Hennion has described how the tensions it has embodied between a 'politico-administrative' logic and a 'research' logic have not simply been limiting factors, but have enabled it to perform a positive 'mediating' function. The unit's founding director speaks (in terms reminiscent of Michel de Certeau) of 'using' the

³ See Mark Schuster, *Informing Cultural Policy: The Research and Information Infrastructure* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Center for Urban Policy Research, Rutgers, State University of New Jersey/Pew Charitable Trusts, 2002), pp. 15, 29, 21, 14. See also Oliver Bennett, 'The Torn Halves of Cultural Policy Research', forthcoming article in *The International Journal of Cultural Policy*.

⁴ Keith Reader, *Intellectuals and the Left in France since 1968* (Hounds mills: Macmillan, 1987), pp. 138, 22.

administrative structures in place, often with considerable ‘cunning’ and ‘audacity’, in order to pursue particular objectives.⁵

In Hennion’s view, the *DEP* has often played a ‘decisive’ role in mobilizing researchers around particular themes and programmes, and has gained a position as a ‘privileged interlocutor’ for academic researchers in their relations with ‘political powers and the State with regard to cultural questions’.⁶ It has enabled, as Jean-Louis Fabiani has put it, researchers, administrators and cultural agents to ‘co-produce’ over time a set of intellectual ‘tools’ within the framework of ‘one of the finest expressions of our French singularity’.⁷ In the course of this process, a number of external researchers and research units have collaborated in more or less sustained manners and on specific problematics with the *DEP* – Augustin Girard cites notably the names of Michel Crozier, Pierre Bourdieu, Robert Francès, Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe, Joffre Dumazedier, Michel de Certeau, Raymonde Moulin, Pierre-Michel Menger, Ehrard Friedberg, Philippe Urfalino, Antoine Hennion...⁸ Such collaborations have played an important part in the elaboration of what one might call a nationally available critical cultural policy intelligence.

⁵ See respectively Etienne Grosjean, ‘La recherche comme “empêcheur de décider en rond”’, in *Trente ans d’études au service de la vie culturelle, Table ronde organisée à l’occasion du départ à la retraite d’Augustin Girard, chef du Département des études et de la prospective du ministère de la culture de 1963 à 1993* (Paris: Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, 1993), pp. 48-51 (p. 50); Philippe Urfalino, ‘Laboratoire d’idées et utopies créatrices’, *ibid.*, pp. 77-81 (pp. 79-80); Antoine Hennion ‘Le grand écart entre la recherche et l’administration’ (Paris: Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, Département des Etudes et de la Prospective, June 1996), pp. 1-3; Augustin Girard ‘Une dynamique pour l’avenir’, in *Trente ans d’études*, pp. 89-99 (p. 92). Hennion’s report provides a helpful overview of the *DEP*’s work. This can be supplemented by the retrospective accounts of Augustin Girard, the *DEP*’s director from 1963 to 1993, in ‘Un cas de partenariat entre administration et recherche scientifique’, in Menger and Passeron (ed.), *L’Art de la recherche. Essais en l’honneur de Raymonde Moulin* (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1994), pp. 138-47, and V. Dubois & D. Georgakakis, ‘Sciences sociales et politiques culturelles: Entretiens avec Joffre Dumazedier et Augustin Girard’, *Politix*, 24, 4eme trimestre, 1993, pp. 57-77 (pp. 67-77). Mark Schuster provides an overview of the *DEP*’s structure and activity in *Informing Cultural Policy*, pp. 59-73.

⁶ Hennion, ‘Le grand écart’, pp. 3, 5.

⁷ J.-L. Fabiani, A. Hennion, N. Herpin, P.-M. Menger, ‘Eléments de synthèse’, in O. Donnat & P. Tolila, *Le(s) Public(s) de la culture: Politiques publiques et équipements culturels*, vol. 2 (on CD-ROM) (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2003), pp. 309-23 (p. 310); for an idea in English translation of this ‘coproduced framework’ see e.g. the interventions brought together in J. Ahearne (ed.), *French Cultural Policy Debates: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2002).

⁸ See Girard, ‘Un cas de partenariat entre administration et recherche scientifique’. and also Hennion, ‘Le grand écart...’.

Bourdieu, Certeau, Debray

The purpose of this study is not to propose an overview of that process as a whole. It proposes instead three case studies of prominent intellectual figures who have engaged in sustained fashion with strategic issues in cultural policy. As Tony Bennett has written of Raymond Williams, their work evinces ‘a real entanglement with those agendas of social, political and cultural reform which define the effective horizon of presently existing policy processes and concerns’.⁹ Certainly, these figures were not smoothly integrated into the mechanisms of cultural policy research, and were not simply experts in this or that sector of cultural policy implementation (indeed, Debray would disclaim any such specific expertise). Their work has spanned a wide spectrum of political and historical domains, and their cultural policy thinking is thus marked by a correspondingly broad range of reference. Nevertheless, these thinkers have also been involved to differing degrees in the day-to-day detail of the policy-forming process. Pierre Bourdieu, who is best known for his hostility to undue State ‘interference’ in the cultural field (and whose very hostility sharpened his attention to the precise forms of State-driven cultural action) also collaborated on occasion with State apparatuses. Michel de Certeau was more or less constantly engaged between 1970 and 1985 in a series of cultural policy research and consultative projects centred largely around the research unit of the Ministry of Culture and the National Plan. Régis Debray has not collaborated in any sustained manner with the Ministry of Culture, but was a full-time advisor to President Mitterrand over much of the 1980s. This experience, I suggest, sharpened his attention to an issue that has presented particular difficulties for cultural policy thinking, namely the relations between technological mutations and cultural-political programmes.

All three thinkers have developed comprehensive theories of cultural process with distinctive foci: Bourdieu’s ‘generative structuralism’ examines the formation of the ‘fields’ within which cultural institutions and works operate and take on meaning, and the ‘dispositions’ which cultural agents bring to their work; Certeau develops what one might call a cultural pragmatics that focuses on the often unpredictable re-employments to which users subject the cultural resources at their disposal; Debray explores the relations between cultural transmission and technological change. I shall look over this study not simply to juxtapose these perspectives, but to triangulate them so as to build up a broader framework for cultural policy thinking.

This triangular construction can also be linked to the stratified cluster of intellectual problematics and political challenges constituted by over four decades of cultural policy research in France. In order to demonstrate this, let me first quote two extended passages from Augustin Girard, looking back in the

⁹ Bennett, *Culture: A Reformer’s Science*, - p. 35.

mid-1990s over his three decades at the head of the research unit of the Ministry of Culture:

Above particular objectives, we must also articulate the general ends to be pursued [...]. In France, the tendency has been to follow the doctrine of the ‘democratization of culture’, by homology with the democratization of education, or the doctrine of ‘cultural development’, by analogy with economic and social development. Now access to art and culture does not function like access to education, which is obligatory and necessarily universal. The cultural development both of the individual and society is not the object of great social demand, unlike for example the development of social benefits. These two ideologies of democratization and development, inherited from the Popular Front and the Resistance, through the intermediary of the popular education movements for the former and the 1960s belief in development for the latter, have been somewhat discredited by the experience of the last 30 years. Technology has changed people’s means of access to works, as well as artistic forms, has inextricably mixed up simple entertainment and culture, and has changed finally the scope and uses of leisure time. The end of the century is thus marked by a widespread jumbling of values and modes of practice that has shaken up established institutions and hierarchies as well as the forms of adhesion among the population that these once brought with them.¹⁰

And:

The ideas advanced by the Ministry’s research unit in the 1960s [...] have been shaken up by technology. Today, it is technology that directs the world, that guides weapons, that guides society through communications, and that constitutes the all-powerful force of businessmen. Now technology has changed a lot since 1960, since the creation of the Ministry.¹¹

I would suggest that the triangulated structure of my study can be mapped on to the tripartite form of Girard’s retrospective assessment, which posits two broad doctrines of cultural policy at work in France (cultural democratization, cultural development) and one significant disruptive force (technology). Although Pierre Bourdieu is best known for his vigorous critique of Malraux’s original cultural democratization project, I will show how his final cultural policy position, when he is brought to proffer normative prescriptions, places him firmly in the

¹⁰ Girard, ‘Un cas de partenariat entre administration et recherche scientifique’ pp. 146-7.

¹¹ Girard, ‘Une dynamique pour l’avenir’, p. 89.

tradition of cultural democratization (he looks to make the ‘highest’ achievements of humanity effectively available to culturally dispossessed social groups). I will show how Michel de Certeau’s cultural policy reflection emerges in the context of the ‘cultural development’ debates of the 1960s and 1970s (‘cultural democracy’ would be a preferred term for many), whose guiding objective was to support and build up those cultures already to be found among the population. In a number of ways, his thinking recasts the terms of this doctrine and can thereby contribute to what Girard calls for in terms of a ‘new problematic of cultural development’.¹² Finally, the persistent focus of Debray’s work (partly, no doubt, as a result of working through the very frustrations of his time at the Elysée) is the ways in which technology both resists and remodels cultural and political programmes. It is this sustained reflection on the efficacy of the technical as such within the political and cultural spheres that warrants his inclusion in this study.

A study such as this, focusing on substantial but individual bodies of work, perhaps runs the risk of presenting the thinkers in question as developing their reflection in heroic isolation. Certainly, the work of all three figures appears to me to be particularly innovative and probing. The remarks above, however, should indicate already how their work is to be inscribed into a more general but also nationally specific cultural-political context, and I will continue to refer to this broader context over the chapters that follow. Moreover, the reflection of these thinkers has been closely associated with particular schools or orientations of thought (the ‘critical sociology’ developed notably in Bourdieu’s journal *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, the extensive networks of Certeau’s ‘subterranean’ influence as charted in François Dosse’s monumental biography, the body of thought elaborated as part of a ‘team sport’ in Debray’s *Cahiers de médiologie*).¹³ While this second broad context falls largely outside the scope of my analyses, it is important to remain aware of it. More generally, the work of these thinkers might be productively placed as ‘moments’ in the process indicated above: the co-production, through conflict and collaboration, of a collectively elaborated critical cultural policy intelligence.

¹² Girard, ‘Un cas de partenariat entre administration et recherche scientifique’, p. 147, and ‘Une dynamique pour l’avenir’, p. 90.

¹³ Bourdieu launched *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* in 1975; other key sites for the constitution of a Bourdieusian ‘school’ of sociology were the *Centre de sociologie européenne* (until 1968) and (from 1969) the *Centre de sociologie de l’éducation et de la culture* at the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales*; on the less institutionally visible but nonetheless far-reaching associations and influence of Certeau (including his influence upon those in the *Département des Etudes et de la Prospective* such as Augustin Girard and Pierre Mayol), see François Dosse, *Michel de Certeau: le marcheur blessé* (Paris: La Découverte, 2002); the biennial *Les Cahiers de médiologie* (which study issues of technical mediation rather than media studies as conventionally understood) were published by Gallimard from 1996 until 2003, and subsequently by Fayard.

Chapter One. Thinking Against Malraux

André Malraux is commonly considered as the founding father of French cultural policy. He was appointed as France's first ever Minister for Cultural Affairs in 1959, and was able to use his position as Minister over ten years to frame and implement a policy broadly congruent with a theory of art and aesthetics that he had developed over previous decades. The principal thrust of this policy is well-known: it looked to give people from all classes and regions access to the great works of culture (particularly French culture). The key vehicles for these projects were to be the Houses of Culture, designed to bring to the provinces examples of cultural excellence defined in opposition both to commercial mass culture and to all forms of ‘merely’ local and/or amateur activity. It is clear that this policy was also shaped by what one might call the will-to-existence of a new and precarious ministry, looking to define itself against the governmental bureaucracies responsible for education, leisure, and television, and against established templates for restricted governmental involvement in the ‘fine arts’.¹

Malraux’s actions over the 1960s constituted the preeminent model of cultural policy. It was not, however, the only model. It imposed itself by sidelining, after an initial period of hesitation, the ‘popular education’ model embodied in many local associations and municipal associations across France (these were linked much more closely to local communities and amateur groups).² There also developed over the 1960s at least two important critiques of Malraux’s policy. Indeed, these critiques have themselves become classic reference points in French cultural policy debates, justifying Philippe Urfalino’s notion of a ‘split foundation’ for French cultural policy, constituted both by Malraux’s founding policy and by these equally ‘foundational’ critiques.

Two of the thinkers addressed in the present study are closely associated with the crystallization of these two critiques. Pierre Bourdieu attacked the ‘charismatic’ ideology of art at the heart of Malraux’s thinking, and argued instead for a ‘rational’ pedagogy of culture; Michel de Certeau gave cogent expression to certain inchoate demands and dissatisfactions associated with the

¹ There are now many accounts of Malraux’s time in office: in English, see e.g. David Looseley, *The Politics of Fun: Cultural Policy and Debate in Contemporary France* (Oxford: Berg, 1995), pp. 33-48, and H. Lebovics, *Mona Lisa’s Escort: André Malraux and the Reinvention of French Culture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999); in French, see e.g. Girard, A. & Gentil, G. (ed.), *Les Affaires culturelles au temps d’André Malraux* (Paris: La Documentation française & Comité d’histoire du ministère de la Culture, 1996) and P. Urfalino, *L’Invention de la politique culturelle* (Paris: La Documentation française, 1996), pp. 9-272.

² See Urfalino, *L’Invention de la politique culturelle*, pp. 101-59.

May 1968 protests, showing how the welter of ‘voices’ issuing from these events displaced the univocal and unidirectional notion of culture espoused by Malraux. Both writers were clearly thinking ‘against’ the dominant cultural policy model of the time, as represented most forcefully by Malraux. There is also a sense, however, in which their cultural policy reflection could dynamically ‘kick off’ against this model, as a swimmer might kick off from a rock in the sea. The model is formatively at work in their thought, even and especially as they react against it. By contrast, Régis Debray’s engagement with Malraux’s aesthetics and cultural policy thinking occurred well after Malraux’s period of office. He could, as it were, take these classic critiques of Malraux’s action for granted (though he also adds a critical perspective of his own), and was therefore at liberty to dwell on the admirable if erratic insights of Malraux. Indeed, I shall suggest how Malraux’s writings work to bring out the tensions in Debray’s own reflection, suggesting that Malraux’s thought retains a suggestive force, and should not be reduced to the status of a simple foil or inert ‘foundation’ for subsequent cultural policy discourse.

1.1 *For a rational cultural policy (Bourdieu)*

Brian Rigby has underlined the extent to which Bourdieu’s early writings on culture and education in the 1960s represented a response to a French tradition of cultural debate reaching back at least to 1936, and which had become particularly active with the official deployment of an explicit State cultural policy. Constituting an important pillar of that ‘split foundation’ evoked above, the critique articulated in these writings has become a classic reference point in French cultural policy debates.³ Its key targets were the ‘charismatic ideology of art’ (AA 90-1 [54]), according to which responsiveness to works of high culture was a matter of direct intuition, and the ‘ideology of cultural needs’ (AA 156 [106]), according to which individuals might hold within them an innate need for high cultural practice. Both these discourses tended to be linked to an ‘ideology of the gift’ according to which innately ‘gifted’ individuals might intuit with particular sensitivity the charism latent in a work of art (AA 17

³ The key books in question are: P. Bourdieu & J.-C. Passeron, *Les Héritiers: les étudiants et la culture* (Paris: Minuit, 1964), henceforth referred to as *H*; P. Bourdieu, L. Boltanski, R. Castel & J.-C. Chamboredon, *Un art moyen: essai sur les usages sociaux de la photographie* (Paris: Minuit, 1965), henceforth referred to as *AM*; P. Bourdieu & A. Darbel, *L’Amour de l’art: les musées d’art européens et leur public* (Paris: Minuit, 1969 [first ed. 1966]), henceforth referred to as *AA*. Useful analyses of these works integrating a cultural policy perspective can be found in Brian Rigby *Popular Culture in Modern France: A Study of Cultural Discourse* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 96-130; and Jeremy Lane, *Pierre Bourdieu: A Critical Introduction* (London: Pluto, 2000), pp. 51-7.

[4]). Bourdieu wanted to expose such representations as both sociologically naïve and politically ambiguous. He underlined how levels of high cultural practice and aspiration were overwhelmingly correlated with levels of formal education, which were themselves, of course, overwhelmingly correlated with social origins. Exploring the mechanisms responsible for these correlations, Bourdieu wanted to show how the apparently ‘direct’ intuition of a work of art was actually mediated by a formal code whose practical mastery was instilled in certain individuals within their family milieu and through formal education. Only those subjects equipped (consciously or unconsciously) with such a code would feel a ‘need’ to invest in cultural practice. Bourdieu thereby looked to problematise all ‘direct’ modes of cultural action (AA 146 [99]) which looked, like the Houses of Culture, simply to place people in front of artworks. Such policies would be liable to benefit only those agents whose socio-educational history had prepared for such an encounter, while also reinforcing and seeming to justify the superior social status of such agents.

It would be fair to say that these arguments have become classic points of reference not just in France, but in wider international cultural policy debates. Rather than rehearse them again in full, I should like here to focus on some complexities in Bourdieu’s early work on culture that have hitherto received less attention.

Given the resolute hostility to State ‘interference’ in social science research agendas that became such a marked attribute of Bourdieu’s intellectual stance, it is interesting to note how his early work on culture developed in partnership with a governmental body. His research into museums and their visitors, culminating in *The Love of Art*, was commissioned by Augustin Girard, head of research at the Ministry for Cultural Affairs.⁴ He even published in advance a concise account of his findings, precisely in an endeavour to avoid delay and thereby overcome ‘one of the great obstacles to cooperation between researchers in the human sciences and those who commission investigations’.⁵ One of the key objectives he professed in that account was to engage through his research in a ‘dialogue’ with those directly at grips with the issues in question (essentially museum directors), and he went so far as to propose an aid to cultural policy decision-making in the form of a ‘mathematical model enabling one to foresee what the public of museums will be in the hypothesis that such or such an action is undertaken on one or other of the determining factors’ (by no means an unreasonable description of what his research achieved).⁶ Curiously,

⁴ See Philippe Poirrier, ‘Présentation’, in *La Naissance des politiques culturelles et les Rencontres d’Avignon 1964-1970* (Paris : Ministère de la culture et de la communication, Comité d’histoire, 1997), p. 31.

⁵ P. Bourdieu, *Le Musée et son public* (Paris : Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Centre de Sociologie Européenne, Groupe de Sociologie de la Culture, 1964), p. 1.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 4, 9. One should remember, of course, that the model is based on statistical probability.

however, despite Bourdieu's evocation at the beginning of *The Love of Art* of the need for a veritable cinema-style sequence of 'credits' (AA 7 [vii]) to acknowledge all those who contributed to his research, the original sponsor of that research, the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, does not figure. This contrasts with *Un art moyen*, where a representative of the industrial firm Kodak, who sponsored the research, wrote the preface.⁷ Why might this objective collaboration with a governmental cultural policy research unit have become, deliberately or otherwise, effaced in Bourdieu's writing?

Although Bourdieu's theses would soon become massively influential in French cultural policy thought, they were not immediately digestible by those in positions of responsibility. Philippe Poirrier notes that when a summary of his research was circulated in 1965 at a meeting in Avignon organized by Jean Vilar, bringing together a number of leading actors in the cultural policy field, it does not seem to have solicited a great deal of response.⁸ This is not really surprising. On a number of counts, Bourdieu's research had led him in an opposite direction to that which was then giving a newly constituted cultural policy its momentum. He had come to see ritually evoked 'direct' modes of cultural action (free entry, extended opening hours, improved physical accessibility) as an 'alibi' (AA 145-6 [98]) for more effectively democratic measures. Survey results showed the new cultural policy's flagship institutions, the Houses of Culture, to be functioning in precisely the same way, and catering to the same audiences, as the traditional panoply of existing fine arts institutions (AA 149-50 [101-2]). He saw existing cultural policy as a whole as at best 'palliating' (superficially alleviating, but actually disguising) deep-rooted cultural inequalities (AA 151[102]). Finally, he considered that the only institutions that could really address these inequalities, by inculcating the skills and mindset required to engage voluntarily in high cultural practice, were schools (AA 154 [105]). This was at a time when the newly founded Ministry for Cultural Affairs in France had just secured a fragile autonomy with regard to the Ministry for Education, and did not want to be sucked back into its orbit. The architects of State cultural policy did not really register Bourdieu's findings, for it was not in their interest to do so. At the same time, one can surmise that this instance of failed communication would induce Bourdieu to mark more insistently his distance with regard to the State.

⁷ AM 9-10 [not included in English translation]. In *Libre-échange*, Bourdieu states that the sums involved were 'derisory', that he was interested above all in certain data that he could obtain from Kodak, and that this experience helped to alert him to the need to defend the autonomy of intellectual research against its very sponsors (P. Bourdieu and H. Haacke, *Libre-échange* (Paris: Seuil/Les presses du réel, 1994), p. 24 [p. 15]).

⁸ Poirrier, 'Présentation', pp. 31-2. The text in question was based on a paper given by Bourdieu to a conference in Arras in 1965, which can be found in English in J. Ahearne (ed.), *French Cultural Policy Debates: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 62-9.

Bourdieu's writings on culture and education in the 1960s – particularly his study of university students' attitudes to culture, *Les Héritiers* – have been seen as a prime influence in the wave of anti-State and anti-institutional protest that surged up in France in May 1968. It is not clear, however, that this influence was based entirely on a controlled understanding of Bourdieu's books. For his work over this period was not simply 'against' the State, or anti-institutional - it was a critique of the State and its institutions as they then functioned. *Les Héritiers* showed how the very autonomy of higher education establishments allowed them to deploy evaluative criteria and hierarchies that acted objectively (not necessarily consciously) as social filters, organising bands of 'ability' that correlated relentlessly with social class. All demands for increased autonomy, Bourdieu argued at this time, would only reinforce this process, allowing discriminatory factors to operate all the more freely (*H* 43-4 [27]).⁹ Clearly, the only force that could check this autonomy would be explicit political intervention on the part of the State. Similarly, Bourdieu argued that the implacable laws of cultural diffusion, by which cultural capital accrues most readily to those endowed already with cultural capital, operated even more relentlessly in the domain of non-academic or extra-curricular 'free culture' (*la culture libre*) than at school (AA 107 [68]), insofar as matters not covered at school (avant-garde music or painting, for example) were left to depend largely on the level of different families' cultural capital. Again, by implication, only State-sponsored institutional reform could hope to exert any persistent effect on this state of affairs. Hence, in a collective document entitled 'Suggestions for a policy of democratization' published in the wake of 1968 by Bourdieu's Centre for European Sociology, we read that 'any democratic transformation supposes [...] that, from nursery school upwards, institutionalised mechanisms for action are put in place that are capable of thwarting social mechanisms.'¹⁰

These institutional mechanisms as Bourdieu conceived them revolved around the normative ideal of a 'rational pedagogy' in cultural matters. Jeremy Lane has shown how Bourdieu took over and adapted this notion from Emile Durkheim:

Just as at the turn of the century Durkheim had argued for an education based on the narrow, partial interests of one revealed religion to be replaced with an educational system based on purely 'rational', hence 'universal' principles, so sixty years later Bourdieu demanded that the

⁹ The term 'autonomy' is not used here in the English translation.

¹⁰ 'Quelques Indications pour une politique de démocratisation', Dossier no 1 du Centre de sociologie européenne, 6 rue de Tournon, Paris, included in P. Bourdieu, *Interventions, 1961-2001 : Science sociale et action politique*, ed. Poupeau, F. & Discepolo, T. (Marseille: Agone, 2000), pp. 69-72 (p. 69). This document was part of a series of collectively written thematically based documents issued by the Centre for European Sociology in the aftermath of May 1968 (see *Interventions*, p. 52).

teaching of art appreciation be ‘secularised’, organised along ‘rational’ principles rather than being left to the vagaries of social background or class determined habitus.¹¹

Bourdieu was looking to institute a break with regard to traditional quasi-religious approaches to culture. Malraux himself famously saw high culture as a substitute or successor for religion, supplying existential meaning for human life in a world dominated by the scientific viewpoint, and likened his Houses of Culture to secular ‘cathedrals’ for a godless age. For Bourdieu, the intuitive, affective ‘communion’ with the work of art celebrated by Malraux presupposed a practical mastery of the ‘codes’ according to which high culture operated (particularly when it came to more formally experimental work). For those who had not had the fortune to learn these codes by family immersion, school was the only recourse. It alone could carry out the repeated exercises and inculcation required to produce in an unprepared subject apparently instinctively appropriate responses to art. It alone could ‘develop in all members of society, without distinction, an aptitude for what are commonly considered the most noble cultural practices’ (AA 154 [105]).

Bourdieu’s rationalism in this respect certainly raises questions. Some of these questions will be addressed later in this study – for example what he would later see as his rather ‘intellectualist’ approach to high culture as constituting primarily an object to be deciphered, or the strictly segregative relation he posited between high culture and other cultural codes.¹² For the moment, I want to consider simply the type of rationality in question, and its relationship to policy norms. For if we follow the quotation above, whereby the professed goal is to inculcate universally an ‘aptitude for those cultural practices commonly considered as the most noble’, it appears as a form of instrumental rationality. It does not deliberate in open-ended fashion over ends and values. As Bourdieu conceives it in *Les Héritiers*, it brackets the question of what educational and cultural ends – or cultural contents - would best suit the interests of disadvantaged classes (H 99 [66]). Instead it assumes a predefined content as given – broadly, the prevailing definition of ‘legitimate’ culture – and deliberates on the most efficacious means for instilling this across a population. Certainly, there are moments where Bourdieu evokes the ‘arbitrary’ content of legitimate culture (we will see in chapter two how this would for a while become a central component of his cultural analysis). Over the 1960s, however, Bourdieu’s most consistent move is to challenge radically the style and methods

¹¹ Lane, *Pierre Bourdieu*, p. 56.

¹² On the first point, see Bourdieu, *Les Règles de l’art: Genèse et structure du champ littéraire* (Paris : Seuil, 1992), p. 431 [p. 313].

of Malravian cultural action, but not explicitly to question its contents or avowed ends – and certainly not to propose alternative ends.¹³

This is not to say that the notion of an educational and cultural policy conveying different cultural contents in the pursuit of different ends did not figure in his thought. Alternative models do emerge, but it is clear that Bourdieu was not happy with them. It might seem that a ‘rational’ pedagogy should steer clear altogether of the mystificatory waters of culture, and offer disadvantaged pupils specialist, practical training corresponding to what they see as being in their own interest. Bourdieu argued forcefully that such a development would surrender the domain of culture even more totally to those unchecked laws of cultural diffusion evoked above (*H* 86-7 [154 n.2]) – and however arbitrary one might deem its content to be, he quite clearly saw culture as fulfilling a function of social discrimination at the expense of the culturally dispossessed. A purely ‘practical’ education would, then, disarm the culturally dispossessed even more thoroughly, further dispossessing them even of the consciousness of their dispossession. The other obvious alternative policy orientation of replacing the cultural content taught in school by the ‘parallel cultures’ to be found in disadvantaged classes was equally firmly rejected by Bourdieu (*H* 110 [72]). Bourdieu saw this option as based on a ‘populist illusion’ which celebrated cultures that owed many of their characteristics to the fact that they emerged from conditions of domination and exploitation. To ratify in this way the resulting cultures was to ratify also particular lacunae and deficiencies for which those conditions were responsible.

If Bourdieu over this period tended to ‘bracket’ the question of cultural ends, and intermittently to demonstrate an ambivalent attitude to legitimate cultural content, this was perhaps not simply the result of scientific neutrality, or even of a contradiction in his thought. He was instead, as I shall look to show in chapter two, in the process of building up a particularly complex and nuanced (multifunctional) view of the social existence of that legitimate culture. There are in these early writings dispersed considerations referring implicitly to questions of cultural content and finality. He argued notably that ‘it is not sufficient to observe that academic culture is a class culture, for to proceed as if it were only a class culture is to help it remain so’.¹⁴ In other words, ongoing discernment is required to perceive those elements of a culture that might satisfy more universal interests and desires. In *Un art moyen*, his study of the uses of photography, Bourdieu pinpointed the obverse fallacy to which middle classes were particularly prone of rejecting ‘without discernment’ all forms of popular aesthetics and embracing anything that might distinguish them from such an

¹³ See also Lane’s discussion of what he describes as ‘an inconsistency at the heart of *The Love of Art*, a contradiction between the radicalism of Bourdieu’s critique of the ‘arbitrary’ nature of legitimate culture and the reformism, even republicanism, of his proposals for change’ (Lane, *Pierre Bourdieu*, p. 57).

¹⁴ *H* 110 [72 – trans. mod.].

aesthetics (*AM* 103-4 [70-1]). Likewise, he noted that ‘photography offers a privileged opportunity to observe the logic of the *search for difference for difference’s sake*, or, to put it another way, of the snobbery that experiences cultural practices not in themselves and for themselves but as a form of one’s relation with the groups that pursue them’ (*AM* 73-4).¹⁵ The strong implication here was that there were uses of culture worth pursuing for their own sakes - the challenge being, whether for individuals or architects of policy, to discern these in the thick of less edifying mechanisms, compulsions and desires.

Such positive indications (one can scarcely call them prescriptions) are rare in these writings. A ‘rational pedagogy’, Bourdieu wrote, was ‘still to be invented’ (*H* 111 [73]). The traditional conceptions of educational and cultural action were represented as both inefficient and socially discriminatory, but the ‘content’ they conveyed could not be discarded ‘without discernment’. The working-class experience of culture could not be embraced as a normative ideal, but neither could it be disregarded. Indeed, in contrast to the ‘enchanted’ experience of culture (as well as the pretensions) characterizing those who have come to feel at home in it, Bourdieu came to think as he analysed the interviews and questionnaires from his survey of museum visitors that ‘the more culturally disinherited see, and express more often than the others, what seems to the observer to be the objective truth of the cultivated experience’ (*AA* 96 [59]). This had nothing to do with the notion of ‘cultural innocence’, according to which the untutored eye might respond with fresh vigour to the riches of art. On the contrary, for Bourdieu, the very disarray which these visitors described, often with considerable acuity, pointed to the essentially ‘mediated’ nature of cultural experience. As a worker from Lille put it, ‘Yes, love at first sight does exist, but for that you’ve got to have read stuff before, especially for modern painting’ (*AA* 91 [55]). The first step in the construction of a rational cultural action, one might conclude, would be to ratify such formulations, that is, to recognise in them the truth of the (high) cultural process. In the light of this, one can understand the policy suggestions made by Bourdieu as falling into two broad categories. On the one hand cultural institutions such as museums had to make it clear that people had a ‘right to be uninformed’ (*AA* 85 [49]). Their layout and design had to be ‘humanised’ so that people unfamiliar with the world of art would not feel out of place:¹⁶ Bourdieu suggested turning them into something resembling more a ‘garden’ than a church, with comfortable chairs, approachable guides, libraries, bars, soft music so visitors could talk to each other without being overheard, art teachers, etc. (*AA* 140-1 [95]). On the other hand, the priority for Bourdieu was for schools to address the underlying causes of that ignorance, and to instill in all pupils a basic mastery of the codes governing high culture. The slow process of equipping subjects with the

¹⁵ This passage does not figure in the adaptation on which the English translation is based.

¹⁶ *Le Musée et son public*, pp. 20, 22.

requisite schemes of perception might be derided as mechanical by adherents of charismatic notions of art, but was infinitely preferable to the unhappy experience, described by another worker, of moving through cultural institutions as if through a ‘fog’ (AA 87 [52 – trans. mod.]).

While Bourdieu’s research had been commissioned by the Ministry of Culture, he showed himself by the time of its formal writing up in *L’Amour de l’art* to be outrightly critical of that Ministry’s policy, not only effacing any ‘debt’ to the Ministry, but also treating in a directly satirical manner the Ministry’s head, André Malraux. Whereas Malraux saw culture as a means of ‘humanising the world’, Bourdieu saw the current institutional deployment of that culture as itself in need of ‘humanisation’. For while claiming to give all citizens access to humanity’s heritage – Malraux’s ‘inheritance of the nobility of the world’ – it actually served to instill in many of those citizens only a sense of inferiority, the suspicion that, unable to respond to these works, they were perhaps not fully human.¹⁷ Insofar as it allowed ‘cultured people [to] believe in the existence of barbarism and persuade the barbarians within of their own barbarity’, ‘the sacralisation of culture and art, that “currency of the absolute” [*monnaie de l’absolu*] worshipped by a society enslaved to the absolute of currency, fulfills a vital function by contributing to the consecration of the social order’ (AA 165 [111- trans. mod.]). As Lane notes, the target of this barb would have been fairly clear to contemporary readers. The third volume of Malraux’s *Essais de psychologie de l’art* (1948-50) is entitled *La Monnaie de l’absolu*, and Bourdieu was thereby attacking not just contemporary policy, but also the aesthetic theories behind that policy.¹⁸

Bourdieu had, as it were, ‘seceded’ from existing governmental institutions (though the condition of this ‘secession’ was, of course, a State-funded research position). Whereas the stance adopted in the ‘pre-report’ *Le Musée et son public* had been one of critical cooperation, making suggestions for an ‘overall policy of cultural democratization’,¹⁹ he had become by the time of *The Love of Art* much more suspicious of the very principles behind the new

¹⁷ For the two preceding quotations from Malraux, see Bourdieu’s reference in *La Distinction: Critique sociale du jugement* (Paris : Minuit, 1979), p. 574 [599 n.19], and A. Malraux, ‘Speech given on the occasion of the inauguration of the House of Culture at Amiens on 19 March 1966’, in Ahearne (ed.), *French Cultural Policy Debates*, pp. 55-61 (p. 58).

¹⁸ Interestingly, the desire to efface the relations between Bourdieu’s work and the Ministry seems to have been mutual. Raymonde Moulin notes how the head of the new (and still fragile) research unit at the Ministry, Augustin Girard, who had commissioned the research, was temporarily forced to ‘hide’ this work from administrators at the Ministry (see R. Moulin, ‘Augustin Girard, acteur privilégié de la recherche sur la culture et les arts’, in *Trente ans d’études au service de la vie culturelle, Table ronde organisée à l’occasion du départ à la retraite d’Augustin Girard, chef du Département des études et de la prospective du ministère de la culture de 1963 à 1993* (Paris: Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, 1993), pp. 68-71 (p. 69)).

¹⁹ *Le Musée et son public*, p. 23.

cultural policy. He overtly wondered what the real function of such inefficacious measures might be as long as everything had not been done to oblige the school system to do what it alone could properly do – to instil in people the capacity and durable disposition to engage in cultural practices (AA 154 [105]). Clearly, he considered that their function was largely mystificatory, serving to legitimate the existing social order along the lines indicated above. The most effective measure conceivable at the time, he argued, on the basis of his statistics, would have been to extend levels of schooling for the least educated (AA 155 [106]).²⁰ In this perspective, the very notion of a cultural policy as a separate outgrowth from educational policy seemed to be put in question. Thus, in the collective pamphlet ‘Suggestions for a Policy of Democratization’ issued by Bourdieu’s research centre in the aftermath of May 1968, we see that the main concern expressed for cultural policy institutions was to bring them into the gravitational pull of the school system:

Everything must be done to bridge the gap between the marginal institutions of adult education or cultural diffusion (Houses of Culture, cultural animation, etc.) and the education system. The anti-educational ideology to be found among most of those responsible for running these organisations can only be combatted if their mode of recruitment is profoundly changed and if teachers are closely associated at all levels with these enterprises.²¹

We will see in chapter two how Bourdieu’s policy reports of the 1980s would articulate a rather less one-sided view of the ideal relations between different cultural and educational institutions. In the formulation above, however, one is struck by the extent to which the ‘gap-bridging’ exercise evoked might amount to a hostile takeover of all cultural institutions by, so to speak, an educational ideology. To steal a coinage that Bourdieu would make in a rather different context, one wonders whether his legitimate and necessary campaign for a rational pedagogy in cultural matters concealed also a more obscurely ‘pedagogocratic’ ambition.²²

With regard to this insistently ‘pedagogocratic’ agenda for cultural policy, one might at this point raise two queries. Firstly, one of the examples Bourdieu cites in support of his case seems interestingly double-edged. He wants to underline how momentary encounters with cultural artefacts will not lead to a long-term engagement in the requisite practices if they are not supported by a

²⁰ Legislation raising the school-leaving age from 14 to 16 had been introduced in France in 1959, and was due to take effect in 1967.

²¹ ‘Quelques indications pour une politique de démocratisation’, p. 72.

²² The adjective ‘pedagogocratic’ is coined, to the best of my knowledge, in P. Bourdieu & J.-C. Passeron, *La Reproduction: éléments pour une théorie du système d’enseignement* (Paris : Minuit, 1970), p. 178 [p. 148].

previously instilled durable disposition (a secondary ‘habitus’ inculcated by school). Thus high cultural exhibitions taken to factories had little subsequent effects (AA 151 [103]). He also recounts, however, how the first primary school teachers in Kabylia at the end of the nineteenth century would complain because their pupils seemed to ‘forget’ everything they had learnt in school as soon as they left (AA 153-4 [104]). Once they were back with their families and communities, they had no opportunity to ‘actualise’ what they had learnt, and thus to ‘incorporate’ it (make it part of their bodily and cerebral disposition) in a durable way. In other words, school by itself is not enough to create a secondary habitus. In a cultural policy perspective, it no doubt is, as Bourdieu argues, the necessary condition for the success of all other cultural policy institutions (AA 155 [106]). But at the same time, as the example from Kabylia suggests, an existing network of such institutions constitutes the necessary condition for the durable success of the cultural education provided in school – to ensure that it does not simply fall away when pupils leave school. And it is not clear, as we shall see in chapter two, that this network will flourish to full effect if it is controlled monopolistically by ‘pedagogocratic’ interests.

Secondly, the quotation above is informed no doubt by Bourdieu’s suspicions of the ‘spontaneity’ celebrated over the May 1968 events. His subsequent analyses would show how those with greater levels of cultural capital were more likely spontaneously to speak up – and to do so, moreover, in manners that, while partaking in the May 1968 discourse of social generosity, were actually congruent with their own objective interests (though the laying bare of the latter does not amount, in Bourdieu’s thinking, to a simple denunciation of the former).²³ Equally, we have seen his reservations with regard to unqualified celebrations of the spontaneity of dominated forms of culture. Nevertheless, Bourdieu in subsequent writings would express also his interest and, to a degree, his endorsement of the ‘anti-institutional’ spirit of the May events, the truth of their ‘laughter’, and the ‘extraordinary social experimentation’ that, for a few weeks, seemed to put everything in question and suspend all forms of routine belief.²⁴ He would express his particular interest in those kinds of speaking up and speaking out that bring back ‘the return of the socially repressed’.²⁵ It is not clear, however, that the style of resolutely ‘rational’ (or more precisely, academic) cultural policy thought pursued by Bourdieu over the 1960s could open a space for such a return of the repressed. For a critique that allows us to understand how May’s explosion of previously

²³ For an analysis along these lines of the universe of French higher education, see P. Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus* (Paris: Minuit, 1984).

²⁴ From the column ‘Son opinion aujourd’hui’ in *Lire*, May 1983, included in *Interventions*, p. 62.

²⁵ Pierre Bourdieu & Pierre Viansson-Ponté, ‘Un entretien avec Pierre Bourdieu, II, La culture, pour qui et pourquoi?’, *Le Monde*, 12 October 1977, p. 2 (also available at *Interventions*, p. 107).

suppressed speech shattered the Malravian model of cultural policy (and at least challenged Bourdieu's frames of reference), we must turn to Michel de Certeau's first sustained engagement with cultural policy questions.

1.2 Culture and voice (Certeau)

La Prise de parole ['The Capture of Speech'], Certeau's analysis of the May 1968 events, was originally subtitled 'Pour une nouvelle culture' ['For a New Culture']. In the text, Certeau argues that the 'displacement' wrought by these events was driven in the first place less by a 'conception' than by a new 'experience' of culture.²⁶ We might represent the displacement at work in his text as a formal inversion of the classical scheme according to which the experience of culture connotes primarily an encounter with the enduring (written) traces of human thought and imagination, necessarily mediated by contemporary interlocution of some kind. The events accentuate in Certeau's thought a kind of switch, such that the experience of culture is represented primarily as an interlocutory process that is nonetheless necessarily mediated by writings of one sort or another.²⁷

Let me quote a passage that suggests the quality of this experience. Certainly, it is in this formulation somewhat set off from the directly political demands issuing from the events. However, the temporary social breakdown occasioned by the latter created the conditions in which the 'utopian' experience evoked by Certeau could occur:

It is a fact that we can attest to for having seen and been participants: a throng became poetic... Everyone finally began to talk: about essential things, about society, about happiness, about knowledge, about art, about politics. A permanent drone of speech [*une palabre permanente*] spread like fire, an immense therapeutic nourished on what it delivered, contagious with every prescription and every diagnosis. It gave everyone access to ... these debates that assailed both professional barriers and those of social milieus. It changed spectators into actors. (*PP* 42-3 [13])

²⁶ See Michel de Certeau, *La Prise de parole et autres écrits politiques*, ed. Luce Giard (Paris: Seuil, 1994) (hereafter in this chapter *PP*), p. 43 [p. 13]. Certeau's analysis was first published as a book in October 1968 (*La Prise de parole. Pour une nouvelle culture* (Paris: Desclée De Brouwer, 1968)).

²⁷ This positing of oral exchange as a fundamental dimension of cultural experience can be seen in Certeau's earlier pedagogical reflection (see e.g. M. de Certeau, 'L'Ecole chrétienne dans la pastorale de l'église', in *Inter-collèges*, 1, October 1965, pp. 19-34 (p. 32)).

This new experience need not in itself have modified a basic conception of culture. Culture was always supposed to constitute the frames of reference that would guide the subject's response to such 'essential' matters – even if that subject were required, so to speak, to mortify himself so that those frames of reference could be preserved intact. Indeed, a characteristically delphic utterance by André Malraux provides an illuminating point of comparison. Marc Fumaroli argues that Malraux entertained an essentially visual conception of the cultural domain in which images (of universal culture) pitched battle against images (of mass culture) for the soul of humankind: thus the mute, unmediated, supposedly intuitive encounter between an uneducated peasant and a great painting provided, for Malraux, a kind of archetypal representation of direct 'cultural action'.²⁸ However, we can see in the following quotation how, for Malraux, the significance of culture also derived from a peculiar kind of interlocutory process (albeit a more unidirectional, more solitary, and more uncanny one than that envisaged above by Certeau): 'If the word "culture" has a meaning, it is what responds to the face which a human being sees in the mirror when he contemplates the prospect of his death mask. Culture is what responds to man when he asks himself what he is doing on the earth.'²⁹ There is, I think, more to such pronouncements than Malraux's political detractors in 1968 would have allowed. There are obvious differences with regard to the resolutely social experience evoked by Certeau. Yet both writers seem to view culture as a kind of utterance ('speech', a 'response') that engages the meaning of an existence. Moreover, for neither writer does this utterance belong, strictly speaking, to a discernible speaker – it emerges as the other, inside or outside the self. The experience described by Certeau corresponds less to a 'capture' than to a 'liberation' of speech, which emerges, as it were, into the open in such a way as to reorganize his vision of cultural process: 'Something happened to us. Something began to stir in us. Emerging from who knows where, suddenly filling the streets and the factories, circulating among us, becoming ours but no longer being the muffled noise of our solitude, voices that had never been heard began to change us. At least that was what we felt.' (PP 41 [11-12]). Those events foregrounded for Certeau the crucial 'coefficient' of utterance as such (PP 52 [21]), initially in a new experience of culture, but in due course also opening out onto a reconceptualisation of culture.³⁰

²⁸ See Marc Fumaroli, *L'Etat culturel: Une religion moderne* (Paris : Fallois, 1992).

²⁹ André Malraux, 'Discours prononcé à l'occasion de l'inauguration de la Maison de la Culture d'Amiens le 19 mars 1966', in *La Politique, la culture* (Paris : Gallimard, 1996), p. 323 ; in translation as 'Speech given on the Occasion of the Inauguration of the House of Culture at Amiens on 19 March 1966', in Ahearne, *French Cultural Policy Debates*, pp. 55-61 (p. 57).

³⁰ For a subtle and properly uncanny analysis of the relations between 'captured' and 'liberated' speech, compare Certeau's study of a case of diabolic possession over the 1630s in M. de Certeau, *La Possession de Loudun* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970).

How might the dynamics of utterance lead to such a reconceptualisation? To begin with, the act of taking hold of speech (*la prise de parole*) can modify, as it were, the weight and stakes of words otherwise prone to ‘float’ unattached in the middle distance. It brings more insistently into focus certain fundamental features of language now familiar to students of the linguistics of utterance: the place of speaker and listener(s); the ‘contract’ between them; the ‘here and now’ of speaking; the act of ‘appropriating’ a preexisting linguistic system, of making it signify in terms of the present situation and interlocutory relationship.³¹ These features are not, of course, foreign to the demands of writing – it is simply that the movement of decontextualization that constitutes the force of writing is liable to occult them.³² A specifically oral exchange brings the speaker up more abruptly against the sense his or her speech can (or cannot) confer upon a given situation. It brings the cultural models informing that speech up against the social and political (micro-)structures with which they putatively engage. I want to suggest that this experience, cast into relief by the events of May 1968, raked through the entire field of culture and transformed for Certeau the key vectors of its development.

A secondhand anecdote recounted by Certeau gives a sense of what is at issue – though one should note that his text does not endorse the absolute value of unmediated spontaneity that, on the face of it, the anecdote seems to convey:

A young elevator operator from the Samaritaine department store who was being interviewed by a journalist responded: ‘I really don’t know what to say, I’m not cultured [*je n’ai pas de culture*].’ A comrade who was on strike interrupted her: ‘Don’t say that! Knowledge is finished. *Today, culture, well, it’s all in what we say!*’³³

One should not suppose that the striking comrade, impetuous and eager to interrupt, is simply speaking for Certeau. An attentive reading of his text shows that, for him, the events of May 1968 signified anything but the consignment of knowledge as such to the dustbin of history. There are, for example, things one needs to know if one is to speak effectively in a given situation. It may be that the young elevator operator knew better than her comrade what she wanted

³¹ See, for example, Emile Benveniste, ‘Man and Language’, in *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. M. Meek (Miami: University of Miami Press, 1971 [1966]), pp. 193-246. On the fundamental role that ‘utterance’ (*énonciation*) would assume as a category in Certeau’s thought, see e.g. Louis Marin, ‘L’aventure sémiotique, le tombeau mystique’, in L. Giard (ed.), *Michel de Certeau* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1987), pp. 207-23, esp. 207-14.

³² Cf. Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 1988 [1982]), pp. 132-3 and 176-7.

³³ PP 37 [9 – trans. mod.]. Certeau’s source for this anecdote was Philippe Labro, *Ce n’est qu’un début* (Paris: Ed. premières, 1968).

before she was ready to speak. Speech, moreover, is not necessarily an end in itself, but refers (more insistently, in Walter Ong's view, than does writing)³⁴ to situations that are more than verbal and that it may transform. What this anecdote does illustrate, however, as it figures in Certeau's writing, is the emergence of a dominant axis of reflection that would shape his subsequent cultural policy thinking. Culture is thus conceived in the first instance as a function of an interlocutory process, which refers in turn to more than just culture. Hence his prime cultural policy preoccupation will be not the supports (books, monuments) that encode and preserve culture (necessary as these are), but rather the disparate groups of speaking subjects who appropriate and incorporate its frames of reference. It is at this level that the key question becomes for Certeau, in the language of the time, not what to create, but rather how subjects might 'create themselves'.³⁵

While the ways in which a culture was 'voiced' transformed the way in which it was experienced, it was above all the plurality of those voicings that would bring Certeau to 'reconceptualise' culture. He argues that cultural process had traditionally always been understood in terms of an 'elite-mass' model. Elite groups had always been seen as the essential motor of cultural change – whether that change was understood in terms of a hegemonic programme of alienation, a 'trickle-down' of enlightenment, or campaigns of popular liberation in which the masses were mobilised by avant-garde revolutionary cells. Malraux's cultural policy was clearly deployed in terms of such a model, aspiring as it did to monopolize initiative by bringing peremptorily defined forms of culture to a provincial 'desert'. Certeau notes how commentators on May 1968 also sought to employ this fundamental model. Whether hostile or sympathetic to the events, the tendency was for these commentators to posit elite 'groupuscules' of activists behind the masses that would otherwise have remained passive. For Certeau, these interpretations were unconvincing. The events invalidated this fundamental model, and 'insofar as the event resists being sifted through this conceptual grid, it obliges us to revise that grid and thus works its way into our representation of the real by reorganising it.'³⁶ For as Certeau had perceived the

³⁴ See Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, pp. 176-7.

³⁵ See Certeau PP 86 [48]. One could compare this formulation with, for example, Raoul Vaneigem's invocation of 'creativity' in his then influential *Traité de savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes générations* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992 [1967]), esp. pp. 245-62; and *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Rebel Press/Left Bank Books, 1993), pp. 190-203; or, in a rather different perspective, the argument of Bourdieu and Passeron that the prime objective of university students should be to 'create themselves' (*se créer*) as agents fit to carry out certain activities and produce certain objects (in *Les Héritiers*, pp. 84-5).

³⁶ 'L'architecture sociale du savoir', in M. de Certeau, *La Culture au plurIEL* (Paris: Seuil, 1993 [1974]), pp. 141-64 (p. 143), referred to hereafter as CP [pp. 83-100 (p. 85) - trans. mod.]. This chapter originally figured as chapter 4 of *La Prise de parole* in the first 1968

events, imagination and initiative had not been restricted to a select few centres of decision-making, rippling out to crowds of people reducible to mere numbers. Instead, these numbers ‘began to live, to destroy, individual by individual, the myth of their abstract inertia’.³⁷ The events, whatever their political efficacy, had given ephemeral but dazzling visibility to an anonymous and dispersed creative potential that was simply unrepresented in prevailing political and conceptual models. The challenge articulated by Certeau was to develop the ‘practical and theoretical consequences’ of this ‘request for a democratic creativity, or for the active participation of all in common representations’.³⁸ We will see in chapter three how his cultural policy thinking addressed this challenge.

1.3 Art: an impossible religion (Debray)

‘The bombast of the minister for Cults has been sufficiently derided, along with his crusading tones. Let us begin by celebrating what there is in him to admire.’³⁹

We have seen how the policy thinking of Malraux provides a foil against which both Bourdieu and Certeau develop their own virtual cultural policy frameworks. Indeed, the critiques they produced would paradoxically combine with the founding project of Malraux to produce what Philippe Urfalino has called the ‘split foundation’ of cultural policy discourse in France: subsequent debate would adopt as recurrent references both Malraux’s ‘invention’ of cultural policy and, so to speak, its foundational critiques. By the 1990s, a thinker like Régis Debray could take for granted that Malraux’s policy thinking (symbolised essentially by the Houses of Culture) would be read through the prism of such critiques. What, by contrast, could he find in Malraux to admire?

Bourdieu and Certeau take as their principal object Malraux’s thinking insofar as it was translated into a ‘doctrine’ for policy action by the principal agents of his ministry.⁴⁰ Debray, by contrast, is clearly interested in the aesthetic

edition of that book, but was removed from the posthumous edition to avoid reduplication with *La Culture au plurIEL*.

³⁷ *L’Archibras*, 4, special edition, ‘Le surréalisme le 18 juin 68’, p. 2, quoted at CP 150 [90].

³⁸ CP 141 [83 – trans. mod.].

³⁹ R. Debray, *Vie et mort de l’image. Une histoire du regard en Occident* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), p. 268 (henceforth referred to as VMI).

⁴⁰ On the transition from a ‘philosophy of the aesthetic State’ as found in the 1960s writings of Malraux and Gaëtan Picon, his close collaborator, to the formulation of a policy ‘doctrine’ by the leading administrators in the new Ministry for Cultural Affairs, see Urfalino, *L’Invention de la politique culturelle*, pp. 31-99.

theory that Malraux had already developed prior to being appointed Minister in 1959. This revolved essentially around the notion of an ‘Imaginary Museum’ as instituted by the increasing availability of ever-improving photographic reproductions of artworks. In Malraux’s view, this technological development was the equivalent for the plastic arts of the transformation produced in the written word by the spread of the printed press.⁴¹ The inescapable reconfiguration of aesthetic perception that ensued transformed the identity of any given work of art, or by the same token the contents of any given physical museum or collection. These now took on significance as a function of their place in the entire set of photographically reproducible works (cave-paintings, icons, sculptures, portraits, decorative engravings...) gathered together in the twentieth century as ‘art’. The virtual site thereby generated was what Malraux called the ‘imaginary museum’. An immaterial construct that englobed the perception of all physical works, it gathered together ‘the most immense domain of images that humanity has known’, and for Malraux called for the creation of a ‘sanctuary as the supernatural once called for the creation of cathedrals’.⁴²

When Debray comes to evoke Malraux’s vision of a virtual ‘world culture’ (and implied policy) in *Vie et mort de l’image*, he is careful to differentiate it from more superficial visions of international art as a high-level lubricant for exchanges in a globalised economy (he quotes from a ‘Manifesto for a Global Society’ published as part of a World Arts Summit mounted in Venice in 1991 under the auspices of the World Economic Forum, according to which ‘art is the language of culture, the one form of creative expression that allows us to communicate and to build real world-bridges’).⁴³ There is a refractory violence in Malraux’s encounter with the images peopling his work that prohibits this representation of a free-flowing world culture as both symbol and instance of a free flow of economic goods in a neo-liberal world order. These mute figures take effect for Malraux against a backdrop of incommunicability (they have become detached from their original function and context); they work nearly always in his account to bring the subject up against his own death and finitude. Herein lies no doubt an initial and quasi-existential principle of ‘admiration’: for Debray too, at an anthropological level, the image was ‘born of death’ (the ‘recomposition’ produced by the image was a response to the decomposition of the living body (*VMI* 27)) and implicitly carries this referent with it as a fundamental signification.⁴⁴ The ‘secular spirituality’

⁴¹ André Malraux, *Le Musée Imaginaire* (Paris : Gallimard (Folio-essais), 1996 [reproduces 1965 edition]), p. 16.

⁴² *Le Musée Imaginaire*, 253.

⁴³ *VMI* 265 (quoted in original English)

⁴⁴ See notably *VMI* 15-41 (chapter entitled ‘La naissance par la mort’); and compare also the contrast developed over the book by Debray between perceptual regimes where images are encountered as more or less rare presences or goods, and the contemporary regime of the

(*spiritualité laïque*) (VMI 267) underpinning Malraux's policy vision is not, as is most common, derided or passed over diplomatically by Debray, but is rather, in the first instance, read seriously on its own terms.

At another equally fundamental level, the mediologist in Debray could admire Malraux's capacity to correlate the putatively separate domains of technological development and the 'spiritual' experience of art. Like Benjamin before him, Malraux does not ask whether the comparatively new technique of photography is or is not an art; instead he explores how it has contributed to the transformation of our entire understanding of 'art'. Unlike Benjamin, he argues not that the techniques of mass reproduction have reduced the power of art by stripping it of its aura; instead, he argues that they have both subjected these effects to a powerful 'metamorphosis' and made them virulent (via the constitution of an all-englobing 'imaginary museum'). The 'cultural action' envisaged by Malraux, at least in his writings, is therefore less direct than some of his critics have argued. The mediation performed by the englobing sphere of the imaginary museum transforms the very objects (images, sculptures) it mediates. This retroaction of cultural media upon the objects they transport corresponds likewise for Debray to a fundamental cultural fact.

Debray notes that Malraux, unlike most intellectuals, was actually given the chance to convert an 'intimate meditation into a responsible public policy' (VMI 268). In *Vie et mort de l'image*, Debray presents the ensuing institutionalisation as a positive breakthrough. Malraux made 'culture' into an autonomous ministerial domain by replacing the old Fine Arts sub-department in the Ministry of Education. Art thereby ceased to be represented in government as a matter of decorative distinction for the cultivated classes; it became rather something 'essential ... that the Republic must transmit to each citizen, though it was up to the citizen to make it bear fruit' (VMI 268). At this point, then, Malraux is presented as extending the republican project of public enlightenment to the aesthetic domain. At the same time, however, just like the rationalist republican Debray, Malraux was sceptical about the capacity of Reason as such to found and cement a political order.⁴⁵ He appears to recognise what Debray describes in *Critique de la raison politique* as the 'unreasonable' law of politics: if a collection of individuals or groups are to cohere 'horizontally' among themselves, they can only do so by common reference to a 'vertically' transcendent principle that stands above them all. Insofar as it stands above them, this principle becomes a super-stition, and its discrediting weakens the social body that it brings together.⁴⁶ In 1959, with the Fourth Republic in

'visuel' where a hyperabundance of images induces an anaesthetised or purely calculatory response to images (*visionnage*).

⁴⁵ Cf. *Le Musée imaginaire*, p. 29

⁴⁶ See Debray, *Critique de la raison politique, ou l'inconscient religieux* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981). For Debray's endeavour to negotiate this challenge to rational republicanism, see e.g. his construction of the republican principle of *laïcité* itself as a generalised transcendent

tatters and the Algerian crisis still dividing the country, the nascent Fifth Republic badly needed such principles of cohesion. De Gaulle proposed, famously (and with considerable efficacy) a ‘certain idea of France’. Malraux proposed the nation’s artistic inheritance, and in particular its inheritance of images. Debray notes, again with reference to the ‘unreasonable’ law described above, that images are more efficacious than concepts as principles of group cohesion (VMI 268–9). They have a greater force of attraction and are prone to elicit a greater affective investment (Debray refers elsewhere to the care taken by the protagonists of the French Revolution to embody their rationalist principles in suitably mobilizing images). In its conception, then, the republican political project issuing from Malraux’s aesthetic theory might be considered *prima facie* as satisfying the non-rational requirements that, for Debray, a rational political strategy must fulfil if it is to become an effective force.

But of course, as we have already seen in this chapter, Malraux’s cultural policy did not become an effective social force. The secular ‘cathedrals’ of this aesthetic cult did not gather together a faithful people. At an initial level, Debray echoes and endorses the diagnosis of Bourdieu (‘Alas, art awakens only the awoken, and most people do not possess the code for deciphering Goya or Clouet’ (VMI 270)). Malraux is thus charged with failing to take into account the ‘socio-cultural constraints of transmission’ (*ibid.*). However, unlike Bourdieu (and to some degree Certeau), Debray’s criticism does not attach to the residually religious language and structuration of Malraux’s secular project. As we have seen, Debray sees the constitution of a vertical form of ‘transcendence’ as a necessary precondition for maintaining the ‘horizontal’ cohesion of a social group (it protects an organisation against entropic dispersal). He thus views the cultivation of some kind of ‘religion’ as an ineluctable constraint of government (‘religion’ signifying here, in a sociological sense, not necessarily belief in deity, but a binding discourse, an organised set of mythically expressed values through which a society represents itself). Certainly, Malraux appears in *Le Musée imaginaire* to build on an analogous position. Schematically put: for Malraux, the abolition of the Monarchy left a void in the self-representation of French society that republicans looked initially to Reason to fill. This principle would prove of insufficient force to prevent the effective domination of nineteenth-century French society by the powers of capital and technology. Over this time, Malraux argues, an unprecedented event took place: ‘true artists ceased to recognise the values of the powerful.’⁴⁷ Instead

principle above more ‘local’ transcendent principles in Debray, *Cours de médiologie générale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), pp. 353–6. Compare also, more recently, Debray’s submission to the commission chaired by Bernard Stasi (of which Debray was a member) that was charged with developing a framework for implementing the constitutional principle of *laïcité* across contemporary French society (R. Debray, *Ce que nous voile le voile. La République et le sacré* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004)).

⁴⁷ *Le Musée Imaginaire*, p. 28.

of illustrating and diffusing the principles of transcendence required by rulers (the Church, the absolute monarchy...) to govern their subjects, modern art constituted itself, for Malraux, by breaking away from the demands of such ‘representation’, and evolving instead its own purely artistic criteria. Those painters, for example, symbolized by Manet, who ‘refused any value foreign to painting itself’ looked to art as a ‘domain for which life was simply a primary material.’⁴⁸ Malraux’s project, in a nutshell, was effectively to annex this autonomously constituted isolate and to turn it into a repository of socially binding transcendent values.

This latter operation appeared ill-founded to Debray. An autonomous art cut off from the social body and preoccupied exclusively with abstracted ‘volumes and shapes’, to paraphrase Malraux, could offer little purchase as a tool of government. One might contrast its social existence with the historically embedded infrastructure of shared narratives, rituals, and modes of inculcation that underpin the apparently immediate efficacy of religious or political icons. As Debray puts it:

An image does not draw its power from itself but from the community of which it is or was the symbol, and which, through it, speaks with itself or hears the echo of its past (VMI 270)

One could argue, of course, that Malraux tried precisely to turn art, through his cultural policy, into such a sociologically and historically embedded symbolic resource. But high art, as a material, was refractory to such a project. This was not necessarily the ‘fault’ of that art. The function of art as constituted over modernity has tended to be precisely to challenge the culture (the shared schemes of perception and thought) in which it develops. This function is inherently ‘anti-religious’, at least in the sense defined above. It is more likely to bring commotion and rupture than it is to bind and cement.⁴⁹ As one who remains unconvinced about the ‘necessity’ of shared superstition within a social body (or unwilling to turn a commonly observed fact into a universal or even normative principle), this function of ‘commotion’ seems to me eminently valuable within a political order. But however that may be, it certainly did work, as Debray argues, to make Malraux’s ‘religiously’ conceived project for art impossible.

Debray evinces a certain ambivalence in his approach to Malraux. We saw above how in *Vie et mort de l'image* the founding of the Ministry of Culture through a secession from the Ministry of Education was presented as a positive

⁴⁸ *Le Musée Imaginaire*, 49, 77.

⁴⁹ Cf. Marc Guillaume’s comments in Commissariat Général du Plan (principal rapporteur – Marc Guillaume), *L’Impératif culturel. Rapport du groupe long terme culture* (Paris : La Documentation française, 1983), pp. 78-9.

breakthrough. In *L'Etat séducteur*, by contrast, the same event is presented as a symptomatic moment in the decline of education-based values in modern France. Malraux is seen here as perverting the republican educational tradition in France, originating with Condorcet over the Revolution, propelled notably by Jules Ferry's reforms of 1879-82, and moving officially over the Popular Front (1936) beyond the spread of school education to questions of access to culture:

The pedagogical genealogy of the ‘Cultural State’, under subcontracting to the educational State, links up, via the Popular Front, the ideal of ‘Culture for Everyone’ to that of ‘Education for everyone’. Malraux was at once its inheritor and gravedigger, introducing the first intellectual and administrative break between the two worlds. Until he took office, the world of taste was officially subordinate to that of knowledge. It was thought not only that sensibility can and must be educated, but that it represents itself a means of education (and thus of redemption).⁵⁰

In Debray’s mediological framework, the 1960s corresponded in France to a period of transition between a social system whose dominant symbolic medium was print, the dominant institution for the transmission of which was the national school system, and a social system whose dominant symbolic medium was the electronic image, the dominant institution for the transmission of which was the national television network. In the technical terms to be deployed more fully in chapter 4, it corresponded to the transition from the ‘graphosphere’ to the ‘videosphere’. Within this framework, one could see Malraux’s Houses of Culture, effectively institutions for the transmission of Culture, as occupying a peculiar interstitial position. Debray notes how Malraux emphatically demarcated these institutions from the ambit of the national education system. In Malraux’s famous words: ‘The University is there to teach people. We are here to teach people how to love.’⁵¹ Explanations in the aesthetic domain could for Malraux be ‘eminently useful’, but would not improve anyone’s understanding of a work.⁵² In this respect, Malraux’s was simply one more voice in the swelling chorus of those devaluing the intellectual operations that for Debray enjoyed preeminence under the graphosphere (abstraction, detachment, objective explanation).⁵³ At the same time, however, Malraux could not be

⁵⁰ R. Debray, *L'Etat séducteur: les révolutions médiologiques du pouvoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), p. 89.

⁵¹ Malraux, ‘Discours prononcé à l’occasion de l’inauguration de la Maison de la Culture d’Amiens le 19 mars 1966’, p. 326 [‘Speech given on the Occasion of the Inauguration of the House of Culture at Amiens on 19 March 1966’, p. 58].

⁵² Ibid., pp. 326-7 [pp. 58-9].

⁵³ On the association of these intellectual operations with the technology of writing, cf. also Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), or Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*.

represented, if we were to extend Debray's analysis, as a straightforward symptom of the coming videosphere. Certainly, he appears to give preeminence to the image over the abstract elaboration of writing; he appears to encourage an immediate subjective response to the image that does not pass through writing; but at the same time, the ultimate purpose of his strategy is to mount a resistance to ... images:

Now, never has the world known dream-factories like ours, never has the world known such a power of the imaginary realm, never has the world seen such a deluge of idiocy [...]. These extremely powerful factories bring with them the most nefarious oneiric instruments in existence, because the dream-factories are not there to raise men up, but very simply to make money. Now, the most productive kinds of dream when it comes to selling theatre and cinema tickets are naturally those that appeal to the deepest, most organic and, in short, most terrible elements in a human being, and, above all, of course, sex, blood and death.⁵⁴

Malraux is not looking to images as the most economic way of rallying an audience via the gratification of immediate bodily instinct (a tropism that for Debray will characterise the videosphere). Instead they are designed precisely as a mediation between such instincts and the abstract 'laws of the world'.⁵⁵ Malraux's images of predilection - abrupt, stark, isolated, shot through always with their unknowability - are not those of an ambient, reassuring or titillating televisual flux.

Debray tends to see the weaknesses in Malraux's intellectual and political constructions as arising from a failure to think through questions of mediation. We have seen how Bourdieu and Certeau, in different perspectives, make a similar diagnosis. For Debray, the fate of the Houses of Culture proved that 'the genius of intermediaries was not that of our national magician' (*VMI* 270), while he suggests that in *Le Musée Imaginaire*, Malraux separated excessively 'the domain of forms from the domain of techniques' that condition and mediate these forms.⁵⁶ Such objections appear both to be well-founded (as regards certain glaring omissions in Malraux's reflection) and debatable (as regards major innovative insights in that same reflection). An overarching perspective in *Le Musée Imaginaire*, for example, is the question of how given technical

⁵⁴ Malraux, 'Discours prononcé à l'occasion de l'inauguration de la Maison de la Culture d'Amiens le 19 mars 1966', p. 324 ['Speech given on the Occasion of the Inauguration of the House of Culture at Amiens on 19 March 1966', p. 57].

⁵⁵ For the 'laws of the world', see *ibid.*, p. 321 [56]; for an analysis of Malraux's aesthetics as based on a Schillerian mediation between instinct and reason, see Urfalino, *L'Invention de la politique culturelle*, pp. 39-57.

⁵⁶ R. Debray, *Transmettre* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1997), p. 111 [p. 72] (henceforth referred to as *T*).

innovations rake through and transform the entire domain of ‘art’. Clearly, the introduction of photographic reproductions, first black and white and then colour, is of central importance here. But Malraux attends also to more minor ‘technical’ considerations: the camera angles deployed, whether the reproductions appear with or without their original frame, with or without a margin, the effect of enlargements, the extent to which the technique of photography ‘reveals’ the technique of oil-painting as such (as a kind of historically ‘finished’ object)... One should not let Malraux’s blindspots in matters of social mediation obscure his considerable insights as regards the technological mediation and constitution of culture. The construct of the ‘imaginary museum’ foregrounds a whole panoply of material mediations that interpose themselves between a subject and a work of ‘art’, and that tend to pass unperceived.

Likewise, it has become clear over this chapter that, as institutions dedicated to the transmission of culture, the Houses of Culture were, so to speak, a resonant failure. We should not take this to mean, however, that their architects simply bypassed the question of mediation. Extended thought and debate went into the material construction of these edifices - it was never a question of confronting the population with works of art in the most convenient empty hangar that happened to be available. Nor were technical questions lost from sight altogether in a humanistically inspired cultural haze. Caught historically, as suggested above, between the heavyweight apparatus of the graphosphere’s education system and the high-performance technology of the videosphere, they too were designed as cultural ‘machines’. In the words of Gabriel Monnet, director of one of the first Houses of Culture:

The House of Culture must be a house where people encounter what is great and exemplary; a great machine to combat machines, particularities, and diletantish curiosity; a machine to open people’s hearts, eyes and ears so as to renew relations between human beings.⁵⁷

A kind of prosthetic sensorium, bringing together what appeared as the principal aesthetic media at the time of their conception - theatre, opera, concerts, lectures, plastic arts exhibitions, cinema, book and record libraries - their architects imagined them as something like a meticulously orchestrated grand Medium or Machine that would transcend its component parts. Considerable attention was given to topographical issues with a view to ensuring that punters lured in by one attraction would come into contact with another.⁵⁸ Indeed, one is reminded of Debray’s characterisation elsewhere of those mediological

⁵⁷ Gabriel Monnet, ‘Une machine à lutter contre les machines’, *Résonances*, 139, March 1965, quoted in Urfalino, *L’Invention de la politique culturelle*, p. 169.

⁵⁸ See more generally, Urfalino, *L’Invention de la politique culturelle*, chapter 6.

‘matrices’ (such as literary salons in pre-revolutionary France) that reorganise public space: ‘The user does not leave these sites in the same state as he entered them’.⁵⁹ In this perspective, the Houses of Culture do not appear simply as a failure to take account of mediation. Instead (and the difference is significant), they appear as an experiment in mediation that failed. Experiments that fail are as a rule instructive. In this case, one might argue that close attention to modalities of the material and technical mediation of cultural experience was not accompanied by sufficient attention to the organisation of human intermediaries (the Christian Church’s ‘living stones’) required for the successful transmission of a cultural system.⁶⁰

The different critiques of Malraux developed by Bourdieu, Certeau, and Debray revolve around questions of mediation. Bourdieu argued that the only means by which cultural inequalities could be effectively addressed was through the rational integration of the cultural democratization project into the institutional processes of certified education. These alone could provide the mediation between the primary habituses of social subjects and the dispositions required for high cultural practices. Certeau, for his part, underlined how the enduring works and reference points of human cultures are, in their social existence, mediated by interlocutory exchange. In particular, he foregrounded the creativity evidenced by a swarm of ‘uncertified’ voices coming to interpose themselves between cultural resources and their authorised interpreters. Finally, Debray focuses not just on issues of social and political mediation, but also on the technical mediations that interpose themselves between subjects and cultural works, and indeed constitute human beings in a fundamental sense as cultural subjects. In this respect, however, Malraux can be seen as much as a pioneering precursor as an object for critique.⁶¹ In the chapters that follow, I will explore how these thinkers pursue their reflection in their own terms, coming not just to refine their critical perspectives, but also to develop frameworks for positive policy prescription.

⁵⁹ T 179 [113 – trans. mod.].

⁶⁰ Urfalino’s analysis suggests that an unreasonable burden was placed on the directors of the Houses of Culture, drawn generally from the world of theatre, and supposed to embody in one person the requisite capacities for artistic creation and direction, financial and personnel management, and public outreach (see Urfalino, *L’Invention de la politique culturelle*, pp. 185-205).

⁶¹ See e.g. R. Debray, *Introduction à la médiologie* (Paris: PUF, 2000), p. 99.

Chapter Two. Pierre Bourdieu

If one surveys Pierre Bourdieu's work as a whole, one can discern within it (along with an array of other issues and topics) various strands of cultural policy thinking. At first sight, it seems difficult to reconcile these various strands with each other. Culture is seen both as a prime generator of illusion and as a preeminent instrument of mental emancipation. Bourdieu looks to expose its contents as 'arbitrary', and yet defends vigorously the 'autonomy' of cultural producers in the definition of those contents. The State is represented as the instrument of powerful class interests, and is described also as a precarious and precious institution whose prerogatives (including the capacity to define a cultural policy) have to be vigorously defended. That cultural policy is described as both protecting and smothering cultural production. And so on. There are, of course, various strategies analysts can deploy to negotiate such apparent contradictions. One is to distribute their elements as successive moments in time: Bourdieu thought A, then B; or he emphasized X, then Y. Certainly, such an approach can help us to understand the evolution of Bourdieu's thought, and I will on occasion have recourse to it. Another strategy, however, is to build up a further point of view from which two apparently opposing positions can be seen both to be true at the same time. That is, in general, the approach I propose to adopt here, pursuing each of the strands in question – present in varying degrees throughout Bourdieu's oeuvre – as far as Bourdieu pushes them, while also pointing to the types of linkage that enable them to be brought together as elements in a coherent body of thought. This will occasionally mean challenging certain formulations of Bourdieu, who has a tendency to absolutize (detach from what he also holds to be true) certain lines of argument. Overall, however, I will look to show how Bourdieu's oeuvre as a whole provides us with a complex and nuanced cultural policy framework, emerging from an analysis of what one might call the 'multifunctional' or overdetermined social existence of culture.

2.1 Cultural policy and dominant ideology

As is well known, Malraux departed as Minister of Culture in the year after the events of May 1968. In any case, it had become clear before these events that the Houses of Culture were not operating as had been hoped, failing notably to draw in audiences from new social classes. For a while after Malraux's departure, the future of the Ministry as an autonomous body was by no means ensured. It was widely held, both within and outside this body, that a new 'philosophy' for cultural policy was required. It was in this context that the

notion of ‘cultural development’ came to the fore. This was a term originally developed by Joffre Dumazedier as an extension to the objectives of economic and social development pursued by the then influential strategic national planning agency (‘The Plan’). Whereas the Malravian philosophy of ‘cultural action’ was predicated on a fairly narrowly prescribed notion of what constituted culture (traditional high culture plus cinema), ‘cultural development’ looked to build on the diversity of leisure practices pursued by the population, and to raise the ‘level’ of these practices rather than abruptly replacing them with something else. Part of the appeal of the notion in the wake of 1968 was this very breadth, which allowed it in ecumenical fashion to accommodate (or conceal) the conflicts splitting the cultural field into so many fractions. Its elevation to the guiding rubric of cultural policy occurred most notably through the discussions of the Commission for Cultural Affairs of the Sixth Plan (1969-1971), whose diverse working groups were charged with devising a new blueprint for cultural policy that would take account of the apparently seismic shock of May 1968. Its discourse and some of its measures would be taken up by the administration of Jacques Duhamel (1971-1973), who has been credited with consolidating the politico-administrative existence of the Ministry, ensuring that it would become an enduring feature of the French political landscape.¹

Pierre Bourdieu was asked to present a paper in May 1970 for the ‘Long Term’ working group of the Commission for Cultural Affairs of the Sixth Plan. This may seem surprising, given the turn taken by the previous research he had undertaken for the ministry.² Bourdieu would later argue that such commissions derived added legitimacy precisely from the occasionally incongruous voices they allowed into their official midst (we will see in chapter three how Michel de Certeau also became involved, somewhat more extensively, in the same working group, and Edgar Morin had presented a paper for the group’s previous session).³ If Bourdieu accepted this invitation, it was perhaps due in part to the specificity of the context – the original Malravian notion of cultural action no longer prevailed, and for a while all options seemed to be up for a discussion. Moreover, the working group in question was itself open to wide-ranging

¹ For an account of these developments see P. Urfalino, *L’Invention de la politique culturelle* (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1996), pp. 207-72, or, for a succinct overview, J. Ahearne, ‘Introduction’, in Ahearne (ed.), *French Cultural Policy Debates : A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 1-35 (pp. 12-18). On the Sixth Plan, see Laurent Gayme, ‘La Commission des Affaires Culturelles du VI^e Plan (1969-1971)’, in G. Gentil and A. Girard (ed.), *Les Affaires culturelles au temps de Jacques Duhamel, 1971-1973* (Paris: La Documentation française, 1995), pp. 57-82.

² See my discussion of *Le Musée et son public* and *L’Amour de l’art* in chapter one of the present study.

³ For Bourdieu’s point, see P. Bourdieu and L. Boltanski, ‘La production de l’idéologie dominante’, in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, no. 2-3, June 1976, pp. 3-73 (p. 11), henceforth referred to as *PID*. The content of the working group’s discussions are discussed more extensively in chapter three of the present study.

debate, for its brief was very general, and it could exert no constraining influence over government (it thus ran the danger of course, as Certeau would see, of becoming a compensatory talking shop for intellectuals).

Although the purpose of the group had by this time become the formulation of long-term objectives ('finalités') for cultural policy, Bourdieu does not really engage in his paper in such positive deliberations. He would later say that, when faced with an audience, his guiding principle was generally to tell it what it least wanted to hear, and one is tempted to see this paper as a case in point.⁴ His first move was to challenge both of the apparently opposing models then shaping cultural policy debate. He defines as 'populist' any 'policy of cultural diffusion tending to consecrate the culture that can actually be found in the popular classes, and thus to attribute to it the status of an authentic culture'.⁵ He saw this as a tendency that could be found in more or less masked forms in a range of existent cultural enterprises. We have already seen Bourdieu's principal objection to this – in ratifying as such a culture produced in a context of domination, such enterprises tended also to ratify the characteristics it owed to the limitations imposed by that domination. However, Bourdieu also castigated what to his listeners might have seemed the obvious alternative to 'populist' policies, which would have been to 'take official culture, legitimate culture as it is, and to diffuse it among those classes or categories who are dispossessed of it'.⁶ Bourdieu ironically denigrated this latter ambition as 'populicultural' – as agri-culture looks to cultivate the fields (*ager + cultura*), so the populiculturists looked to cultivate 'the people' as found in their natural (weed-infested) state. For this elite culture owed many of its characteristics to the fact that it served to legitimate and reproduce the position of the dominant classes – and could not therefore be deployed *en bloc* to emancipate those it had helped to dominate. In other words, Bourdieu's key objection to these opposing but also complementary models was that they were based on a shared 'ignorance of the fundamental fact that, in any given social structure, both the dominated and the dominant culture owe their characteristics to the structural relation that they maintain with each other'.⁷

Bourdieu's critique here is not simply criticism in the sense of fault-finding (though it certainly is that). It is also critique in a modified Kantian sense: it looks to lay bare the (social) a priori schemes of perception that

⁴ See the extracts from an interview carried out in 1989 in Tokyo and reproduced in P. Bourdieu, *Interventions, 1961-2001. Science sociale et action politique*, ed. F. Poupeau & T. Discepolo (Marseille: Agone, 2002), p. 74.

⁵ 'Exposé de Pierre Bourdieu' (13 May 1970), Commission des Affaires Culturelles, 6^{ème} Plan, Groupe de travail 'Long terme', Sous-groupe 'Finalités' (from the archives of the Ministry of Culture's *Département d'Etudes et de la Prospective*, 6th Plan 1971-1975, Dossier XXII 'Long Terme'), p. 1.

⁶ 'Exposé de Pierre Bourdieu', p. 2.

⁷ Ibid.

constitute and limit what is thinkable in a given domain. This was more clearly the case in the second broad move he carried out in his presentation. Those around the table would no doubt have assumed that the issue at stake in their deliberations concerned a cultural strategy for the nation as a whole. Without disputing this directly, Bourdieu looked to provide another perspective on their debates. What was also at issue, he contended, was the outcome of a struggle between different fractions of the dominant class concerning, so to speak, the legitimate or preeminent principle of domination. Members of different ‘fractions’ of that class would carry with them different categories of perception determining what for them constituted models of cultural excellence. In a sense, such cultural policy forums offered artists and intellectuals (usually ‘dominated’ fractions of the dominant class) a temporary symbolic revenge over the other fractions (economic managers and the politico-administrative elite) that more often held sway. Having said that, this revenge was not unqualified, and those with differently structured portfolios of cultural capital (economic and/or politico-administrative know-how, academic standing, avant-garde artistic reputation, etc.) continued to vie with each other for the most favourable ‘rates of exchange’ (to pursue the metaphor as Bourdieu would later do). All this, Bourdieu conceded, might have seemed somewhat crude to his audience, as he contended that the history of art, literature, or philosophy could also be conceived as the history of the conflicts between the fractions of the governing classes.⁸ But the point (scarcely taken up by his listeners) was this: there was a sense in which such debates about cultural policy had nothing to do with the people about which they were ostensibly concerned, and everything to do with the ongoing power struggles for resources and symbolic capital among the fractions of the dominant class. To understand the positions taken up by intellectuals (concerning the importance of such or such a type of cultural content and practice), one had to carry out a sociology of intellectuals; and that led necessarily to a sociology of the relations between intellectuals and power (as Bourdieu put it at the time).⁹

Unsurprisingly, given the manifestly confrontational content of his interaction, Bourdieu’s paper did not lead to an ongoing collaboration with the working group (his prime concern being, as we shall see, to assert the autonomy of intellectual practice with regard to State power). But we need not consider his contribution here as purely destructive. Firstly, such critique can exert a positively emancipatory effect. To put it paradoxically: the best way to prevent cultural policy debate being entirely a squabble between fractions of the dominant class jockeying for position may be to recognise to what extent it is, inevitably, just such a squabble. Hence apparently reductive comments of the type cited above may performatively exert anti-reductive effects, creating

⁸ Ibid., p. 7

⁹ Ibid., p. 6.

greater room for manoeuvre. Moreover, rather than yield to the easy option of dismissing Bourdieu as ‘reductive’, it seems to me more fruitful to hold on to the considerable truth behind such propositions, and then, using Bourdieu’s work, to integrate it into a more complex overall framework. We will see in subsequent discussion how the relationship between group interests and universal interests need not always be one of mutual opposition.

Bourdieu would exert a further turn of the critical screw in the extended article ‘The Production of the Dominant Ideology’, co-written with Luc Boltanski, and published in his emphatically non-governmental journal *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*.¹⁰ Here, he turned his attention not simply to the categories of thought informing policy models, but to the sites where those categories were forged, fostered and transmitted. These included various politico-economic forums and circles, the higher education ‘schools of power’ where the French governing elite were educated (and where leading political figures, civil servants and company managers taught), and also, especially, the various commissions of the Plan.¹¹ Bourdieu saw such sites, located at the intersection of the intellectual field and the field of ‘power’, as serving to produce the ‘logical and moral integration of the dominant class’ through a process of ‘negotiation and bargaining’ between the fractions of that class.¹² This work of ideological adjustment and adaptation was organised by the high-level bureaucracy of the State, which constituted a point of equilibrium (*PID* 60) within the field of the dominant class (that is, between those fractions with high economic capital and those with high cultural capital).

This process of adjustment (*‘aggiornamento’*) was particularly intense, Bourdieu argued, because an old-style ‘primary’ conservatism had given way to a ‘reconverted’ conservatism that needed to legitimate itself. Paradoxically, by contrasting itself with that ‘primary’ conservatism, the new (neo-liberal) conservatism could appear as progressive. Its professed project was a process of ‘modernisation’ steered by ‘neutral’ and ‘competent’ circles of economic and political managers. Its watchwords were openness, flexibility, adaptability, progress, technological advance, and the end of political ideologies – hence its ‘liberal’ appellation. It was itself a form of political ideology, in Bourdieu’s account, because it both masked and promoted the interests of the dominant

¹⁰ See above, note 3.

¹¹ Elite pupils in France do not as a rule attend universities, but what are called ‘grandes écoles’; and what Bourdieu terms the different ‘fractions’ of the dominant class (managers, the politico-administrative elite, engineers, academics) generally each attend different types of ‘grande école’, thus precociously becoming relatively segregated from each other (there is some crossover, but comparatively little in the case of the training grounds for academic intellectuals).

¹² *PID*, pp. 6, 4, 35. Bourdieu would later analyse the relations between the intellectual field and the politico-administrative field (as well as the economic field) within an englobing ‘field of power’ that their respective struggles constituted (see Bourdieu, *La Noblesse d’Etat. Grandes Ecoles et esprit de corps* (Paris: Minuit, 1989), pp. 371-486 [261-339]).

class. It adapted to (and indeed accelerated) certain ongoing mutations in the international system of economic production (notably moves to more flexible modes of accumulation and more intense recourse to the artificial creation of scarcity value). But it adapted to these in such a way as to preserve the interests of the already dominant classes – hence its ‘conservative’ label (*PID* 42-3).

We have seen how Bourdieu had himself taken a limited part in the deliberations of the Plan, and he noted in his 1975 article how ‘aesthetic’ (i.e. cultural policy) considerations loomed relatively large in the ideology being fashioned by the network of institutions evoked above. He argued that this was in part an aspect of the strategy of adapting in order to preserve. Rather than risk a return of the traumatizing upheavals of May 1968, graduates from the ‘schools of power’ (notably the *Ecole Nationale d’Administration* and *Polytechnique*) had ‘understood that they should adjust their sights by reintroducing all the things that the spokespeople for the excluded were demanding, which is to say beauty, happiness and imagination’ (*PID* 51). To concede a little such symbolic gratification would, as it were, lubricate the mechanisms of productivity, cost relatively little, and provide a sop for discontented intellectuals. Indeed, Bourdieu suggested that the prominence of aesthetic concerns in this new discourse could be explained not simply because it added an appearance of ‘soul’ (*un supplément d’âme*) to technocratic programmes, but also because cultural education programmes could provide a secularized equivalent to ‘spiritual exercises’ that might rechannel the disturbing violence and contestation that had emerged over the May events (*PID* 44). In other words, in the aftermath of those events, certain political circles (Bourdieu refers here in particular to the writings of Jacques Duhamel’s cabinet director, Jacques Rigaud) saw in ‘cultural development’ a programme that could ‘reeducate’ people to abandon their old mindsets and to embrace the demands of the new economic environment. As Duhamel himself had said, ‘resistance to change even more than material deprivation is what impedes development.’¹³ What capital (or productivity targets) objectively required was for people to become flexible, adaptable, mobile, as well as to desire things that they did not really need. In this perspective, cultural development policy was not concerned primarily with emancipating people. Its footsoldiers, the cultural and socio-cultural *animateurs*, took their place among the expanding professions of ‘soft management’ (*encadrement doux*) (*PID* 51): looking to remodel people’s aspirations, at worst they would defuse the tensions associated with the changes outlined above; at best they might lead people to embrace these changes, flexibly changing their work practices as required and hankering after the primarily symbolic goods that would now drive the economy...

¹³ J. Duhamel, ‘The Age of Culture’ [1972], in Ahearne (ed.), *French Cultural Policy Debates*, pp. 83-90 (p. 89).

All this is, of course, relentlessly suspicious. It is not that Bourdieu suggests that this was a carefully calibrated and orchestrated plot of some kind. His sociology confirms the observation that people routinely drift, un- or semi-consciously, to positions that objectively suit them. It is quite feasible that the kinds of politico-administrative groups being discussed by Bourdieu would routinely filter out cultural policy programmes that unsettled them, and would finally settle on a model that unsettled them the least, particularly if some elements might fit in with more insistent concerns. Nevertheless, it might seem that a high degree of instrumental efficacy was being attributed to activities like cultural animation by certain architects of this policy orientation (out of proportion to what might have been happening across the country with motley clusters of people in village halls and municipal facilities). Indeed, the prominent place given to ‘cultural development’ or aesthetic issues in this emergent neo-liberal discourse would soon fade (those driving neo-liberal programmes having grown sceptical no doubt about claims that cultural development could defuse and educate as they would desire). In 1974, the Ministry of Culture even ceased to exist as such, being demoted by Valéry Giscard d’Estaing’s government to a mere ‘Secretariat’ for Culture. Even when the Ministry was reestablished as such in 1977, the same neo-liberal dynamic analysed by Bourdieu in ‘La production de l’idéologie dominante’ would now cut back on any ‘superfluous’ cultural spending on the part of the State, reducing cultural policy to a minimal heritage protection package combined with political endorsement of the expanding cultural industries. Interestingly, we shall see that when Bourdieu would come some twenty years later to engage again with a now massively dominant neo-liberal orthodoxy, it would be not to attack any particular State intervention in culture, but to defend the very possibility of such intervention.

Bourdieu was thus unwilling to adopt the role, as he saw it, of the token ‘exotic’ individual whose input would finally be diluted beyond recognition, but who would give added legitimacy to the official State commissions where a cultural policy consonant with the requirements of a dominant ideology was elaborated. Instead, he would use a site outside the politico-administrative field to develop a critique not just of particular cultural policy options, but, one is tempted to say, of the whole cultural policy game.¹⁴ He noted in a 1977 interview that there was a tendency of politicians to believe and persuade people that there was ‘no policy, no political solution, and no political agreement possible outside those lofty summits frequented by sovereign minds alone’.¹⁵

¹⁴ The professed point of founding his journal *Actes de recherche en sciences sociales* in 1975 was to reinforce the autonomy of sociology produced independently of State and industrial demands.

¹⁵ P. Bourdieu and P. Viansson-Ponté, ‘Entretien avec Pierre Bourdieu’, *Le Monde*, 11 October 1977, pp. 1-2 (p. 2) (also in *Interventions*, p. 104).

Later he would note a similar tendency among those in the political microcosm to consider that ‘anything that has not been through the mill of official apparatuses, congresses, programmes and platforms did not exist.’¹⁶ In opposition to such politico-administrative takeovers of politics as such, Bourdieu considered that it was possible to exert substantial symbolic effects (and much of politics comes down to symbolic effects) from independent platforms elsewhere in the field of power. It would thus be as an autonomous intellectual that he would launch his critique of the cultural policy game – itself based on his broader deconstruction of what Brian Rigby has called the ‘cultural game’. And that critique has indeed been massively influential.

2.2 *The cultural policy game*

Brian Rigby writes of Bourdieu’s classic study *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* that ‘however much this is masked by its “scientific” procedures, the work is fundamentally a Rousseauist and Proudhonesque exposure and refusal of the cultural game as played by the rules laid down by the powerful and cultured classes.’¹⁷ This is undoubtedly true – though before going on to develop this, it is worth underlining that the overall perspective on culture (and cultural policy) that emerges from Bourdieu’s work cannot be reduced to an ethical denunciation of the mystifications and pretence informing the world of arts and culture. For Bourdieu notes that attitudes close to Proudhon’s vehement denunciation of the self-absorption of artists and the artworld were to be found particularly among the governing fractions of the French communist party. This was for Bourdieu understandable when referred to the popular and petit-bourgeois class ethos of these fractions, which made them particularly alert to certain truths of the cultural game, but it led directly on to ‘Zhdanovite’ cultural policy inclinations – in other words the direct subordination of all aesthetic expression and exploration to predefined political and propagandist purposes.¹⁸ We shall see how, after neo-liberalism, ‘Zhdanovism’ in its obvious and less obvious guises would become the principal

¹⁶ ‘Retrouver la tradition libertaire de gauche’, interview with R. Pierre and D. Eribon published in *Libération*, 23 December 1981, and republished in Bourdieu, *Interventions*, pp. 165-9 (p. 168).

¹⁷ Brian Rigby, *Popular Culture in Modern France* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 111.

¹⁸ The Russian politician A. A. Zhdanov (1896-1948) developed in the immediate post-war period a policy of rigorous ideological control of artistic and cultural life. For Bourdieu’s reference to the cultural attitudes of those directing the French Communist Party, see *La Distinction. Critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: Minuit, 1979), p. 52 [p. 566 n.40], henceforth referred to as *D*. For his hostility in a cultural policy perspective to both direct and indirect forms of ‘Zhdanovism’, see e.g. *Les Règles de l’art. Genèse et structure du champ littéraire* (Paris: Seuil, 1992), pp. 389, 471 [281, 347], henceforth referred to as *RA*.

adversary of Bourdieu's cultural policy reflection. Indeed, the term would come to operate in his writing as a kind of code for any direct political prescription of cultural production.

Nevertheless, Bourdieu did over his work accumulate an overwhelming battery of critical perspectives on the world of art and culture – to the extent, as he himself acknowledged, that he risked coming across as himself ‘barbaric’ in his refusal to play by the rules, and as ‘philistine’ in his readiness to perceive quasi-instinctual patterns of self-promotion and class segregation within the impeccably ‘disinterested’ realm of culture.¹⁹ I should like here to perform, as it were, a more condensed type of barbaric operation by bringing together those perspectives and insights that are dispersed across Bourdieu’s writings, and that can be deployed as so many principles for suspicion of any cultural policy project.²⁰ Bourdieu argues in *The Rules of Art* that a controlled (‘scientific’) understanding of cultural works requires us to perform ‘a sort of *epoché* [suspension] of the *belief* commonly granted to cultural things and to the legitimate ways of approaching them’ (*RA* 260 [185]). More than a simple ‘methodological’ reversal, he presents this as a ‘veritable conversion’ in thinking about intellectual matters. Certainly, it seems likely that some of the belief ‘suspended’ for the purposes of understanding may not return, and that the ‘credit’ accorded to the things of culture may thereby be diminished. In this sense, we will be exploring here how Bourdieu’s writings work to dis-credit (take belief from) cultural policy projects of all kinds. Before embarking on this tide of critique, it is worth reminding ourselves that it is not the whole story (Bourdieu, in what he would subsequently evoke as ‘needless excesses’, sometimes writes as though it is).²¹

The caustic quality of Bourdieu’s intelligence exerts its scouring effects on the object of cultural policy (the culture that is deemed worth transmitting), that policy’s agents (the politico-administrative elite, the cohorts of *animateurs*, artists), and its supposed and unavowed effects.

The principal object of cultural policy, a society’s ‘legitimate culture’, is described as overwhelmingly ‘arbitrary’. It has a historical *raison d'être*, but as a structured entity, it is largely independent of any logical, biological or geographical necessity. So too are those ‘popular cultures’ sometimes advocated

¹⁹ See e.g. *D* 110 [99-100], 574 [599 n.18].

²⁰ This aggressive dismantling of the social workings of culture (that also yields positive or ‘scientific’ results) is more marked in some works than others. I have drawn for this section particularly on P. Bourdieu & J.-C. Passeron, *La Reproduction: éléments pour une théorie du système d'enseignement* (Paris: Minuit, 1970), henceforth referred to as *R*; *La Distinction*; *La Noblesse d'Etat*, henceforth referred to as *NE*; and *Les Règles de l'art*, particularly Part I, ch. 3, ‘Le marché des biens symboliques’.

²¹ On his ‘needless excesses’ (*outrances inutiles*), and the grounds for them, see *RA* 260 [185].

as substitute objects for cultural policy, for they are similarly ‘arbitrary’, making up with legitimate culture a ‘system’ of cultural arbitrariness (*R* 38 [23]). There would thus seem to be no absolutely compelling grounds for transmitting one culture rather than another, or for replacing one culture with another. Indeed, regardless of their content, the works of legitimate culture seem to function above all as pretexts, positional devices in class-related strategies of ‘distinction’ and symbolic ‘capital’ accumulation (*D* VI, VIII, 320 [5, 7, 282]). Both the production and reception of culture are driven by an apparently vain mechanism of ‘pretension and distinction’, or ‘action and reaction’ (*RA* 181-2 [126]), which agents internalise as an obscurely compelling ‘instinct’ (*D* 585 [499]). This blind or pre-reflexive hankering after distinction is not simply an ‘incidental’ aspect of the ‘aesthetic disposition’ (*D* 32 [31]). Culture, commonly represented as the path to enlightenment, thus constitutes the terrain *par excellence* of ‘misrecognition’ (*D* 94 [86]). Essentially social categories are sublimated as purely cultural categories (*D* 578 [493]). The value of artworks is supposed to be immanent in the works themselves, whereas these works function as ‘fetishes’: the collective belief guaranteeing their value, which is also a collective ‘misrecognition’, is maintained by an elaborate network of institutions whose agents themselves have vested interests in maintaining that value (*D* 31 [30-1], *RA* 243-5 [171-3]). There is, in short, an ‘idolatry’ at the heart of cultivated pleasure, and its most virtuoso connoisseurs live in a state of ‘possessed possession’, to say nothing of those (petit-bourgeois) souls persuaded of the need to accomplish the requisite rites without mastering the rules of the game (*D* 584-5, 370 [499, 321-3]).

All this was presumably not calculated to win over those who had invested their identity in the tasks of, say, protecting the artistic heritage or bringing culture to the people. Indeed there is a tendency, already noted, for Bourdieu to intensify the causticity of his texts by ‘absolutizing’ his position. The collective belief that attributes value to art, for example, does not simply involve misrecognition – it becomes in the heat of writing ‘only’ misrecognition (*RA* 244 [172]). With the repeated insistence throughout *La Reproduction* that legitimate culture simply ‘is’ arbitrary, it is easy to forget the note (afterthought?) in its preface that the notion of pure arbitrariness is a logical construction without empirical referent that is necessary for the construction of the argument (*R* 11 [xi]) (somewhat like Rousseau’s ‘state of nature’). Be that as it may (and sometimes one has to know how to make one’s point), Bourdieu’s texts do chisel away at the beliefs to which the architects, employees and beneficiaries of cultural policies would like nothing better than to cling. It is worthwhile, at the very least, to meditate on the extent to which the rites of culture are purely ‘negative’ (i.e. segregational) (*NE* 155 [111]) and its pleasures ‘vain’ (*D* 573 [491]).

We have already seen the grounds for Bourdieu’s suspicion regarding the architects of national cultural policy. Presenting their programmes as a ‘public

service', they were actually the result of an ongoing squabble between the fractions of the dominant class.²² Moreover, the bargaining in question would generally be resolved in the name of an 'organic solidarity' (*NE* 558 [388]) between these competing fractions who nonetheless shared a dominant position in their respective fields. In fact, the elaboration of cultural policy discourse could play a part in the 'logical and moral integration' (*PID* 4) of these diverse fractions (the industrial sponsor lying down with the avant-garde artist, so to speak). More generally, it could spread recognition of legitimate culture's legitimacy – an essential condition if the superior status of its most adept practitioners (the dominant class) was itself to be recognised.

This suspicion with regard to the interests in play in the cultural policy game extended also to the cohorts of cultural and socio-cultural *animateurs* responsible for its implementation on the ground. Bourdieu represented these in the 1970s as just one section of a growing class of 'cultural intermediaries' positioned between the production of goods and their consumption. This category included marketing and advertising consultants, stylists, interior designers, etc., as well as those working in subordinate positions within the expanding bureaucracies of cultural production (newspapers, magazines, television companies, etc.). The new posts emerging in these domains were ideally suited to the growing number of middle-class graduates produced by the education system whose qualifications were not sufficient to secure careers in more established domains. And of course, it was only human nature that the occupants of these posts should talk up the importance of their new-found careers. Thus Bourdieu speaks of the persuasive 'coups de force' (*D* 170-2 [153-4]) through which such agents instilled in others a 'need' for their services (thus also playing their part in an economic logic whereby matters of style and marketing had to take precedence over production in the traditional sense). They would, so to speak, drive a wedge between how people were and how people were brought to feel they ought to be. In this perspective, 'cultural animation' functioned as just one more 'euphemism' (*D* 397 [345]) for the symbolic action by which a need was artificially created and a profession was invented.²³ At the same time, this self-serving strategy could be presented as a 'public service' for which State resources should be deployed (*D* 415 [359]). Bourdieu does not note that, over the 1970s, State resources for such animation would by and large dry up. This by no means invalidates the account sketched out above, but does indicate that, whether because of their subversiveness or their ineffectualness, the agendas of local *animateurs* at this stage did not always mesh neatly with the agenda of policy's national architects. Indeed, we shall see

²² On the strategic uses of the term 'public service', see e.g. *NE* 541 [378].

²³ For a detailed case-study of this process of professionalisation, see Vincent Dubois, 'The dilemmas of institutionalisation: from cultural mobilizations to cultural policies in a suburban town (Bron, 1970-1990)', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, forthcoming.

in the next section how Bourdieu could also interpret very differently the artificial creation of cultural aspiration.

Artists, like cultural *animateurs*, and, in their own way, like the architects of national policy, had a clear interest in cultural policy because it created for them a market. Bourdieu suggests in his 1970 presentation for the Plan discussed above that any enterprise of cultural diffusion – such as the Houses of Culture – can also be conceived as a campaign to conquer a cultural market.²⁴ Given the workings of the ‘market for symbolic goods’ (*RA* 201-45 [141-73]), artists cannot expect the value of their works to radiate forth from those works alone. They require an institutionalised battery of celebrations and celebrants, exhibitions and commentators, to guarantee the credit of the work, and to maintain the apparently self-evident belief that the cultural game as a whole is interesting (*D* 279-80 [250]) (the game becomes, of course, more interesting as the ‘interests’ invested in it increase). Artists thus require a cultural policy apparatus to preserve the value of their ‘fetishes’ – or more precisely, to produce the ‘symbolic alchemy’ (*RA* 241 [170]) that transforms the objects they produce into desirable fetishes. What suits them even more is when those responsible for this policy (such as Bourdieu’s bugbear, André Malraux) also consolidate their ‘professional ideology’ (*D* 574 [491-2, 599 n.19]) according to which they are free-floating ‘creators’ detached from the world of material interests, bureaucratic apparatuses, and markets.

It is perhaps because Bourdieu was willing to go ‘too far’ in his exposure of the cultural game – and by extension, the cultural policy game - that he could nail so many otherwise sacrosanct targets. We have seen how he eroded the credit of both the object and the principal agents of cultural policy. At the same time, he sought to lay bare the problematic but unrecognised effects of cultural policy programmes, and to expose their proclaimed effects as ineffectual.

While cultural policy institutions may have been relatively autonomous of directly political agendas (like the education system as analysed in *La Reproduction*), Bourdieu suggests that they served to ‘legitimate’ that cultural order that in turn legitimated the social order (in which those who governed society seemed to do so by rights because of their greater degree of cultivation). In other words, cultural policy fulfilled an effective if indirect function as a cog in those ‘long and complex circuits of legitimating exchanges’ (*NE* 554 [386]) that maintained the symbolic strength of social hierarchies. In the same way, it could serve indirectly to ‘delegitimise’ further already ‘illegitimate’ cultures – Bourdieu notes how the ‘therapeutic’ campaigns aimed at the working classes could actually have a ‘demoralising’ effect, eroding the last residues in dominated classes of a capacity for positive autonomy, that is setting down the values by which one chooses to live (Bourdieu was thinking particularly of traditional models for working-class males, based on physical strength, virility,

²⁴‘Exposé de Pierre Bourdieu’, pp. 14-15.

etc.) (*D* 447-8 [384]). More perverse were the effects as they figure in Bourdieu's work on what one might call the designated victims of cultural policy. These were the petit-bourgeois classes prone to aspire to the cultural practices of their superiors, but without really mastering them. In Bourdieu's terms their relation to dominant culture, both 'avid' and 'anxious', was characterized by *allodoxia*, or recognition without understanding (*reconnaissance sans connaissance*) (*D* 370 [321-3]). Driven by the need to distinguish themselves from those below them, they would typically mistake vulgarisation for science, and operetta for high classical music. Extrapolating from Bourdieu's analyses, the facilities provided by cultural policy, endorsing the value of legitimate culture without supplying the means really to understand it, let alone challenge it, were liable to lock these people ever tighter into the unhappy and inauthentic straitjacket of cultural 'pretension' (*D* 420 [363]). Pursuing their liberation, they would fall ever deeper into subservience and alienation.

All this is, so to speak, a worst-case scenario. Again, discussion of Bourdieu's other work will complicate these matters. It suggests, for example, that the path to emancipation may well have to pass through specific forms of alienation. Moreover, the analyses above represent the State as a kind of 'central bank of credit' which can be deployed to exercise a 'monopoly on legitimate symbolic violence' (*NE* 538-9 [377]). The resulting effect of 'state magic' (*NE* 538 [376]), instituting an 'eminent' if not exclusive perspective, can both 'certify' and 'decertify' types of cultural practice. Once again, arguments developed elsewhere by Bourdieu will challenge without invalidating this perspective. In *Les Règles de l'art*, notably, he traces how from the middle of the nineteenth century, the workings of the artistic field imposed a new principle of legitimacy. This was defined precisely in opposition to the State's claims to legislate over artistic value. Against the monopolistic institution of State magic (the Academy), leading artists (Baudelaire, Flaubert, Manet...) set in motion an 'institutionalisation of anomie', that is a field in which artists autonomously vied to impose their own differing aesthetic norms. Furthermore, this field of 'legitimate' culture, along with its attendant institutions, could be represented in many contexts as much the beleaguered victim of governmental programmes as their functional collaborator.²⁵ Certainly, this does not exclude the notion that they occupy a place in a 'long and complex circuit of legitimation' – but it does once again remind us of their ambivalent or multifunctional status.

²⁵ On the discourse of beleaguerment, see Oliver Bennett, 'Cultural policy in Britain: collapsing rationales and the end of a tradition', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 1/2 (1995). For a critique of the notion of 'legitimacy' in Bourdieu's cultural analysis, see Jean-Louis Fabiani, 'Peut-on encore parler de légitimité culturelle?', in O. Donnat and P. Tolila, *Le(s) Public(s) de la culture. Politiques publiques et équipements culturels* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2003), pp. 305-17.

We have seen in chapter one how Bourdieu's early analyses in the 1960s worked to discredit Malravian cultural policy by demonstrating its very ineffectualness, and these analyses would not change significantly when applied to analogous cultural enterprises. The apparent generosity of cultural democratization programmes was shown to mask a 'refusal to communicate' at the heart of its very communication (*D* 36 [34]). The clearest example of this was the free entry offered by avant-garde museums that nevertheless provided no indication of the 'code' necessary for understanding adequately the works exhibited (*R* 67 [51-2]). More generally, Bourdieu tended to portray cultural policy initiatives as furnishing the sociology of culture with so many ready-made 'experiments' that were revealing precisely because of their ineffectiveness – whether it was putting culturally dispossessed classes directly in front of high culture (the Houses of Culture), experimental and avant-garde culture (Beaubourg), or looking to reach wide audiences for certain cultural experiences via television (*D* 34-5 [33]). Indeed, there was a sense in which the gifts bestowed by cultural policy were devalued by the very act of giving: insofar as the 'value' of a corpus of cultural works (that is, here, the social credit to be derived from its ostended consumption) was dependent on its rarity, its divulgation would diminish that value. It is for this reason, as well as on account of the *alloodia* described above, that, as Bourdieu put it, the melodies of Fauré and Duparc would cease to be what they were if 'the development of suburban and provincial Conservatories caused them to be sung, well or badly, in petit-bourgeois living rooms' (*D* 377 [327-8]). The cultivated classes would shift the object of their attention, ensuring that the structural attributes of socio-cultural hierarchies remained in place, even if the substantial 'properties' attaching to their respective echelons mutated.

Consideration of this dynamic led Bourdieu to question his 'rational pedagogy of culture' as formulated in the 1960s. For it was all very well to 'arm' individual members of the culturally dispossessed classes with the instruments giving access to 'legitimate culture' as defined at a given moment. Certainly, this might serve those members, but one could not identify the interests of those classes as a whole with the interests of individuals who, through their own mobility, would soon cease to belong to them (*R* 69 [53-4]). Moreover, if sufficient proportions of those classes were to master the rudiments of that ('arbitrary') culture, then the cultivated classes would quasi-instinctively adopt another set of contents and/or manners that would continue to ensure their distinction. At one level, this observation seems incontrovertible, and it is surely unrealistic in any case to imagine that any cultural policy could abolish a dynamic that is so deeply ingrained in the dispositions of all those with a stake in the cultural game. However, it is surely overhasty simply to reduce the 'substantial' contents of a culture (the particular texts, ideas, skills) with which social groups may engage to the relational position of those contents within a given socio-cultural hierarchy at a given time. When we look across the range of

Bourdieu's work, we see that he did not ratify such a reduction. Nor did he abandon his commitment to a rational pedagogy in cultural matters. When asked by another government to provide conceptual frameworks for its education programmes, he gave careful thought to what cultural contents were most worthy of vulgarisation.

2.3 Advising the State

In a 1984 interview, Bourdieu mentions that he had once considered with Michel Foucault producing a 'white paper' that would formulate, in association with several other specialists, 'a rigorous critique of a certain number of political measures, concerning notably educational and cultural matters'.²⁶ Michel Foucault's untimely death had prevented this project from coming to fruition, but earlier that year, Bourdieu had become involved in an enterprise designed not simply to criticise existing policy, but positively to propose a framework for measures that might be adopted in the future. President Mitterrand had written in February 1984 to the administrator of the *Collège de France*, the most prestigious of France's academic institutions, where Bourdieu had had a chair since 1981, asking its professors to formulate what they saw as the 'fundamental principles' that should inform future educational programmes.²⁷ The report was duly prepared, and was published in 1985. Bourdieu would subsequently say that it did not really respond to the specific demand formulated by Mitterrand, but in saying this he was perhaps looking to defend his reputation for intellectual 'autonomy'.²⁸ For the report does address the principal indications expressed in the President's letter – the integration of artistic/literary culture with scientific knowledge, the consideration of technological and social change, the equipping of pupils with modern instruments of thought, etc. Indeed it seems that Bourdieu played the principal role in the elaboration of this report. Not only, as he put it, was it a 'point of honour' to ensure its rigour, given that his academic reputation rested in good measure on his specialist analyses of the French education system. It is also clear that he identified with the detail of the report, defending unreservedly in interviews both its prescriptions and omissions, and not

²⁶ 'Université: les rois sont nus', interview with Didier Eribon, in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 2-8 November 1984, pp. 86-10, included in Bourdieu, *Interventions*, pp. 189-98 (p. 195).

²⁷ Mitterrand's letter is included at the beginning of the final report, published as *Propositions pour l'enseignement de l'avenir élaborées à la demande de Monsieur le Président de la République par les professeurs du Collège de France*, Paris: Collège de France, 1985 (referred to hereafter as PPEA).

²⁸ 'Le rapport du Collège de France: Pierre Bourdieu s'explique', interview with Jean-Pierre Salgas, in *La Quinzaine littéraire*, August 1985, no. 445, pp. 8-10, included in Bourdieu, *Interventions*, pp. 203-10 (p. 203).

contradicting his interviewer when he was addressed as its ‘author’.²⁹ It seems, therefore, entirely appropriate to trace in the report how Bourdieu’s cultural policy thought negotiates the transition from critique to positive proposition. Nevertheless, at another level, Bourdieu was keen to underline that he was not the sole author of the report. He thought that it was an important and welcome political development that the President of the Republic had addressed his request not to an isolated individual but to a recognised academic body.³⁰ For Bourdieu, this implied a recognition of the institutional autonomy of the academy, and of the corresponding rights of educational professionals to legislate collectively over their activities. Needless to say, Bourdieu would be critical of the way in which the report would serve Mitterand’s political self-projection. He saw it as figuring, as cultural policy considerations had in the programmes of the Plan in the early 1970s, as a ‘supplément d’âme’ in the President’s ‘Letter to the French People’ in 1988.³¹ Even so, he regarded the report also as laying down an important ‘buffer’ (‘une espèce de butoir’) that might make it harder for certain political regressions and abuses to take place.³² Thus, when Mitterand’s Minister for Education, Lionel Jospin, asked Bourdieu in late 1988 to co-chair a commission reflecting on the contents of the educational curriculum, he was prepared to continue his collaboration with the (socialist) State.³³

We have seen already how one of the principal thrusts of Bourdieu’s thinking in the 1960s was to bring cultural policy institutions more directly into the orbit of the education system. It will not, therefore, be surprising to find recommendations relevant to broader cultural policy within what are nominally reports for the State education system. In fact, the interest of the *Collège de France* report for us will lie to some degree in the way the relations between schools and cultural policy institutions are significantly reconstrued. There are other differences between these reports and Bourdieu’s previous social scientific analyses. He himself notes that the *Collège de France* report is explicitly normative rather than purely critical – it actually, unlike his books, states what ‘must’ be done.³⁴ This is in part because it is expressing a collective line (that of the *Collège de France*), and is therefore a more directly political document. As a result, it also attends more closely than do Bourdieu’s books to the question of

²⁹ ‘Le rapport du Collège de France: Pierre Bourdieu s’explique’, in *Interventions*, p. 209.

³⁰ ‘Université: les rois sont nus’, in *Interventions*, p. 195.

³¹ See *Interventions*, p. 186.

³² ‘Le rapport du Collège de France: Pierre Bourdieu s’explique’, in *Interventions*, p. 210.

³³ The report of the commission, which Bourdieu co-preserved with François Gros, was published as *Principes pour une réflexion sur les contenus d’enseignement* (Paris: Ministère de l’Education nationale, de la jeunesse et des sports, March 1989). The text of the report can be found in Bourdieu, *Interventions*, pp. 217-226. The report is referred to hereafter as PRCE, followed by page references to its publication in *Interventions*.

³⁴ ‘Le rapport du Collège de France: Pierre Bourdieu s’explique’, in *Interventions*, p. 203.

what might and might not be politically possible. Bourdieu seems proud in commenting on this text to assert (is he making a virtue out of necessity?) that certain terms one would have expected to see – reproduction, democratization – simply do not figure.³⁵ For, he argues, the education system is set up and embedded within social relations in such a way that it is virtually impossible to expect it not to reproduce the social order. The most one can hope is that devices, levers and stratagems might be instituted that counteract in some measure this secular dynamic. The worst one could do would be to make dramatic promises whose failure would simply reinforce the disinvestment of those who profit least from that system. Thus we see Bourdieu formulating a quasi-Stoic understanding of public policy:

What is in play, and what ordinary discussions on politics never get at, is the very idea of what political action can be and do – what used to be called ‘government’. Politicians should meditate on the Stoic distinction between what depends on us and what does not depend on us. The great principle responsible for error, as is well-known, lies in the ignorance of one’s limits.³⁶

All public policy can do (but it is an important function) is, accordingly, is to control ‘softly and imperceptibly’ forcefields whose dynamics have a strong degree of inertia; it is more akin to ‘the art of using people’s passions’ rather than changing those passions.³⁷ Certainly, as we have seen, the field of public policy does not, in Bourdieu’s thinking, exhaust the realm of politics. He evokes also an ‘everyday political invention’ dispersed across the social body that demonstrates more resourcefulness and imagination than ‘two years of work carried out by a commission for the Plan’.³⁸ We will see in the next chapter how Michel de Certeau, in particular, turned that inventivity itself into an object of both analysis and policy reflection. Let us first, however, consider how Bourdieu channelled the unchecked tide of critique into the narrow limits of the politically feasible.

Given their explicitly normative rather than purely critical intent, one might wonder what norms these reports seek to institute, and therefore, by extension, what types of cultural content they seek to prescribe. Unsurprisingly, the *Collège de France* report begins by proposing as a key norm the critical disposition itself. The notion of cultural arbitrariness, deployed in Bourdieu’s previous work as a critical instrument ‘against’ legitimate culture, is proposed itself as a fundamental positive component of their programme:

³⁵ See the quotation from an interview carried out in Tokyo in 1989 in *Interventions*, p. 186.

³⁶ ‘Université: les rois sont nus’, in *Interventions*, p. 197.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 198.

The only universal foundation that one can give to a culture lies in the recognition of the degree of arbitrariness it owes to its historicity: it would thus be a question of bringing this arbitrariness to light and developing the necessary instruments (supplied by philosophy, philology, ethnology, history or sociology) for understanding and accepting other forms of culture. (*PPEA* 14)

The discourse devised as a critique of a given cultural curriculum was thus proposed as an essential part of any future curriculum. Recognising a culture's degree of 'arbitrariness' – the extent to which it need not be as it is – could diminish the reign of automatic acceptance and unconscious reproduction, and strengthen 'the logic of conscious choice' (*PRCE* 221). The purpose of instilling such a critical disposition was not to generate hordes of academic commentators, but rather to provide people with an essential means of self-defence (the text uses Bourdieu's favoured metaphor of the martial arts). Armed with this disposition, future citizens would be able to protect themselves more effectively against the 'abuses of symbolic power' deployed in the worlds of advertising, politics or religion (and also, Bourdieu would have written in another context, the academy itself...) (*PPEA* 13).

More generally, the *Collège de France* report argued that the State must establish a 'common cultural minimum' whose transmission to every pupil it would guarantee (*PPEA* 27). The reflection on this 'minimum' in the two reports displaces Bourdieu's critical cultural policy thinking in interesting ways. Firstly, it is clear that this 'minimum' is not to be understood in a minimalist way as what pupils might need simply to get by in life. Rather, it is proposed as the 'core of fundamental and obligatory knowledge and know-how' that pupils would require to continue to learn and develop over the rest of their lives. The key point for our purposes here is Bourdieu's emphasis on the need to *create* needs within the pupils that they do not spontaneously have. For 'those who are deprived of this minimum do not know that they can and must claim it, as they do with the minimum wage. Cultural alienation tends to exclude the consciousness of that alienation.'³⁹ We saw in the previous section Bourdieu's irony and suspicion with regard to those cultural *animateurs* who 'artificially' induced cultural 'needs' in their target populations. Bourdieu himself, however, would come later to assert forthrightly that this state of unconscious privation was a very important factor for any cultural policy to take into account, and that, in many cases, 'cultural action must produce the need for its own product'.⁴⁰

³⁹ 'Le rapport du Collège de France: Pierre Bourdieu s'explique', in *Interventions*, p. 208

⁴⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, 'Contre les divisions scolastiques', in *L'Université au défi de la culture. Actes des assises culturelles de l'Université de Toulouse-le-Mirail (29 et 30 octobre 1990)* (Toulouse : Association pour le Développement de la Documentation et de la Communication Culturelles en Midi-Pyrénées, April 1991), pp. 31-57 (p. 36).

Indeed, in the same talk, he would denounce the educational ‘back to basics’ campaign conducted by the Socialist Minister of Education Jean-Pierre Chevènement between 1984 and 1986, and it is worth citing in full the terms of Bourdieu’s criticism, as it articulates in particularly clear-cut form an essential component of his cultural policy position:

[People such as Chevènement] propose an educational policy that gives the people, in a sense, what it wants, with a little bit of civics as a bonus, and which takes as its basis a previous and outdated mode of pedagogical action in order to give the people, with its agreement and support, an education that tends to imprison it in its state of cultural dispossession. Such folk have all the appearances of democracy on their side, and they can thus count on the support of all those who, having learnt in the old-style primary schools only to read, write and count, are deprived of their deprivation, and who are ignorant not only of the extent of their ignorance, but also of everything of which their schooling deprived them, for example all the modern techniques and modes of thought, and who therefore are happy in all good faith for their children to be similarly deprived. If I could really control the meaning I should like to give the term, I would call this form of populism ‘national-socialist’. There’s a way of flattering the people in its deprivation, and in its unawareness of its deprivation, which is one of the most tragic forms of demagogic, that populist demagogic [...] that is one of the permanent temptations of what is called the Left.⁴¹

Having directed his thinking in the 1960s against the discourse of (innate) cultural ‘needs’, Bourdieu would thus come to see the ‘artificial’ production of (acquired) needs as a first step in any cultural policy process.

As regards the specific contents attaching to this ‘common cultural minimum’, the reports did not really attach themselves to the cataloguing of particular themes. This was not their brief, as they were charged explicitly with articulating fundamental ‘principles’ which would inform subsequent curriculum deliberation. They do, however, caution against the dangers of ‘encyclopedism’, i.e. trying to cram in as much information as possible into the heads of pupils. For the key issue appeared to be the *relation* of pupils to such information. And here too, we can point up an interesting comparison with Bourdieu’s previous critical work. For there he had argued that the real problem with traditional cultural education lay in its privileging of a certain ‘relation’ to culture over the content of that culture itself.⁴² That is, a certain ‘natural’, assured, elegant, rhetorically ‘distinguished’ relation to the cultural contents

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 35-6.

⁴² See e.g. R 160, 163, 235 [138 n.29, 128, 198].

distributed by school were more important than the effective mastery of those contents (and an important element of that relation to academic culture was that it should not seem too academic...). But Bourdieu did not propose, as this previous work might have implied, to create a context in which ‘culture could be dissociated from one’s relation to culture’ (*R* 160 [138 n.29]). Instead, the reports designated what one could describe as a range of instruments allowing pupils from different social backgrounds to enter into a more controlled and confident relation with regard to cultural contents they might subsequently come across. These are represented in particular by the explicit inculcation of certain ‘modes of thought’:

Education must privilege all types of teaching that are well-suited to providing modes of thought endowed with general validity and applicability, over and above types of teaching that propose forms of knowledge that can be learnt just as effectively (and sometimes more agreeably) by other means [...]. One must resolutely give priority to those types of teaching charged with ensuring the conscious and critical assimilation of the fundamental modes of thought (such as the deductive mode of thought, the experimental mode of thought, or the historical mode of thought, and also the reflexive and critical mode of thought, which ought always to be associated with them). (*PRCE* 219)

The previously expressed hope whereby one’s ‘relation’ to culture as an issue might fall away is recast insofar as the prescribed norm becomes the instilling in all pupils of an ‘art of thinking’ that would allow them to enter into a controlled, creative and emancipatory relation to any particular cultural content.

This did not simply take up the more instrumentalist agenda evoked in Bourdieu’s work of the 1960s of trying to diffuse more universally traits constitutive of the dominant relation to culture. For Bourdieu would suggest that the dominant relation to culture is, in a number of ways, also a ‘mutilated’ relation to culture that is unconscious of its own mutilation or ‘deprivation’.⁴³ This was most clearly apparent in the dichotomous relation between ‘literary’ and ‘scientific’ culture that structured it. As part of a more generalised endeavour to link up (*articuler*) the diverse modes of thought indicated above, the reports repeatedly evoke the need to ‘reconcile the universalism inherent in scientific thought and the relativism taught through the historical sciences that attend to the plurality of modes of life and cultural traditions’ (*PRCE* 224). That relativism is perhaps none other than the ‘historical’ mode of thought evoked

⁴³ ‘Contre les divisions scolastiques’, p. 42

above – or what Bourdieu would theorize and refine in his own scientific work as ‘the relational mode of thought’.⁴⁴

Bourdieu thus proposed a policy orientation that would look not simply to distribute more equitably the products of legitimate culture, but that would also work to reconfigure that culture itself - particularly via the system of ‘classification’ that constituted it. Dominant cultures (and this trait is particularly marked in France) tend to impose clear hierarchies of cultural excellence, in which different aptitudes (manual, practical, analytical, theoretical...), subjects (metalwork, engineering, languages, mathematics, philosophy...) and genres occupy clearly defined positions. In this respect, while some pupils will gain an exorbitant (and itself mutilated...) sense of their own importance, most will at some stage or another have a sense of being ‘relegated’ to the position ascribed to them. They will be condemned to a ‘more or less unhappy experience both of the culture they have received [their ‘natural’ aptitudes] and of the academically dominant culture [that relegates those aptitudes]’ (*PPEA* 17). Bourdieu argues not for an abolition of hierarchies (sociologically improbable and indeed politically undesirable). Instead he argues for their ‘multiplication’, via a diversification of ‘the socially recognised forms of cultural excellence’ (*PPEA* 17). This, one might say, would be a constructive use of that ‘State magic’ evoked above: the education system’s power of certification, criticised elsewhere by Bourdieu, could be harnessed to this task of readjusting, or at least inflecting, the rates of exchange between different types of cultural capital. Practically, this meant raising the profile of practice as such within the curriculum. Without discrediting the theory that can usefully be brought to ‘inhabit’ practice,⁴⁵ the overriding goal for all areas of education becomes to bring pupils to ‘make things’ (a film, a newspaper, a chemical experiment, a diagnosis...). Arts education itself, for so long so undervalued, underresourced and narrowly defined in French education, becomes in this perspective a pivotal matter:

Arts education, conceived as the in-depth teaching of a given artistic practice (music, painting, cinema, etc.), freely and voluntarily chosen (instead of being, as it is today, indirectly imposed), would assume again

⁴⁴ Cf. e.g. Bourdieu, *Le Sens pratique* (Paris : Minuit, 1980), p. 11 [4] : ‘The philosophical glosses which, for a time, surrounded structuralism have neglected and concealed what really constituted its essential novelty – the introduction into the social sciences of the structural method, or, more simply, of the relational mode of thought which, by breaking with the substantialist mode of thought, leads one to characterize each element by the relationships which unite it with all the others in a system and from which it derives its meaning and function.’

⁴⁵ Cf. the discussion in ‘Contre les divisions scolastiques’, pp. 50-52, where the invention and use of theoretical instruments is itself described as being an ‘art’ that is learnt through practice, over which a capacity for pre-reflexive ‘intuition’ can be acquired.

an eminent position. In this domain more than any other, discourse must be subordinated to practice (that of an instrument, or even composition, drawing or painting, the design of one's living space. etc.). The revocation of prevailing hierarchies should entail here also, especially at elementary levels, the teaching not just of the fine arts but also, and just as much, of the applied arts, which are extremely useful in everyday life – for example graphic arts, the arts associated with publishing and advertising, industrial aesthetics, audio-visual arts, and photography. (PPEA 19).

Here as elsewhere, Bourdieu's reflection on aesthetic matters has shed some of the 'intellocentric' bias that characterised his earlier reflection. As he would indicate later in some suggestive remarks on a 'non-cartesian pedagogy' (an interesting development/critique of his 'rational pedagogy'), generative practice rather than methodological 'first principles' is what must come first.⁴⁶ He came to theorise intellectual inquiry itself, in its practical rather than purely exegetical mode of existence, as a skill, an 'art' in the sense of an acquired dexterity: like a well coached footballer instinctively following his footballing brain, a well trained researcher would acquire 'automatically' critical turns of thought and would come to intuit 'pre-reflexively' (thinking without thinking that he was thinking) new patterns and connections. Rather like his professed mentor, Blaise Pascal, Bourdieu begins his critical thought by breaking with all forms of cultural 'habit' (exposed as arbitrary and discriminatory). Having done this, he returns to the question of 'habit' and pre-reflexive 'automatism', but, as Pascal would put it, with a different idea behind it all (*une pensée de derrière*).⁴⁷ And the problem facing cultural policy (to pursue a little provocatively the parallel with Pascal) becomes, firstly, to convince folk that they do indeed need 'salvation' and, secondly, to instill in them the habits that will take them to greater felicity and understanding. Bourdieu had exposed the ruts along which particular types of academic or artistic 'habitus' were set up to run – but did not suppose that the remedy for this in a policy perspective was to give free reign to people's spontaneity (this would simply have given free reign to the inclinations and 'privations' of their primary habitus). Rather, he looked to schooling as the cultural institution through which 'emancipatory disciplines' could be imposed and, through an emphasis on repeated practice, 'habitus of invention, creation and liberty' could be inculcated.⁴⁸

As an institution, schools exist among a network of other cultural institutions. Indeed, we have seen how Bourdieu had previously proposed, in a rather abruptly 'pedagogocratic' manner, that those cultural institutions should be purged of their 'anti-academic ideology' and brought into the orbit of the

⁴⁶ See 'Contre les divisions scolastiques', pp. 47-53.

⁴⁷ Cf. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, number 336 (Brunschvicg edition).

⁴⁸ 'Contre les divisions scolastiques', p. 52.

education system.⁴⁹ It is striking, particularly in the *Collège de France* report, that the relation between the education system and the other cultural institutions that make up a nation's overall cultural policy would come to be interestingly reconfigured. The report stressed that school did not have a 'monopoly' in the transmission of knowledge, and that other types of institution – television, theatre, cinema, youth centres (*maisons des jeunes et de la culture*), etc. – were more effective with regard to certain types of transmission. Far from seeking to dominate these other institutions, the action of academic institutions could become more productive 'if it were to integrate itself consciously and methodically into the universe of modes of cultural action exerted by other means of [cultural] diffusion' (*PPEA* 41). Certainly, within this overall field of cultural action, there were certain tasks to which schools were best suited – essentially, as we have seen, the 'inculcation of general and transposable dispositions that can only be acquired through repeated practice and exercises' (*PPEA* 42). But the report clearly recognised that a properly maintained network of cultural institutions, including for example an adequately resourced source of quality television programming, were necessary to 'create around school a cultural environment that is indispensable to the generalised success of the educational enterprise' (*PPEA* 38).

The integration of schools within this wider universe of cultural action had to take place not simply via external relations between institutions but, notably, through the penetration of other modes and vehicles of cultural action within school itself. An obvious example is, again, the supply of quality programming, or the exploitation of ordinary media products within school (*PPEA* 37-9, 42-3). More revealing for our purposes is the notion that cultural 'creators' (researchers, artists, writers) and intermediaries (publishers, journalists, curators) should be brought into schools. Interestingly, the report does not mention any 'anti-academic' bias that such external agents might bring; instead, it evokes, as well as the technical, financial and bureaucratic impediments to these ventures, the 'psychological resistance' that obstructed the participation of non-academic figures in the academic world (*PPEA* 42). Indeed, Bourdieu would later suggest that academic institutions might also be conceived as existing in a state of 'unconscious deprivation'. Addressing an audience at the university of Toulouse-le-Mirail, he evokes a previous discussion among his listeners of how more artists might be brought into the university, and observes that before any artists were brought there, nobody missed them.⁵⁰ Cultural deprivation, one might conclude, runs through the cultural field, and is relational through and through. The effect of integrating his educational reflection within a global cultural policy framework (rather than spelling out a purely sectorial

⁴⁹ See 'Quelques indications pour une politique de démocratisation', Dossier no 1 du Centre de sociologie européenne, 6 rue de Tournon, Paris, included in Bourdieu, *Interventions*, pp. 69-72 (p. 72), and the discussion in chapter one of the present study.

⁵⁰ 'Contre les divisions scolastiques', p. 43.

programme) was not now to bring all other institutions under the domination of educational criteria. Rather, by articulating as such the ‘universe of modes of cultural action’, each type of action could be brought, as it were, consciously to ‘miss’ the other.

The *Collège de France* report repeatedly stressed the need to provide quality educational programming, and even advocates the creation of the dedicated State ‘cultural channel’ that would indeed soon after come into existence (*PPEA* 27, 46).⁵¹ It is not surprising that Bourdieu should look over the 1980s also to make direct propositions to the Socialist government concerning the defense and development of public television. For those acquainted with the history of French television over the 1980s, this will be even less surprising. In the space of a few years (essentially between 1984 and 1987), France had moved from a television system owned and run (and largely censored and stifled) entirely by the State, to one overwhelmingly in hoc to commercial interests. This had happened via the creation of three privately owned channels and, crucially, the privatisation of France’s leading public channel (TF1), leaving just two weakened public channels who themselves had to compete in the advertising market with the other channels for a substantial proportion of their income. We will see in chapter four how Régis Debray analyses the cultural policy implications of the fact that France’s principal cultural medium was now firmly ‘in the hands of the advertisers’. Bourdieu, for his part, associated himself with representatives of other sectors in the cultural field and directly addressed the Socialist government that had returned to office in 1988 (and that had inaugurated the privatisation process in 1984).⁵² As in his educational reports, the mood is again directly imperative:

It is a question of deciding whether the television viewer must be nourished or force-fed, whether advertising must be accepted or imposed, whether those making television programmes must represent for their viewers magicians, confidants, informants, teachers, *animateurs*, in short, people who create bonds, or simply vendors at the service of sacrosanct Ratings, there just to provide a frame for sequences of advertising.⁵³

⁵¹ The Franco-German cultural channel *LA SEPT*, later to become *ARTE*, was launched (initially only on cable) in 1986.

⁵² Bourdieu’s proposals for State television were published as articles co-signed by Ange Casta (a television producer), Max Gallo (writer and journalist), Claude Marti (communications consultant), Jean Martin (a lawyer), and Christian Pierret (a Socialist member of the National Assembly). They appeared as ‘Que vive la télévision publique’, *Le Monde*, 19 October 1988, p. 2, and ‘Pour une télévision publique sans publicité’, *Le Monde*, 29-30 April 1990, pp. 1 & 9. The quotation comes from ‘Que vive la télévision publique’.

⁵³ ‘Que vive la télévision publique’.

Again, like the educational reports, the articles directly address the State with detailed policy propositions:

We have not been content just to ‘analyse’ the situation of the audiovisual domain as a whole – who hasn’t done that? We have studied the figures closely, brought together different kinds of expertise, given a voice to good sense, and worked out some concrete, clear and simple propositions. We addressed the politicians, those that hold power in ministerial cabinets and administrations, and the highest authorities of the State.⁵⁴

In this case, the proposal was based on the notion of a ‘culture and communication’ tax to be levied on all media advertising transactions, the revenue of which would revert directly to public television channels. Their revenue would thus rise, according to the 1990 article, from 2.5 to around 4 billion francs. At the same time, the proposal was presented as politically digestible insofar as the tax would be ‘reasonable’ and carefully modulated across the advertising market, and to the extent that the commercial channels would in some measure be compensated by the withdrawal of the public channels from that market (they would no longer have the right to carry advertising). The group even went so far as to lay down a draft outline for a law (one of their members was a member of parliament) – but to no avail.

Unlike Bourdieu’s educational reports, these propositions had not, of course, been solicited by government. They were autonomously proposed. And while the articles rightly credited the socialist governments since 1981 with having freed television from direct governmental control, they were very critical of the ‘incoherencies’ in policy by which control over television had effectively been ceded to the powers of commerce. They made it clear that the independence of public television could not be achieved simply by the withdrawal of the State: it was up to parliament, having ‘freed’ public television from political control, to free it – via a different kind of political control – from the exclusive sway of financial interests.⁵⁵ We can thus see these articles rehearsing what would become a familiar dialectic in Bourdieu’s cultural policy thinking. On the one hand, the cultural field requires State support if it is not to be overrun by the logic of an englobing economic field. On the other hand it must resist the very State power it also needs and demands – hence the reference in these texts for the imperative, should their proposition be accepted, for a ‘separation between broadcasting and programme production’, and for a ‘plurality in programming matters, to be ensured by a *decentralisation* of decision-making and a *multiplication of the sources of creation and*

⁵⁴ ‘Pour une télévision sans publicité’, p. 1.

⁵⁵ ‘Pour une télévision sans publicité’, p. 9.

production'.⁵⁶ Bourdieu was not content to offer his disinterested expertise to the State as and when it was required. Instead, engaging with the apparatus of State in a detailed and demanding manner, he would also critically step back from it as he formulated what would finally amount to a cultural policy campaign for creative 'autonomy'.

2.4 Autonomy in the Cultural Field

We have seen how, after the critical engagement of his 1960s work, Bourdieu came over the 1970s to adopt an attitude of resolute suspicion with regard to the State and its cultural policies (which initially looked in Gaullist fashion to use culture to neutralise or mask conflict, and then, after Giscard d'Estaing's election in 1974, moved to a more markedly neo-liberal position of State withdrawal and the embrace of market forces). One might have expected Bourdieu to welcome the advent of a socialist government in 1981, especially given the unprecedented support and prominence it gave to its new-look cultural policy.⁵⁷ To some degree, Bourdieu was certainly more prepared to cooperate with left-leaning administrations – as is evidenced by the educational reports discussed above. However, towards the end of the socialists' extended period in office (1981-6; 1988-93), Bourdieu expressed his wariness with regard to the extensive networks of State cultural sponsorship that had been developed by Jack Lang. Comparing their softly-softly style of influence with the harsher and more explicit cultural censorship policy of the traditional American Right, he even went so far as to suggest in a conversation with Hans Haacke that 'attacks on [cultural] autonomy are in a sense more dangerous when they come from a government which, like the socialist government in France, has leant on the weaknesses and fault-lines of the literary and artistic fields - that is, on the least autonomous (and least competent) creators - to impose its solicitations and seductions.'⁵⁸ While to external observers this might appear like a case of those in the cultural professions biting the hand that fed them, Bourdieu diagnosed in the very generosity of these patrons of the arts an insidious form of Zhdanovism. Admittedly, it demonstrated none of the brutality or rigidity of the syndrome's hard-line exemplifications. But it still amounted, in Bourdieu's assessment, to a structure in which those with less artistic and/or cultural competence were able to impose their agenda on those with more such competence. It was more dangerous (though surely only in some respects...) because it was more

⁵⁶ 'Que vive la télévision publique'.

⁵⁷ For a comprehensive overview of this programme, see David Loosely, *The Politics of Fun: Cultural Policy and Debate in Contemporary France* (Oxford: Berg, 1995), pp. 69-245.

⁵⁸ P. Bourdieu & H. Haacke, *Libre-échange* (Paris: Seuil/Les Presses du Réel, 1994), pp. 22-3 [p. 13 – trans. mod.], referred to hereafter as *LE*.

winning: via its blandishments and inducements, it could insinuate its way into the workings of the cultural field.⁵⁹

But if he wanted independence from all undue interference of the State in the cultural field, he also wanted independence from the agendas of the cultural and media industries. These industries pursued ‘cultural policies’ of their own (*RA* 208 [146]), and, as they had become ever larger, ever more vertically and horizontally integrated, and ever more transnational, these effective cultural policies had become ever more difficult to resist. These policies were based on criteria of maximal short-term profit, and ran directly counter to the principles governing autonomous cultural fields.⁶⁰ They were elaborated in sites removed from democratic control, and looked to impose their neo-liberal conditions on the directions taken by State educational and cultural policies.⁶¹

One could construct on this basis something like a cultural policy ‘field’ comprising all those strategic forces looking to model the cultural field, and/or to instrumentalize that field for their own purposes (the augmenting of financial capital, the creation of political consensus and belief, etc.). Clearly, the dominant poles of such a field would be constituted by the transnational cultural industries and individual nation States (the latter perhaps increasingly functioning as ‘dominated dominators’). Into this field – if one accepts the construction – we can see Bourdieu looking to project a supplementary position. He looked to institute (or at the very least, consolidate) sites that might function as federated platforms for a kind of cultural counter-policy. He worked particularly over the 1990s to mobilize international intellectual and cultural groupings around a range of issues, and to endow these groupings with a politically effective symbolic force. Reflecting in 1994 on the possible uses of an international writers’ parliament, he proposed as its first principle an

independence with regard to political, economic and media powers, and also with regard to all forms of orthodoxy. The vocation of the Parliament’s action must be to defend wherever it is threatened the autonomy of creation and thought, to return to writers the full control over their means of production and the definition of their work, and to define

⁵⁹ For another analysis of the problematic aspects of a policy where cultural creators depended on direct political patronage, see Jean Caune, ‘The power of creation or power to the creators?’ [1992], in Ahearne (ed.), *French Cultural Policy Debates*, pp. 157-61.

⁶⁰ P. Bourdieu, ‘Questions aux vrais maîtres du monde’, paper given on 11 October 1999 at Canal+/MTR conference, in front of assembled directors of major media groups, published in *Le Monde*, 14 October 1999 and *Libération*, 13 October 1999, and included in Bourdieu, *Interventions*, pp. 417-24 (p. 419).

⁶¹ Bourdieu, ‘Les chercheurs et le mouvement social’, paper given in Athens in May 2001, published in *Interventions*, pp. 465-9 (pp. 465-7).

itself a ‘policy of creation’ that is independent of States’ ‘cultural policies’ and indifferent to the pressures of the market or the media.⁶²

He even goes on to propose a kind of counter-administration, comprising secretariats, commissions, plenary and regional meetings. Unsurprisingly perhaps, it was difficult to impose such a bureaucracy, the condition of any sustained effective action, on a dispersed body of writers, and Bourdieu became disenchanted with this particular instance of mobilization. This was not the case, however, with other more enduring groupings that he helped institute.⁶³ And the general point is perhaps this: within an essentially bipolar cultural policy field, Bourdieu looked to introduce an organised supplementary third pole that could, at the very least, unsettle the two others. Given the commercially homogenising and neo-liberal thrust of the cultural industries, given the tendency of State cultural policies to overt or disguised forms of ‘Zhdanovism’, given also the effective combinations of the two (think of America’s implicit cultural policy), Bourdieu looked to give shape to a third pole constituted by a self-conscious body of cultural producers.

The odds, clearly, would always be against such a potentially nebulous pole, liable always to resscatter, and whose only substantial capital is cultural and symbolic. Framed in this way, however, one is perhaps reminded of Bourdieu’s analysis of the nineteenth-century artistic field in France. He evokes the ‘particular horror’ inspired in the most able and innovative artists of the time by ‘the cultural atmosphere of the Second Empire’ (*RA* 91 [59]). On the one hand, this atmosphere was defined by the cultural strategies of Napoleon III, multiplying festivals, commissions and pensions for the most compliant of artists and intellectuals, and thereby exerting direct control over the literary and artistic fields (*RA* 77-9 [49-50]). On the other hand, the period saw the increasing ‘industrialisation’ of literary values via the commercial expansion of the press, based to a considerable degree on the serialisation of novels defined for the purpose (*RA* 82-4 [53-4]). The interests of these two poles overlapped to a considerable degree (though other studies show how Napoleon’s regime of press censorship also delayed the subsequent explosion of the popular daily

⁶² P. Bourdieu, ‘Un parlement des écrivains pour quoi faire?’, *Libération*, 3 November 1994, republished in *Interventions*, pp. 289-92 (p. 289).

⁶³ As examples of such groupings one might cite the programmatically ‘autonomous’ journal founded by Bourdieu in 1975, the *Actes de Recherche en Sciences Sociales*; the Association for Reflection on Higher Education and Research (ARESER), launched in 1992, and the International Committee of Support for Algerian Intellectuals (CISIA), launched in 1993 (on these, see *Interventions*, pp. 293-5); and *Raisons d’agir*, launched in the mid-1990s as a ‘collective grouping designed to put the analytic competence of researchers at the service of those movements resisting neoliberal policies, as a counterweight to the influence of conservative think tanks’ (editors’ comment, *Interventions*, p. 331). See also Peter Collier’s analysis of the initially cross-national publishing venture *Liber* in ‘*Liber*: Liberty and Literature’, *French Cultural Studies*, 4/3, October 1993, pp. 291-304.

press). Moreover, artists also had a sense of inhabiting a kind of political end-game, in which all possible moves (the liberal Monarchy of 1830-48, the revolution of 1848, the Second Republic of 1848-1852, not to mention the Second Empire) had become derisory. Bourdieu traces how, faced with this predicament, the most innovative and recalcitrant artists of the period (notably Baudelaire, Flaubert, and Manet) worked to invent and consolidate a new position in the cultural field. They refused the values both of the Academy and the bohemian counter-culture, whose ‘social art’ they adjudged to be artistically incompetent; they fell into line neither with the ‘philistine’ taste of the governing class, nor (when their private income allowed) with the demands of the press. They ‘seceded’ from all existing authorities, recognising no ‘law’ but that of their own artistic projects. They thus created the seeds of an ‘empire within an empire’ (*RA* 90 [59]). Certainly, this fragile empire was in its formative phase ‘radically elitist’ (*RA* 464 [341]) and hostile to any political engagement. Nevertheless, Bourdieu shows how, by an unintended ruse of history, that ‘empire’ came within a few decades to constitute a quasi-institutional platform from which political campaigns could be launched challenging the prerogatives of the political and financial elites. In a homologous fashion, Bourdieu could be seen as seeking to help into being a new position in the cultural policy field that could alter the play of forces within that field.

Engaged in an increasingly explicit polemic with the twin adversaries of neo-liberalism and governmental ‘Zhdanovism’ (and these orientations could combine in various ways), Bourdieu was brought to define in more forthright terms just what he was looking to defend. This represents a contrast to the scientific ‘neutrality’, or quasi-Flaubertian irony, for which he strives in his sociological studies (where individual positions in a field are neither condemned nor embraced, but understood in terms of the conflicts and interests defining the field). Bourdieu was conscious of this contrast, proclaiming the need to take up an explicitly ‘normative position’ (*RA* 461 [339]) in order to advance what we might call his cultural counter-policy agenda. The object of his concern is thus defined abruptly as ‘the rarest acquisitions of human history’ (*LE* 77 [72 – trans. mod.]), or ‘the highest productions of humanity’, such as ‘mathematics, poetry, literature, and philosophy’, which all represent things that ‘have been produced against the equivalent of audience ratings, against commercial logic’.⁶⁴ The metaphor of elevation would recur – Bourdieu evokes also the ‘highest conquests of humanity’ (*LE* 77 [72 – trans. mod.]) – and contrasts strikingly with the irony directed at the worship of high culture that also runs through

⁶⁴ Bourdieu, *Sur la télévision* (Paris : Liber, 1996), p. 29 [p. 27 – trans. mod.]. One should note that ‘acquis’ can signify in French acquisitions, but also rights and entitlements (in the sense that Trade Union struggles have over history acquired rights and entitlements that need to be defended).

Bourdieu's work. As he deploys it in its 'normative' and self-consciously prescriptive sense, this metaphor seems designed to connote not just the arduousness of the process leading to these diverse cultural breakthroughs, but also the potential universality of their reach and their status as points of reference that 'stand above' the human activity to which they can give sense and direction. This discursive shift may also be due to changes in the social existence and status of traditional 'high' cultural corpuses. Discredited on one flank by the technocratic and managerialist culture of the economically dominant classes, and on the other by a popular anti-intellectualism increasingly ratified by a populist media, it is no longer clear whether those traditional corpuses are more the instruments or targets of 'symbolic violence'.⁶⁵ In such a context, a purely ironical description of those cultures' workings may have come close to flogging a dead horse.

This is not to say that Bourdieu advocated a simple return to the worship of high culture. This would have amounted to a revocation of the insights gained as a result of his own sociological work, which helps us, as I have suggested, to see culture in its social existence not as a monolithic bloc, but as 'multifunctional'. Yet Bourdieu, in his 'normative' considerations, was not obliged to endorse all the functions that he saw legitimate culture as having traditionally fulfilled. Indeed, his understanding of those functions allowed him to specify more precisely not just the cultural resources but also, especially, the uses of culture that he was looking to defend:

Those I am addressing here are not all those who conceive of culture as a patrimony, a dead culture to be made into an obligatory cult of ritual piety, or as an instrument of domination and distinction, cultural bastion and Bastille, to be erected against the Barbarians within and without (who these days often seem to the new defenders of the West to be one and the same), but rather those who conceive of culture as an instrument of liberty that itself presupposes liberty, as a *modus operandi* allowing the permanent supersession of the *opus operatum*, i.e. a culture reified and closed. (RA 461-2 [339-40 – trans. mod.])

Lest the scholastic terms disconcert, it is worth recalling Bourdieu's observation elsewhere that discussions of *modus operandi* (ways of proceeding) and *opus operatum* (the work actually produced) nearly always leave out the essential issue – the *ars inveniendi*, the art of inventing or discovering things.⁶⁶ In any case, the thrust of his message is clear. People do not need specific cultural resources to be free, but engagement with such resources, with the most

⁶⁵ On the rise of technocratic and managerialist culture as a terrain for social distinction, to which Bourdieu had long been alert, and the subsequent displacement of 'humanist' culture, see e.g. *D* 361 [315] and *NE* 302-5, 484 [212-14, 337].

⁶⁶ 'Contre les divisions scolastiques', p. 51.

searching achievements of humanity, can increase their degree of liberty. And it can emancipate them, notably, from the ‘ritual pieties’ and the strategies of ‘domination and distinction’ that might be put upon them in the names either of traditional culture or the technocratic and managerialist discourse that has supplanted its preeminence.

All that is very well, but begs the question of who decides upon which human achievements are indeed the highest. The answer, for Bourdieu in normative mode, lies within the workings of the cultural field itself. If there is to be a chance that the most universally valuable achievements are to be positioned as the ‘highest’, then the requisite filtering process must be independent both of purely commercial calculations and also of political instrumentalization. Cultural producers must be able to set down their own laws – they must be autonomous (*nomos*, in Greek, signifying ‘law’). Of course, not all cultural producers will agree as to what laws should prevail, and there will be a vigorous conflict among them. In Bourdieu’s terms, a healthy cultural field is defined by the absence of any single centrally defined law – it ‘institutionalizes anomie’.⁶⁷ But out of the struggles which constitute that field, particular hierarchies will emerge, laying down particular laws (they exert a ‘nomothetical’ effect). Our trouble is, of course, that due in part to Bourdieu’s own work, we will be suspicious of those norms (cultural producers have their own compulsions and interests, and they are particularly adept at disguising these as purely universal, democratic, or artistic interests). But at least, in a field where the principle of anomie reigns, we have the right to voice those suspicions, and to integrate them into the filtering process. In Bourdieu’s perspective, a cultural field with a high degree of autonomy is more likely to bring to the top of its hierarchies those works most worthy of being universally transmitted than a cultural field in hoc to the ‘heteronomous’ principles of short-term profitability or political expediency.

What Bourdieu really wants to defend, therefore, are autonomous cultural fields themselves – and in particular the ‘ecological’ conditions that enable them to endure.⁶⁸ We have seen above all the reasons he adduces for being suspicious of these fields. They perform the ‘symbolic alchemy’ through which value and belief are invested in the ‘fetishes’ of the cultural world. All the inhabitants of that microcosm have vested interests in maintaining that belief via their rituals of celebration and contestation (their very arguments suggesting that something important is at stake) (*RA* 241-2, 318-9 [170, 229]). Bourdieu does not revoke these analyses, which designate decidedly non-euphoriant truths about the

⁶⁷ On the institutionalization of anomie, see *RA* 93-103 [60-8] (with regard to literature); or ‘Manet and the Institutionalization of Anomie’ [1987], in Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, ed. R. Johnson (Cambridge: Polity, 1993), pp. 238-53.

⁶⁸ See ‘Questions aux vrais maîtres du monde’, in *Interventions*, p. 420 (Bourdieu refers to Ernst Gombrich). On the question of the ‘ecological’ conditions of given cultural spheres, cf. also the discussion of Régis Debray in the present volume (below, 4.4).

network of institutions maintained notably by State educational and cultural policy. Yet it is as though the normative constraints imposed by Bourdieu's cultural policy engagements themselves imposed on him a kind of filtering process, obliging him to confront more directly what was and what was not worth defending. We see this in the text of what must have been a rather incongruous paper that Bourdieu gave in 1999 to the assembled heads of the world's leading transnational media enterprises, and entitled, lucidly enough, 'Questions for the real masters of the world'.⁶⁹ Bourdieu is forced to spell out the conditions that might make it possible for cultural producers not to follow the short-term profit criteria of commercial cultural policies (if one assumes that human beings are not routinely self-sacrificing and heroic, and that they require incomes and recognition). In so doing, Bourdieu is brought to defend, as a precious but threatened 'ecosystem', the very battery of institutions and agents that he described elsewhere as engaged in a collective process of misrecognition (*RA* 244 [172]). For if Paris had been able to foster so many lasting works, if it has often acted as a kind of headquarters for a 'literary, artistic and cinematographic Internationale', this was because it had concentrated, for historical reasons, a 'microcosm of producers, critics and knowledgeable consumers'.⁷⁰ And of course, it takes a long time, and suitably resourced cultural and pedagogic institutions, to create not only those creators that might not simply respond to mass demand, but also the 'social spaces of producers and consumers within which they can appear, develop, and succeed'.⁷¹ The thrust of Bourdieu's paper was to persuade the 'masters of the world' that it was in their long-term interest to protect, or at least not destroy, these cultural ecosystems that could in due course deliver substantial demand for symbolic goods. In a sense, this may well be casuistry (such harmony between the interests of media entrepreneurs and autonomous cultural producers seems improbable). But underlying this rhetorical move was Bourdieu's belief that the universes of cultural production that had conquered their autonomy over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had now entered a phase of 'involution', overrun by the demands for short-term profit and appeal imposed by heteronomous authorities.

Bourdieu wanted in the first instance to defend autonomous cultural fields for their own sake, insofar as the goods they produced were, to a greater or lesser extent, ultimately of universal worth. We have also seen, however, how the autonomy of a cultural field, once constituted, can serve as a platform for political campaigns directed at those outside the field. The classic example here, which Bourdieu analyses as inaugurating in France the figure of the 'intellectual', is the Dreyfus Case.⁷² Agents in the cultural field can use the cultural and symbolic capital (expertise and recognition) they have acquired

⁶⁹ See note 60 above.

⁷⁰ 'Questions aux vrais maîtres du monde', p. 423.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 422.

⁷² See *RA* 185-9 [129-31].

there to exert effects in the universe of political decision-making. We have seen how Bourdieu pursued this practice with regard to cultural policy strategies, and will see a further instance of this below, concerning the cultural implications of the GATS trade talks. He adopted, as it were, a two-pronged strategy. When faced with political or commercial pressures (the latter often mediated through the categories that journalists bring to their work), he would defend uncompromisingly the autonomy of the cultural field.⁷³ When operating within that field, he would urge his colleagues collectively to defend that autonomy, but also to ‘engage’ the resources it secured in wider political struggles (the ultimate purpose of his prescriptions was not simply to create an ivory tower). The resources thus engaged could be, for example, the expertise of the intellectual, or properly artistic techniques for the production of aesthetic effect. Bourdieu is clearly fascinated by the work of Hans Haacke, whose formal artistic experiments do not take him away from the political and economic worlds, but lead him directly to challenge people’s perceptions of those worlds (applying shock treatment, as it were, to their *habitus*).⁷⁴ The cultural counter-policy evoked above, if it were to exist politically, would be the result of this engaged autonomy.

In what I have construed as a multipolar field of cultural policy, there are several competing principles of domination (*nomoï*). In the light of this, it is not surprising that Bourdieu’s cultural policy reflection should encounter what he calls ‘antinomies’, resulting from conflicts between these principles that are not always resolvable in any absolute sense.⁷⁵ For, to give the most obvious example, those in the cultural field are forced to depend upon what they must also oppose. As Bourdieu puts it, ‘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’.⁷⁶ He expresses here a kind of recalcitrant dependency on the State, drawn into a relation that he also contests. He would also, however, vigorously defend the ‘official’ definition of the republican State as the ‘guarantor’ of the

⁷³ On journalistic categories, see *Sur la télévision*, 18-22, 54 [19-22, 47] (and *passim*).

⁷⁴ See *Libre-échange*, notably the reproductions and glosses of Haacke’s work on the connections in the USA between right-wing fundamentalism, corporate affairs, and the National Endowment for the Arts; in Europe between the world of high art and corporations tainted ethically by their work for Nazi Germany, apartheid South Africa, and the arms programme of Saddam Hussein; and his (unsuccessful) design for the courtyard for the French National Assembly, on which the eminently French republican principles of ‘Liberty, Equality, Fraternity’ would be inscribed in Arabic.

⁷⁵ For his reference to ‘antinomies’, see *LE* 23, 74, 77 [13, 69, 71].

⁷⁶ *LE* 77 [71-2 – trans. mod.].

‘general interest’ (*LE* 77 [72]) as itself an ‘extraordinary historical invention’ that constitutes a valuable ‘acquisition of humanity, just like art or science’.⁷⁷ For amongst other things, this official definition, as a real discursive entity, is one of the things that allows the State to be held to account, and to be manoeuvred into living up to its professed identity. But nowhere was Bourdieu’s positive attachment to the prerogatives of the republican State more apparent than when he had to defend it against the impositions of the transnational and commercially driven cultural policies (or anti-cultural policies) pursued by powerful politico-commercial lobbies through such institutions as the World Trade Organisation. In an address to the ‘Summit of the Peoples’ held in Quebec in 2001, he listed some of the domains which the GATS negotiation was set to ‘open up’ to the laws of free trade. In addition to health and education, these amounted to a catalogue of those sectors that constitute a nation’s cultural policy as traditionally understood, comprising notably ‘services like libraries, the audiovisual sector, archives and museums, and all the services linked with entertainment, the arts, performance, sport, theatre, radio and television, etc.’.⁷⁸ For Bourdieu, the real thrust of these negotiations was to destroy the State’s ‘immune system’ in cultural affairs, by treating ‘as “obstacles to commerce” the policies that look to safeguard national cultural particularities’.⁷⁹ In this context, Bourdieu threw his weight resolutely behind the defense of the nation-State – both that of France and of more vulnerable countries – against the steamroller of transnational economic powers.

Bourdieu’s apparently alternating positions as presented above – against the State, for the State, and a variety of points in between – should not be understood too hastily as contradictions. Instead, we can conceive them as moments leading to a largely coherent practice of negotiating the inevitable antinomies of cultural policy. We have seen how Bourdieu’s reflection on culture is subtle enough, when taken as a whole, to integrate the multiplicity of functions assumed by ‘legitimate’ culture in its social existence (it alienates and liberates; performs at the same time ‘magical’ and rational operations; develops both vested and universal interests; mystifies, but provides the instruments of demystification; imprisons the mind and generates invention; imposes symbolic violence, and is the target of symbolic violence, etc.). Bourdieu’s cultural policy

⁷⁷ P. Bourdieu, ‘Notre Etat de misère’, interview with Sylvaine Pasquier, *L’Express*, 18 March 1993, pp. 112-15, republished in *Interventions*, pp. 245-52 (pp. 245-6). It is worth recalling again that ‘acquis’ in French can also mean ‘right’ or ‘entitlement’.

⁷⁸ P. Bourdieu, ‘Pour une organisation permanente de résistance au nouvel ordre mondial’, text published in *Interventions*, pp. 461-4 (pp. 461-2). For an example of France’s official stance with regard to the cultural ramifications of the GATS talks, see Catherine Trautmann, ‘Cultural Diversity and the Cultural Exception’ [1999] in Ahearne (ed.), *French Cultural Policy Debates*, pp. 206-11.

⁷⁹ ‘Pour une organisation permanente de résistance au nouvel ordre mondial’, p. 462.

reflection, when taken as a whole, is similarly nuanced. It allows us to construct a ‘multipolar’ vision of a cultural policy field as sketched out above. Given the conflicting, incompatible and labile forces in play, those wanting to defend a given position (say, cultural and creative autonomy) will have to adopt different strategies in different contexts. At one moment, or in one historical conjuncture, cultural producers will have to use what symbolic leverage they might have to impose their independence with regard to governmental agendas. At another, they will have to cultivate an alliance with the apparatus of government in order to overcome a structural subordination to national or transnational market forces. Having said that, one does wonder sometimes whether the momentum of Bourdieu’s polemical intent leads him to unhelpful rigidities of position. In a rare concession, he recalls in *Les Règles de l’art* Zola’s contention that ‘money has emancipated the writer, money has created modern literature’.⁸⁰ For, notwithstanding romantic notions of the virtues of aristocratic patronage, the ‘industrialisation’ of the book trade also allowed some cultural producers to build up a platform enabling them to remain independent of political powers, and that would incite the economic powers to leave them be. Of course, this amounted in a sense to playing with fire (and the volume of Zola’s sales did make him an object of suspicion to some in the artistic field). But this example does show, in a manner that Bourdieu does not conceptualise as such, how symbolic leverage for an autonomous cultural field may be derived from diverting the resources of the ‘industrial’ as well as the ‘political’ pole of the cultural policy field. By contrast, Bourdieu certainly does conceptualise the way in which cultural producers may ‘divert’ or subversively ‘misappropriate’ the resources of the State in the development of their cultural and/or political programmes (*NE* 556 [387]). However, he consistently seems allergic to the idea that cultural producers might actually work within the bureaucracy of the State, interpreting this as a sure sign that they have failed to gain the recognition of their peers and have had to fall back on a less demanding market from which, moreover, they will exert undue ‘Zhdanovist’ pressure on their former colleagues. This seems an unnecessarily ‘pedagogocratic’ position. Hans Haacke noted in conversation with Bourdieu that a management apparatus was a necessary component of a complex society, and that he had ‘no doubt that we [in the cultural field] would stand to gain by the presence of intellectuals in management bodies [in cultural and cultural policy institutions]’ (*LE* 74).⁸¹ Certainly, he admitted that people’s thinking tended to change substantially on accepting cultural management responsibilities. But he seems to be expressing here the fruits of many years’ experience of dealing with cultural administrations with a view to developing challenging artistic programmes. Interestingly, however, Bourdieu does not even seem to register this

⁸⁰ Cited at *RA* 136 [91 – trans. mod.].

⁸¹ *LE* 74 [68 - trans. mod.].

observation. Prepared to endorse alliances between the cultural and State ‘bureaucratic’ fields conceived as two separate bodies, he does not seem ready to envisage the notion that a degree of interpenetration of the two fields, or even of ‘infiltration’ of the latter by the former, might be a welcome development. We will see in the next chapter how Michel de Certeau’s cultural policy engagement challenges this rather dichotomising vision.

Chapter Three. Michel de Certeau.

Michel de Certeau's cultural policy thinking (and indeed his cultural thinking in general) developed through a sustained engagement in a range of institutional bodies and networks involved in the shaping of French cultural policy over the 1970s and 1980s. He was between 1970 and 1971 a member of the 'long-term' working group of the Commission for Cultural Affairs of the Sixth National Plan; he was between 1971 and 1973 a member of the Council for Cultural Development; he was asked to write a preparatory report and an introductory presentation for a colloquium on the future of cultural development held at Arc-et-Senans in April 1972, organised by French and European governmental bodies in order to help generate strategies for cultural development; he held for a while a position of 'director of studies' at the Ministry of Culture; between 1974 and 1977, he pursued a governmentally funded research programme set up in 1973 following on from the Sixth Plan and officially designed to clarify possible options for the cultural wing of the Seventh Plan; in 1982, he was asked to produce a report on 'the contents and tools of communication' designed to inform the cultural policy of the newly elected Socialist government; his writings provided the main influence for the report of the 'Long Term Culture' working group of the Ninth Plan in 1983.

The work he produced in the context of these engagements will be analysed in detail below. The list above, however, while not being exhaustive, should suggest the degree to which Certeau's cultural policy thinking was not purely theoretical, but was grounded by a familiarity with the effective processes of governmental decision-making. At the same time, one should not suppose that this thinking was conditioned by a technocratic subservience to succeeding governmental agendas. On the contrary, Pierre Mayol has commented on the caustic severity of his introductory talk at Arc-et-Senans in 1972, which was liable to unsettle the attendant audience of decision-makers and experts, and which Mayol sees as very unusual for such gatherings; Certeau (along with Françoise Choay) was the first member to resign from the Council of Cultural Development, impugning the 'conservationist' mentality and 'political discrimination' characterising policy at the time, and foreshadowing the resignation *en masse* of the entire Council some months later, faced with its increasing marginalisation; we will see below how the content of Certeau's analyses tend to decentre the ambition of strategic decision-makers to mould the social body in the image of their policy programmes; finally, for all his commitment to the promise of a new socialist cultural policy at the beginning of the 1980s, the emphases of Certeau's policy recommendations were always far removed from the fetishisation of professional art and spectacle that would

come to characterize Jack Lang's administration (notwithstanding the latter's many positive achievements).¹

It seems clear, nevertheless, that Certeau had a considerable impact on the cultural policy circles within which he would work regularly from 1970 until his departure for the USA in 1978 (even after this date, this work would continue in various forms). François Dosse, having interviewed a substantial number of Certeau's collaborators, suggests that Certeau's thought has 'irrigated in a very subterranean fashion post-Malraux cultural policy in France'.² The precise nature of such influence (its vectors, its efficacy) is admittedly difficult to determine, but Certeau's work has certainly come to constitute an established reference point in French cultural policy debate.³ This chapter will show, at an initial level, how Certeau's reflection in this respect emerged through detailed engagement with the challenges of a particular historical period. Beyond that, it will look to uncover certain lines of force in this reflection that have up until now been insufficiently recognised, and that should consolidate its position as a resource for contemporary cultural policy thinking. These concern notably the key values that Certeau looks to pursue, questions of political 'representation', and above all modes of 'articulation' (or linkage) between cultural institutions and processes of experimentation.

3.1 The Commission for Cultural Affairs of the Sixth Plan (1969-1971)

Certeau was first drawn into the apparatuses of governmental cultural policy as such under the auspices of the newly devised Commission for Cultural Affairs of the Sixth National Plan. The 'long-term' working group of the Commission was charged with elaborating a set of overall aims for State cultural

¹ On the Arc-et-Senans introductory talk, see Pierre Mayol, 'Michel de Certeau, l'historien et la culture ordinaire', in *Esprit*, March-April 2002, pp. 191-205 (p. 200); on the dissolution of the *Conseil de Développement Culturel*, see Sophie Gautier *Le Conseil de Développement Culturel: Une occasion manquée, Maîtrise* dissertation, Université Paris VII Jussieu, October 1992, pp. 134-53 (for Certeau's position, see pp. 140, 145); a separate *Annexes* volume appended to Gautier's dissertation includes a press dossier, containing an article from *Le Monde*, dated 5 October 1973, which cites a letter from Certeau to the Council's President Pierre Emmanuel, explaining the terms of his dissatisfaction with the Council's operation.

² François Dosse, *Michel de Certeau: Le marcheur blessé* (Paris: La Découverte, 2002), p. 460.

³ See e.g. Jean-Louis Fabiani, 'Peut-on encore parler de légitimité culturelle?' in O. Donnat & P. Tolila (ed.), *Le(s) Public(s) de la culture : Politiques publiques et équipements culturels* (Paris : Presses de Sciences Po, 2003), pp. 305-317 (pp. 315-6), or the remarks of Fabiani and Antoine Hennion in volume 2 of that collection, in the concluding 'Eléments de synthèse', pp. 309-23 (pp. 310, 311-12).

policy, and held four full meetings over November and December 1969, after which the Commission issued an interim report on the major options to be pursued. At its fifth meeting on 6 April 1970 it was decided to change the style of the group, calling notably on outside ‘experts’. These included Michel de Certeau (as a result, it seems, of a meeting with Augustin Girard, head of research at the Ministry of Culture, at the offices of Esprit, whose editor, Jean-Marie Domenach, was also president of the long-term group⁴). Whereas some of these experts, such as Edgar Morin or Pierre Bourdieu, would come only to one session for the presentation of a paper, Certeau would become a regular member of the group, presenting at its last meeting on 7 January 1971 an overview of its work as well as his own views on the challenges facing cultural policy.⁵

The collective deliberation pursued in this context appears to have functioned as a matrix for the crystallization of Certeau’s cultural policy thinking. In this respect, the interim ‘Major Options Report’ of the Commission for Cultural Affairs, circulated in February 1970 (i.e. two months before Certeau’s involvement in the long-term group), provides us with a helpful touchstone. On the one hand, it will forestall any naïve temptation to see Certeau as single-handedly overturning a Malravian cultural policy agenda (my overall objective, as evoked in the introduction to this study, is to present Certeau’s work as one of the most probing and imaginative elaborations of the ‘cultural development’ or ‘cultural democracy’ strand in French cultural policy thought). On the other hand, laying out as it did the ‘state of the question’ for post-68 reformist cultural policy theory in France, it articulated the key concerns and notions in relation to which Certeau’s cultural policy reflection would develop.

The report’s proposals were organised around a cluster of notions that readers of Certeau will recognise as underpinning his own reflection on cultural policy. It took up the ‘global’ understanding of culture already advocated in 1965 for the Fifth Plan by the Commission’s predecessor, the Commission for cultural facilities and artistic heritage.⁶ In contrast to the Malravian conception

⁴ Conversation with Geneviève Gentil, July 2002.

⁵ Details concerning the group’s meetings are taken from its minutes, Département des études et de la prospective du ministère de la Culture, archives de la Commission des Affaires culturelles du VI^e Plan, dossier no. 22, groupe Long Terme. For the interim report, see Commissariat Général du Plan, Commission des Affaires Culturelles VIème Plan, *Rapport sur les grandes options*, February 1970 (typed document available at the Ministry’s *Département d’études et de la prospective*). I am very grateful to Geneviève Gentil for guiding me through the archival material pertaining to the Commission for Cultural Affairs. For a helpful overview of the Commission’s work, see Laurent Gayme, ‘La Commission des Affaires Culturelles du VI^e Plan (1969-1971)’, in G. Gentil and A. Girard (ed.), *Les Affaires culturelles au temps de Jacques Duhamel, 1971-1973* (Paris: La Documentation française, 1995), pp. 57-82.

⁶ For reference to the ‘global’ conception of cultural policy proposed over the Fifth Plan (which was not borne out in ministerial policy), see the final general report of the Sixth Plan’s Commission for Cultural Affairs, published as Commissariat Général du Plan, *Rapport de la*

of culture (the great works bequeathed as ‘the inheritance of the nobility of the world’), a ‘global’ approach to culture was deemed to take in a full range of activities, modes of expression, and social groups (scientific culture, technical culture, regional and popular cultures, television, education, urban planning, etc.). State cultural policy was thus given the task of building on a ‘pluralist national cultural life’ (p. 16). In order to do this, it should, as part of a ‘decentralising’ approach (pp. 15-16), adapt to the aspirations of local populations (p. 7). Again, this contrasted with the flagship policy of Malraux’s administration, the Houses of Culture, which looked to set aside any manifestations ‘merely’ representing local culture in order to parachute in only instances of ‘universally’ valuable culture.⁷ The report urged the development of locally based ‘animateurs’ (p. 13), and, instead of the monolithic Houses of Culture, the deployment of ‘multipurpose’ cultural facilities that could cater in unintimidating fashion to a range of social groups (p. 19). It acknowledged the possible tensions between State planning and culture as the realm of liberty and creation (p. 3), and negotiated these by underlining the need to create the conditions in which the ‘creativity’, ‘autonomy’, and ‘initiative’ of citizens could flourish (p. 3), and by advocating organised support for ‘experimentation in all domains’ (p. 16 bis). It argued that the Ministry of Culture’s remit was too narrow, and that it therefore had little purchase on the major cultural forces reshaping society. It therefore needed to develop meaningful links with the national education system and television network (pp. 17-20), and government cultural action more generally needed to be ‘decompartimentalised’ (p. 11), notably through the creation of dedicated interministerial funding and consultative bodies (p. 23).

Such broad directives constituted in some ways a framework within which Certeau would develop his critical reflection, though one should remember that this reflection had already laid out its underlying orientations in *La Prise de parole*, significantly subtitled in its first edition *Pour une nouvelle culture* (‘For a New Culture’).⁸ They are explored notably in the presentation he himself gave to the long-term group in January 1971, where we can see in seed the key emphases of his own subsequent cultural policy thinking. I shall bring

commission Affaires Culturelles: l'action culturelle (Paris: La Documentation française, 1971), p. 9. For the interim report’s advocacy of a ‘global approach to culture’, see *Rapport sur les grandes options*, p. 20. Subsequent page references in brackets in this paragraph refer to the latter document.

⁷ See Philippe Urfalino, *L’Invention de la politique culturelle* (Paris : La Documentation française, 1996), pp. 101-59, 243-72.

⁸ *La Prise de parole. Pour une nouvelle culture* (Paris : Desclée de Brouwer, 1968); references in this chapter will be to the posthumous collection of this text and other writings, *La Prise de parole et autres écrits politiques*, ed. Luce Giard (Paris: Seuil, 1994) (referred to hereafter as PP). On these orientations, see above, 1.2.

out here just three elements of that presentation, whose formulation by Certeau is taken up more or less verbatim in the final report of the long-term group.⁹

Firstly, Certeau sums up the programme advocated by the group in terms of two ‘essential principles’: to ‘unite cultural diffusion and cultural action’ and to give preference to a ‘culture of development’ over a ‘culture of consumption’ (*CR* 3; and see *RGLT* 388). This sounds vague in the extreme, but amounted, in the language of the time, to an endorsement of the shift from a Malravian supply-led form of ‘cultural action’ to the new philosophy of ‘cultural development’ as inspired initially by Joffre Dumazedier.¹⁰ Whereas the scheme underlying Malraux’s cultural action was to project universally valid artistic goods into spaces imagined as a cultural desert, the scheme characterising ‘cultural development’ was to build on the cultural activity already present in social groups. This activity was conceived in a broad way (reading, amateur artistic activity, cinema, gardening, local associations, etc), and the objectives were generally to wrest such activity from the alienating and levelling effects of ‘mass culture’. This shift would soon be taken up at least nominally by the administration of Jacques Duhamel (1971-1973), although subsequent ministers would return over the rest of the decade to a more aggressively conservative conception of cultural policy. Certeau, however, was already drawing attention to the difficulties facing ‘cultural development’ programmes. Insofar as cultural development was imagined as a complement to or pocket alongside industrial and economic development, it was marginalised, becoming an ineffectual or utopian ‘residue’ whose discussion would at least keep intellectuals busy (*CR* 3). Insofar as the programme of cultural development straddled a number of administrations each jealous of its territory, little constructive and coordinated action was liable to emerge. Indeed, the very openness of the definition it gave to culture made it a slippery political category with insufficient guidelines for action (*CR* 3) – a difficulty to which, as we shall see, he would devote considerable attention.

Secondly, Certeau stressed at length the tension between the aspirations of these policy-makers to promote autonomy and the ‘fact’ of generalised passivity

⁹ The final report of the long term group was published as ‘Rapport du groupe long terme’, in Commission Générale du Plan, Commission des Affaires Culturelles (action culturelle), *Rapports particuliers: Enseignements artistiques, création – diffusion* (Paris: La Documentation française, 1971), pp. 375-402 (referred to immediately hereafter as *RGLT*). The detailed résumé of Certeau’s presentation constitutes the eleventh set of minutes (CR11) of the full meetings of the group (see Département des études et de la prospective du ministère de la Culture, archives de la Commission des Affaires culturelles du VI^e Plan, dossier no. 22, groupe Long Terme), entitled ‘Compte rendu de l’exposé de M. de Certeau – Réunion du 7 janvier’ (referred to immediately hereafter as *CR*). The group’s archives also contain Certeau’s manuscript notes for the presentation.

¹⁰ See e.g. J. Dumazedier & A. Ripert, ‘Leisure and Culture’ [1966], in J. Ahearne (ed.), *French Cultural Policy Debates: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 45-54; and the contextualisation in J. Ahearne, ‘Introduction’, *ibid.*, pp. 1-35 (pp. 6-18).

induced by standardised work procedures and the ‘ambiguous status’ of ‘purchased and consumed leisure’ (*CR* 1-2; cf also *RGLT* 379, 382, 385-6). Certeau’s subsequent work, whose problematic is already taking shape here, would of course probe further that ‘ambiguity’ and challenge to some degree that ‘fact’. However, the mobilizing impetus behind his cultural policy engagement is already clear: ‘Cultural action presupposes that we give credit to each individual, considering them as capable of autonomy and destined to participate in the elaboration of a common language’ (*CR* 3). His abiding concern would be to explore the ways in which this theoretical postulate could be incarnated as a practical possibility.

Thirdly, Certeau proposes a ‘policy of experimentation’ in order to constitute a middle term between the grand but ungrounded designs of pure theory and the reactive subservience of empirically driven practice (*CR* 3; *RGLT* 390-1). Methodically targeting strategically determined ‘key points’, this process would both generate practical results and provide a basis for further research (*CR* 3). This articulation between theory and practice, centred essentially on ‘the creation of groups at grass-roots level’ (*ibid.*), was designed in the medium term to turn ‘cultural development’ into a more credible policy programme. The final report of the long-term group took up Certeau’s formulations in this respect, confessing that it did not as yet dispose of properly ‘operative principles’ (*RGLT* 390) for the implementation of its recommendations.

3.2 Criteria for cultural action

Having been drawn into the networks of French cultural policy making, Certeau was asked by Augustin Girard to write a preparatory report and an introductory presentation for a colloquium on the future of cultural development held at Arc-et-Senans in April 1972.¹¹ The work for this colloquium, organized by French and European governmental bodies in order to help generate strategies for cultural development, constituted a further ‘decisive step in the crystallization of his reflection on cultural practices’.¹² The very problems

¹¹ For these texts, see M. de Certeau, ‘La culture dans la société’ and ‘Le lieu d’où l’on traite de la culture’ in *La Culture au pluriel* (Paris: Seuil, 1993 [1974])), pp. 165-91 [101-21] and 193-203 [123-31], referred to hereafter in this chapter as CAP. On Certeau’s preparation of this colloquium with Augustin Girard and Geneviève Gentil, see Dosse, *Michel de Certeau. Le Marcheur blessé*, pp. 445-6, 449.

¹² Luce Giard, ‘Histoire d’une recherche’, in M. de Certeau, *L’Invention du quotidien*, vol. 1, *Arts de faire*, ed. L. Giard (Paris: Gallimard, 1990 [1980]), pp. i-xxx (p. vii); Giard’s article can be found in translation as ‘History of a Research Project’ in M. de Certeau, L. Giard, P.

thrown up at this colloquium – in particular the hazily conceived but insistently felt rift between official cultural policy and most people's cultural experience – would provide the stimulus for Certeau's subsequent cultural policy thinking.

For the participants at Arc-et-Senans, the title of Certeau's preparatory report – 'Culture within Society' – could in itself be read as a condensed 'manifesto'.¹³ This applied particularly to the opposition it expressed with regard to the founding mission of the Ministry for Cultural Affairs, which had originally set out precisely to transcend whatever culture could be found within existing society through the diffusion of works associated with a universal (predominantly French) cultural heritage. It is also possible, however, to detect in this title a desire to redirect somewhat the task assigned to the colloquium. The colloquium had been convened under the sign of futurology (*la prospective*), a discipline that was expected in this context to contribute to the centralized planning of society by constructing scenarios for future 'development' on the basis of extrapolations from current trends and that would serve as models for the elaboration of long-term strategy. Perhaps due to his experience as a historian, Certeau was sceptical about the predictive validity of such models. In any case, he wanted to focus attention principally on the cultural rifts that could already be seen at work within society. The challenge was less to map out the future from a single strategic vantage point than to discern a number of those 'operative principles' invoked in the Long Term Group's report in 1971 that would enable constructive intervention in the present.

Certeau's emphasis, therefore, after sketching out the key forces and divisions reconfiguring the contemporary cultural field, was on a limited number of 'points' of intervention with sufficient potential leverage for inhibiting or stimulating particular developments. I propose to gather together here the key principles that inform Certeau's proposals for political-cultural intervention. These principles might also be called second-order values (or 'metavalues'). They enable Certeau to constitute an operative framework for socio-cultural action, mediating, as Herman Glaser put it in the context of socio-culture policies in general, between the emptiness of theory without practice and the blindness of practice without theory.¹⁴

Mayol, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, vol. 2, *Living and Cooking* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), pp. xiii-xxxiii (p. xvii).

¹³ The colloquium proceedings (essentially transcripts of those discussions plus Certeau's two texts and a common 'final declaration') were published in a special number (*hors-série*) of *Analyse et prévision* entitled 'Prospective du développement culturel' in October 1973. For the view of Certeau's title as a 'manifesto', see p. 6.

¹⁴ Herman Glaser, 'Joys and Sorrows of a Utopian Cultural Administrator' (Copeland lecture at Amherst College, 1976), *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 9/2 (2003), pp. 185-94 (p. 185). Glaser is playing on Kant's statement on the relations between conceptions and perceptions, presumably as found in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith, (Hounds Mills: Macmillan, 1950), p. 93: 'Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind'.

This invocation of values and principles might seem misplaced. Certeau speaks disparagingly elsewhere in *La Culture au pluriel* of the mystificatory ‘decor’ supplied by ‘values’ in political discourse. He opened his preparatory report for Arc-et-Senans with the premise that ‘the disappearance of universal principles is one aspect of the current situation.’¹⁵ Yet, in the face of this cultural fact, Certeau developed a position more complex than the mere acceptance that henceforth ‘anything went’ and that the exercise of qualitative judgement could be left to the mechanisms of supply and demand. This position emerges perhaps most clearly in the colloquium proceedings, which show him responding to concerns such as those voiced by the German philosopher Georg Picht over a ‘relativism’ in his preparatory report that was ‘so to speak, absolute’. Certainly, Certeau maintained that, in the face of the prevailing ‘fragmentation’ or ‘diversification’ affecting society’s systems of cultural reference, he did not believe it possible to define some common, binding set of values that a cultural policy could then set about diffusing throughout the social body. He did, however, then go on to say what ethical point there might be, given this fragmentation, of intervening in the cultural field at all. It was once he had done this that, as he noted by way of commentary on his own discourse, the question of value was ‘reintroduced’, albeit at a rather different level.¹⁶

For if Certeau had any reason, as an intellectual authority, to intervene in the broad field of cultural policy, it was precisely, he said, through ‘respect for the ability [*pouvoir*] of each individual or of groups to create and intervene as authors in a society.’¹⁷ The policy-level intervention he posited was designed less to model society than to enable the individuals and groups that composed that society to intervene themselves more forcefully in the shaping of their own social world. The term *author*, used here in a broad sense, refers to the capacity to participate in the construction of a form of life that those concerned see as meaningful. I call the ‘respect’ referred to here a ‘second-order value’ insofar as it brackets, so to speak, questions regarding the value of those values that shape the actual forms of life constructed by the given individuals and groups.¹⁸ This is not to deny that these are important questions that need to be addressed at the appropriate level.

The supposition of generalised potential ‘authorship’ raises questions concerning the conditions that allow human subjects to develop the implied autonomy. It is here that one can see the value of plurality as such emerge in Certeau’s thought. A key question raised during the discussions at Arc-et-

¹⁵ CAP 165 [101]. See also ‘The Language of Violence’, in CAP 73-82, esp. 73 [29-36, esp. 29].

¹⁶ See the colloquium proceedings in *Analyse et prévision* (pp. 37, 136, 137).

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 136.

¹⁸ The term *metavalue* could also be used to denote this distinction of level. Just as a metalanguage is a language about languages, so, I want to suggest, are metavales those values that engage with the question of values as such.

Senans was that of the individual human subject. As previously dominant collective systems of belief (represented by trade unions, churches, political parties, etc.) lost their capacity to integrate people quasi-automatically into social groups, as many existing social groups were fragmented by processes of urbanization and economic restructuring, the status of the individualised subject became, so to speak, exposed in its own right. It was in this sense that a notional individual became a major object of concern for these intellectuals as they endeavoured to chart a future course for cultural policy.¹⁹ Certeau looked to displace somewhat this rather ill-defined fixation by arguing that the only ‘practical’ way in which such political considerations came up against the liberty of the individual subject lay in ‘the necessity of maintaining at the level of social organization a plurality of interpretative systems’. The straightforward illustration he offered in support of this position shows how, for Certeau, a properly cultural process based on plurality sets up the space of human subjectivity: ‘One could take the easy example ... of education. Insofar as the child has only a one-to-one [*univoque*] relationship with a parent or with school, you suffocate him! Insofar as, on the contrary, he is situated within a plurality of relations, that is, with regard to his work, a teacher, parents, etc., this plurality leaves free a subject’s own space [*l’espace propre d’un sujet*] and does not determine it.’²⁰ Fundamentally, Certeau thus conceives the subject’s conditional liberty here as an effect of the play (*jeu*) among heterogeneous interpretative systems, the a priori indeterminable room for manoeuvre instituted by their very plurality. The object with which a cultural policy should concern itself was not so much this liberty per se as its conditions. The cultivation of ‘plurality’ therefore emerged as a value in its own right. Again, it is what I would call a second-order value, insofar as it leaves open the value of those (often irreconcilable) values that together make up a plurality. This is not to deny that these represent vital questions – so vital, indeed, in Certeau’s account, that the relative autonomy constitutive of the human subject was liable to be seriously impaired if they were simply arbitrated by proxy.

The properly political responsibility to maintain a plurality of interpretative systems at work within a social organization may seem curiously redundant, given Certeau’s adherence to the thesis that French society of the early 1970s was moving of its own accord toward a ‘fragmentation’ and ‘diversification’ of frames of reference.²¹ In a subsequent education report written for the OECD in the mid-1980s, he would even note how multiculturalism had become the new cultural ‘orthodoxy’.²² There was not necessarily a contradiction here. Certeau also emphasized in his 1972 paper a key rift emerging in French society between an ‘operative’ culture of decision-

¹⁹ See, for example, Janne’s comments in *Analyse et prévision*, p. 79.

²⁰ See Certeau’s remarks in *ibid.*, p. 105.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

²² See ‘Economies ethniques’ [1985], in *PP* 225-71 (p. 249) [141-74 (p. 160)].

making concentrated in the hands of political and economic elites and a passive culture of ‘spectacle’ destined for the majority of the French people. That spectacle may have been variegated and mottled on the surface – it may have juxtaposed the *dramatis personae* of Marx, Freud, Astérix and France’s Mystic Meg – but insofar as this collage corresponded neither to the effective beliefs of those who produced and distributed it (for whom it was a profitable instrument) nor necessarily to those who consumed it (who had little direct input into its fabrication), Certeau suggested that it largely amounted to a simulacrum of plurality.²³ In his 1985 OECD report, Certeau would borrow Smolicz’s term ‘hybrid monism’ to suggest the single ‘substance’ (a certain economy of symbolic production) underlying a more visible hybridization of cultural artefacts (*PP* 250 [160]). Certainly, one could criticise this ‘flattening’ approach to the products of the cultural industries. Nevertheless, the terms of such analyses point us to the implied countermodel of effective plurality that was guiding Certeau’s reflection. From this perspective, the plurality of cultural models available to the subject only really became effective if those models ceased simply to float unattached, so to speak, in that middle distance evoked in our discussion of *La Prise de parole* (where, as anything goes, nothing finally touches us).²⁴ And this was liable to happen only if such models were appropriated by subjects who saw in them the chance to recast their life-worlds. To use the terms of Certeau’s paper for the Long Term Group of the Sixth Plan in 1971, ‘the massive growth in information is tending to create a universal language, but this language, true for everyone, is no longer true for anyone. Its effect is neither to set up an encounter between interlocutors nor to transform an object; it falls into insignificance.’²⁵ Hence Certeau insisted on the need to facilitate the creation of spaces for interlocutory exchange and the fashioning of small-scale collective projects (in the context of which people could come to think that what they said might matter).²⁶ Such processes of appropriation constitute, moreover, a crucial link between cultural models and effective social structures. Indeed, I would locate at this point a further second-order value orientating Certeau’s cultural policy reflection: the need for meaningful interplay (or ‘interference’) between cultural models and social structures.²⁷ Such interplay, by which cultural models and social structures are reciprocally ‘tested’, requires an ongoing commitment to experimentation (we shall explore

²³ For Certeau’s evocation of such *dramatis personae*, see *CAP* 177 [110].

²⁴ See above, 1.2.

²⁵ ‘Compte rendu de l’exposé de M. de Certeau – Réunion du 7 janvier [1971]’, p. 2, in Département des études et de la prospective du ministère de la Culture, archives de la Commission des Affaires culturelles du VI^e Plan, dossier no. 22, groupe Long Terme. It should be noted that these are not Certeau’s own words, but those of the official résumé of his presentation as minuted in the group’s proceedings.

²⁶ See *CAP* 178 [111].

²⁷ See *CAP* 184 [116].

further in the final section of this chapter the centrality of this notion to Certeau's thinking on culture). Leaving open the question of this interplay's precise effects in given situations, Certeau's reports suggested that unless it was deliberately cultivated, culture would deteriorate into an apparently free-floating symbolic magma with little constructive purchase on social reality, on the one hand, and an operative but invisible code for the management of populations, on the other.

I have gathered together thus far three second-order values constituting a framework for Certeau's policy recommendations: respect for the ability of individuals and groups to intervene creatively in society; recognition of the subject's need for a plurality of socially instituted interpretative systems; commitment to meaningful interaction between cultural models and effective social structures. One could add a fourth and final component to this set, defined as the need, from Certeau's perspective, to mark a space for alterity in reflection upon cultural process. This also serves to delimit the role that politics (in the sense of policy implementation) should aim to play where culture is concerned. Without the prospect of 'departures for elsewhere' (real and metaphorical) and 'encounters' (symbolized for Certeau by the idea of 'festival'), the very 'air' of a given society comes to feel 'stifling'.²⁸ Certeau leaves the specific nature of these 'departures' and 'encounters' undetermined. Indeed, they must, by definition, remain to some extent unpredictable (think, for example, of a new musical experience). Any policy aiming to determine their form (along what Bourdieu might have called Zhdanovist lines) is liable to create a sense of suffocation instead. The sufficient conditions for such encounters exceed the realm of politics as understood in this context. This is not the case, however, for certain necessary conditions.

Certeau's cultural policy framework is certainly 'liberal' in the sense that it is founded on respect for the autonomy of individuals and social groups. It is, however, opposed through and through to the 'neo-liberal' approach to cultural policy that would prevail under French right-wing governments in the mid to late 1970s, based on a withdrawal of the State and an acceptance of market forces. To use Pierre Gaudibert's distinction, Certeau eschews a 'laissez-faire' version of market pluralism for an 'unequal and conflictual pluralism' conceived as a response to social and cultural inequalities.²⁹ Some social groups are more bereft than others of the 'necessary conditions' for their cultural development, and he presents it as the responsibility of the State to make good such disadvantages. The purpose of such targetted actions was not primarily to enable these groups to appreciate Culture, but to allow them to define and shape more autonomously their place in society (Certeau's approach was resolutely socio-

²⁸ CAP 187 [118].

²⁹ See the postface to Pierre Gaudibert, *Action culturelle: intégration et/ou subversion*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Casterman, 1977), p. 165; a substantial extract from this postface can be found in J. Ahearne (ed.), *French Cultural Policy Debates*, pp. 91-101 (quotation p. 94).

cultural). Finally, the ‘liberal’ or ‘enabling’ nature of Certeau’s fundamental values did not preclude a properly governmental ambition to modify patterns of behaviour. On the contrary, this ambition could on occasion derive precisely from these values. In their 1982 report ‘The Everyday Nature of Communication’, written for the new Socialist cultural administration, Certeau and Giard addressed the hostility to immigrant groups that was prevalent particularly in popular working-class milieux (other classes came less directly into contact with them). They argued that only ‘co-ordinated, stubborn, and far-reaching action’ could succeed in modifying the cultures as well as social conditions that reproduced this hostility; the nature of their proposal will best be understood if we remember that a ‘culture’ can be defined as a ‘frame of reference’(CAP 168 [103]):

Only that [action] can slowly gnaw away the hard core of age-old bitterness and tenacious prejudices that make the foreigner an undesirable and menacing intruder. Work must be carried out to replace this bitterness and prejudice by other types of information, other images of reference, which, taken together, will finally give a new form of representation to the other.³⁰

Cultural policy should actively work on society’s culture (frame of reference), therefore, not despite Certeau’s liberal values, but because of them. Official State policy, however, constituted only one pole of reference within that frame, and Certeau’s overall aspiration was to bring into play a multiplicity of other references, constituted by voices that had been disregarded or suppressed. This aspiration is best understood in the light of his thought on political and conceptual ‘representation’.

3.3 Representation and Planning: Towards *The Practice of Everyday Life*

Régis Debray has defined the ‘intellectual’ in its French sense, as opposed to the scholar, the scientist or the teacher, in terms of a ‘project of influence’, a kind of will to shape events that brings him or her onto the political stage.³¹ And ‘stage’ has generally been the appropriate term. The intellectual, in this model, stands on a public tribune and speaks truth to power. That tribune is situated more or less outside, against, and by implication above the political field.

³⁰ See ‘L’ordinaire de la communication’ (1982), in *PP* 163-224 (pp. 219-20) [89-139 (p. 136 – trans. mod.)].

³¹ See R. Debray, *Le Pouvoir intellectuel en France* (Paris: Ramsay, 1979), pp. 43, 147-8 [32, 127-8].

Certainly, many intellectuals in France have tended to adopt a stance of resolute hostility or at least suspicion with regard to the State.³² We have seen in chapter two how Bourdieu would exemplify but also complicate such an attitude. By contrast, we have seen how Certeau's own 'project of influence' – for such it undoubtedly is – takes up a position within the machinery of government, and more particularly within the apparatus of State planning.

This might understandably puzzle many readers of Certeau. For a certain reading of *L'Invention du quotidien* could dissuade prospective intellectuals from following up on any 'project to influence' at all, whatever the institutional basis for that project might be. The book is shot through with statements and, perhaps especially, figures designed to humiliate and bring low the claims of certified knowledge and authorised interpreters to model the social body. The practices that effectively constitute this body are given metaphorical representation as an irrepressible, unchartable 'brownian motion', a teeming plurality of 'rumours' and 'murmurs', a 'night-side of societies, a night longer than their days, an obscure sea from which successive institutions emerge, a maritime immensity on which socioeconomic and political structures appear as ephemeral islands'.³³ Such figures frame the book's analyses, and account for an important part of its seductive force. They can be used, not implausibly, to authorize libertarian and/or populist (in Bourdieu's sense) readings of the book. They also seem to adumbrate more generally, to borrow an evocative phrase from Ben Highmore, the 'death of the planner'. More precisely, Highmore notes in a reading of *L'Invention du quotidien* that 'planning [...] is something that is sidestepped'.³⁴

On the face of it, this generates a paradox. *L'Invention du quotidien* originated, after all, as part of a governmentally funded research programme set up in 1973 following on from the Sixth Plan and officially designed to clarify possible options for the cultural wing of the Seventh Plan.³⁵ When Augustin

³² See e.g. Keith Reader, *Intellectuals and the Left in France* (Hounds Mills: Macmillan, 1987), p. 138.

³³ M. de Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien*, vol. 1, *Arts de faire*, ed. L. Giard (Paris: Gallimard, 1990 [1980]), p. 67 [41], referred to hereafter as *IQ*. It should be noted that I am focusing in this chapter on volume one of *L'Invention du quotidien*. Cf. also J. Ahearne, *Michel de Certeau: Interpretation and its Other* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), pp. 154-6.

³⁴ Ben Highmore, 'The Death of Planner? Paris circa 1968', in J. Hughes and S. Saddler (eds), *Plan/Non-Plan: Essays on Freedom, Participation and Change in Modern Architecture and Urbanism*, Oxford: Architectural Press, 2000, pp. 156-65 (p. 165).

³⁵ For a detailed account, see Giard, 'Histoire d'une recherche', pp. viii-xi; 'History of a Research Project', pp. xviii-xx. The main results of this research programme were published in the dossier 'Economie et culture', presented by Augustin Girard and Jack Ligot, in *Le Progrès Scientifique*, 193,

March-April 1978, pp. 25-82 (the journal of the *Délégation générale à la recherche scientifique et technique*, a body officially attached to the Prime Minister, and which had

Girard, head of research at the Ministry of Culture, reviewed in 1978 the results of this programme (of which Certeau's project constituted one component), he underlined its strategic function for the planning of governmental action:

From the beginning [in 1973], the general delegate for scientific and technical research had presented the programme of research as a means of aiding decision-making in the ministry responsible for culture, and the debates of the scientific committee focused both on the major axes of a cultural policy and on the potential ability of scientific research to reduce the margins of uncertainty in this new area for the action of public authorities [i.e. culture, which had only had a dedicated Ministry since 1959, and had only been integrated into the Plan from 1962 onwards]. Thus it was not a question of supporting research projects selected from among those presented by researchers on the basis of their own problematics, but of asking researchers to help elucidate points of cultural policy that were identified as both the most important and the least well understood.³⁶

Girard presents here a model of the relationship between intellectuals and politics whereby Certeau the researcher is located within the cogs of the central governmental machinery, working at a strategic level to help ministerial decision-making and reduce the margins of uncertainty associated with the implementation of policy.

We have seen that Certeau's policy writings were not produced according to the classic French 'tribune' model of intervention in politics. However, one can abstract from his work two models that seem to be mutually incompatible: on the one hand, the theorist, admirer, and perhaps aesthete of 'tactics' that elude any strategic control; on the other hand, the policy adviser, the active participant in strategic projects designed, in one way or another, to modify behaviour in the social body. At an initial level, a reader might perhaps be reminded of Sartre's definition of bad faith: it is as though Certeau's writings are what they are not and are not what they are. More neutrally, to take up his own terms, his writings seem explicitly to extol tactics while remaining implicitly conditioned by strategies.³⁷ Such a description would not be wholly wrong, but would be somewhat inert. I want now to consider how the two poles I have contrived to separate (a non-directive attention to the ordinary and

issued Certeau's research contract). The dossier contained texts by Michel de Certeau (pp. 45-53) and Luce Giard (pp. 53-6).

Certeau's text was essentially what would become his general introduction to *IQ* (see *IQ* xxxv-liii [xi-xxiv]).

³⁶ A. Girard, in 'Economie et culture', p. 26.

³⁷ For Certeau's classic distinction between institutional 'strategies' and users' 'tactics', see *IQ* 57-63 [34-9].

participation in strategic policy development) might be articulated in terms of a coherent overall praxis.

Daniel Bogner's book *Gebrochene Gegenwart. Mystik und Politik bei Michel de Certeau* is primarily concerned with the relevance of Certeau to contemporary theological debate. Its problematic of 'rupture and representation', however, sheds light on other dimensions of Certeau's thought. The last section of Bogner's book is devoted to politics, and I shall use this as a starting point for discussion.³⁸ Slightly problematically, Bogner concentrates on the 1968 text *La Prise de parole* as though it could stand metonymically for Certeau's political thought as a whole. Nevertheless, his analysis of this text will throw into particular relief for us important subsequent changes in Certeau's approach to issues of political representation.

Certeau analysed the crisis of May 1968 as a crisis in representation. Institutions that were supposed, in one way or another, to 'represent' society and its members had lost their credibility. Political parties, the University, trade unions, the Church, etc., were seen as functioning according to their own discrete logics, and cut off from the base that alone could legitimate them. Speech was something that had to be 'captured' at a grass-roots level because those that were supposed to be 'speaking for' the people they represented were perceived as 'speaking in their place' (the difference can be rendered in German as one between 'Representation' and 'Stellvertretung'). However, and this was the crucial point for Certeau in 1968, speaking up in one's own name was necessary but should not be an end in itself. It would simply be recuperated unless new representative mechanisms could be brought into play, giving collective, effective force to an otherwise dispersed collection of protests and demands. For Bogner, the fundamental normative reference underpinning *La Prise de parole* is that of the 'coherent social body'. May 1968 had revealed the social body to be incoherent, or out of joint, insofar as society's 'representative' instances had become cut off from what they nominally represented. For Certeau, the 'capture of speech', as an event, signified the need for a longer term action: to aggregate forces and institute mechanisms whereby a social base that felt excluded or unconcerned could be brought into the loop of political representation. This would ensure a social body that was 'coherent', that fitted together at a certain level, precisely through the expression of its conflicts.

Bogner's analysis is useful both because it brings out a key thrust of *La Prise de parole*, and also because, bearing its emphases in mind, we can pinpoint a significant change in Certeau's political thinking. By the mid-1970s – i.e. after an extended period of involvement in the French politico-administrative process – he dismisses the notion of a coherent social body as a category for

³⁸ D. Bogner *Gebrochene Gegenwart: Mystik und Politik bei Michel de Certeau* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 2002); for his analysis of *La Prise de parole*, see pp. 257-96.

informing effective political reflection. He opens an article published in 1974 as follows:

There is a type of discourse that just goes round in circles [...]; it is the discourse that would like to give expression to society *in its entirety* in the form of a ‘global project’ organising political or cultural actions into a coherent whole. This model had its moment of truth. Today, it is simply ideology. It expresses the nostalgia of yesterday’s political or religious churches. In this respect, it has become the verbal relic of yesterday’s engagements, based on the idea that they held a ‘meaning’ of history, and that they could administer both its representation and realisation.³⁹

The ‘solution’ underpinning the credibility deficit analysed in *The Capture of Speech* had here itself lost its credibility for Certeau. Nevertheless, the basic problem – that of a dispersion of potentially creative but unrepresented or subinstitutional developments – remained, as a subsequent passage from the same article suggests:

Whereas that discourse continues to go round in circles, a prisoner of the stage on which it circulates, practices themselves are dispersed on the streets. [...]. On the one hand, one sees a folklorisation and repetition of global discourses; on the other hand, there is a dissemination of one-off actions solidly rooted in particular groups, separated from each other by technical and social differences, and thus escaping any overall directive. To return to institutions designed to integrate all these movements, or to strategic syntheses, would, I believe, be an outmoded reflex. But does the situation allow us to link up [*articuler*] these practices with each other, in a manner that does not reproduce structures that have become conservative or discourses that are now insignificant?⁴⁰

Ironically, Certeau was supposed to be embarking at this time on, precisely, a strategic ‘synthesis’ of developments in the counter-cultural field integrating futurological research as part of his governmental contract.⁴¹ We should not therefore posit a link of direct subservience between his governmental remit and his actual research. Instead, it seems plausible to suggest that Certeau himself

³⁹ M. de Certeau, ‘Actions culturelles et stratégie politique: sortir du cercle’, in *La Revue nouvelle* (Brussels), 59, April 1974, pp. 351-60 (p. 351).

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 352.

⁴¹ See Certeau’s summary of the original ‘general objective’ that had been assigned to him in M. de Certeau, ‘Manières de faire et pratiques quotidiennes’, in *Le Progrès Scientifique*, 193, March-April 1978, pp. 45-53 (p. 45). Cf. also Giard, ‘Histoire d’une recherche’, pp. viii-ix; ‘History of a Research Project’, p. xviii.

made ‘tactical’ use of the ‘strategic’ resources he could secure in order to pursue an agenda developed in the terms of his own cultural policy thinking.

For Certeau, the basic problem facing the social practices he designated were that they were ‘dispersed’ or ‘atomized’. What were these practices, and why was this a problem? Certeau had in mind above all local micro-groupings that were relatively autonomous of centralised directives: local cultural gatherings or events, informal seminars in universities, workshops around this or that theme in factories or town halls, single-issue groupings around childcare, ecological issues, town planning, and so forth (in short, as retrospective analysis has shown – and this is not a criticism – the sorts of groupings that might often federate members of the working classes or peasantry, but that were generally driven by new fractions of an expanding middle class).⁴² Why was the dispersion of these practices potentially limiting? In the first instance because, as tactical groupings around this or that local issue or activity, they were ‘blind’ in an important sense. Looking to negotiate problems and demands thrown up by their immediate socio-cultural environment, they were largely unaware of how other groups were responding to analogous issues. They could not learn from mistakes made and solutions created elsewhere, and, just as importantly, they could not maximise local political leverage through the creation of strategic alliances. So whereas Certeau might, as it were, poeticise in *L’Invention du quotidien* the very blindness that constitutes tactics as tactics, we see him looking in this 1974 piece to enable groups to overcome the blindness of their localised tactics so that they can enter into coherent, concerted strategies of their own (one might note that at this stage, the terms had not yet been transformed by the coding they would receive in *L’Invention du quotidien*).⁴³

We have seen the irony that Bourdieu reserved for such practices of animation, though he would also come to evoke an ‘everyday political invention’ dispersed across the social body that demonstrated more resourcefulness and creativity than ‘two years of work carried out by a commission for the Plan’.⁴⁴ Certeau, for his part, was looking from the 1970s actively to facilitate such everyday political invention, precisely through his

⁴² See e.g. Vincent Dubois and Pascale Laborier, ‘The « Social » in the Institutionalisation of Local Cultural Policies in France and Germany’, *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 9/2 (2003), pp. 195-206 (see especially the references collected under endnote 5); cf. also E. Ritaine, *Les Stratèges de la culture* (Paris : Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1983), pp. 115-47.

⁴³ On the ‘blindness’ of tactics as represented in volume one of *L’Invention du quotidien*, see Ahearne, *Michel de Certeau*, pp. 177-8. On the ‘concerted strategies’ that Certeau was looking to promote among diverse socio-cultural groupings, see ‘Actions culturelles et stratégie politique’, pp. 355-60.

⁴⁴ P. Bourdieu, ‘Université: les rois sont nus’, interview with Didier Eribon, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 2-8 November 1984, pp. 86-90, republished in P. Bourdieu, *Interventions, 1961-2001: Science sociale et action politique*, ed. Poupeau & Discepolo (Marseille: Agone, 2002), pp. 189-98 (p. 198).

(marginal) position within the State planning apparatus. With this objective in mind, he suggested that a certain ‘formalization’ of these practices might help show what they had in common (it would abstract certain common forms of practice over and above the specific ‘material’ on which they operated). This would provide the basis for a politicization of these practices, for, as Certeau noted in a subsequent article, one can only politicize what one can formulate.⁴⁵ We can see here a driving force behind the project that would culminate in *L’Invention du quotidien*. For, in Certeau’s analysis, what these practices had in common were modes of appropriating a socio-cultural environment that they themselves had not constructed. If such groups could recognise themselves in a kind of common vocabulary for these techniques of reappropriation (and clearly, Certeau’s work provides something along these lines), this would facilitate a quasi-strategic process of association, based on the analysis, exchange, and wider diffusion of their experience. It would also provide tools enabling such groups to federate in order to articulate their own political representation – in other words, a visible and differentiated public grouping prominent enough to force other strategic players to take account of it. It should be stressed that the notion of ‘articulation’ – the combination of elements that retain their distinct identity – is a recurrent feature of Certeau’s thought as a whole.⁴⁶

When we consider in this light the reception of *L’Invention du quotidien*, however, we notice a disconcerting paradox. The book has been criticised for presenting an ‘atomized’ vision of ‘monadic’ individuals pursuing original but solitary paths across an unreadable urban jungle. And it is difficult to see this simply as a misreading. At the same time, we have seen how Certeau conceived its problematic as a *response*, precisely, to processes of atomization, as a kind of tool box designed to facilitate processes of association, ‘articulation’, and collective representation. In a 1978 article, he noted a ‘neo-fatalism’ spreading particularly among the young, and insists that ‘it is very important that a will for reappropriation reemerges at a grassroots level.’ It was for this reason that he stressed that ‘the modalities of reappropriation must be detached from the particular individuals that carry them.’⁴⁷ It may be that the emphases of the first volume of *L’Invention du quotidien* attach, on the contrary, these forms of reappropriation to the individual subject. However, their political relevance, as potential tools for strategies of exchange and auto-representation, emerge when they are read as part of Certeau’s work as a whole.

Certeau’s governmental reports were thus not designed simply for governmental use. One could speak in terms of, at least, a double inscription. They were inscribed simultaneously in different political problematics. Beyond

⁴⁵ Cf. M. de Certeau, ‘Mass media, culture, politique’, interview with G. Delavaud and P. Mayol, *Education 2000*, 9, April 1978, pp. 7-19 (p. 13).

⁴⁶ Cf. J. Ahearne, ‘The shattering of Christianity and the articulation of belief’, *New Blackfriars*, vol. 77 n. 909 (Nov 1996), pp. 493-504 (p. 498).

⁴⁷ M. de Certeau, ‘Mass media, culture, politique’, pp. 12-13.

what might be considered as their official readerships – the governmental agents that commissioned a putative ‘synthesis’ – they offer themselves up for ‘re-employment’ by user-groups along the lines I have just indicated. Luce Giard is right here to stress at the beginning of her introduction to the second edition of *L’Invention du quotidien* that it is unusual for such a governmentally commissioned report – what the French call ‘grey literature’ – to appear straightaway in paperback form.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, Certeau’s analyses did have to appear at some level as officially ‘useful’, if the strategic resources they depended on were not simply to disappear. At the same time, we can ask how Certeau, in his turn, might have ‘used’ the strategic site that was his (researcher attached to the Plan and to the Ministry of Culture), precisely to turn such sites toward their ‘other’.

The question of the official ‘usefulness’ of Certeau’s research cannot be answered simply, since ‘government’ here cannot be understood as a monolithic bloc. There were, in particular, clear conflicts in perspective between those agents who commissioned the project in 1973 (engaged in and sympathetic to the Cultural Commission of the Sixth Plan and the subsequent Council for Cultural Development), and those ultimately responsible for shaping cultural policy in the second half of the 1970s (the Cultural Commission of the Plan would be discontinued; the Minister of Culture would refuse even to acknowledge correspondence sent by the Council, which in its turn would resign *en masse*).⁴⁹ In a nutshell, Certeau’s analyses could resonate among certain

⁴⁸ Giard, ‘Histoire d’une recherche’, p. i; ‘History of a Research Project’, p. xiii. Antoine Hennion has noted more recently that the demand for the informational resources possessed by the Ministry of Culture’s research unit has tended to come more naturally from a grass-roots level (regions, associations, trade unions) than from the Ministry’s own sectorial directorates (A. Hennion, ‘Le grand écart entre la recherche et l’administration’ (Paris: Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, Département des Etudes et de la Prospective, June 1996), p. 17).

⁴⁹ Emblematic of the former might be Augustin Girard, head of research at the Ministry of Culture, who had played a key role in securing Certeau’s research contract between 1974 and 1977 (see notably Philippe Urfalino’s discussion of the ‘secant marginality’ of the Ministry’s research unit, and of the kind of cultural policy framework to which Girard aspired, in Urfalino, ‘Laboratoire d’idées et utopies créatrices’, in *Trente ans d’études au service de la vie culturelle, Table ronde organisée à l’occasion du départ à la retraite d’Augustin Girard, chef du Département des études et de la prospective du ministère de la culture de 1963 à 1993* (Paris: Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, 1993), pp. 77-81 (pp. 79-80)). Emblematic of the latter might be Maurice Druon, Minister of Culture between 1973 and 1974, who had been instructed by President Pompidou to ‘tighten the screw’ on bodies such as the Council for Cultural Development, seen, no doubt like the Commission for Cultural Affairs of the Sixth Plan, as a kind of Trojan Horse bringing subversive cultural projects into the machinery of government (see Philippe Poirrier, *L’Etat et la culture en France au XXe siècle* (n.p.: Librairie Générale Française, 2000), pp. 143-4); Claude Fabrizio’s report on execution of Sixth Plan gives a clear sense of how the more experimental and innovative suggestions issuing from the Commission for Cultural Affairs had by the middle of the decade

groups of governmental agents, but not others. However, in order just to give an idea of a context in which Certeau's thought could appear as relevant to high-level administrators responsible for developing cultural policy, I shall quote a couple of paragraphs written by one such administrator, Jack Ligot. He is presenting, in 1978, the publication of summary reports from the research programme launched in 1973 that included Certeau's project:

From the start of this research programme, as the Seventh Plan was being elaborated, the idea of growth [economic growth was a fundamental concern of the Plan] acquired a more qualitative meaning. Corresponding to this new type of growth, there emerged a new conception of cultural development envisaged less as a programming of governmental action than as the establishment of conditions that would favour the expression of individual potential.

And later on:

There is a sense that [...] in matters of cultural action, what is required now are interventions that take place at increasingly subtle levels, but which are difficult to programme, and located in increasingly diverse sectors in which forms of personal creativity can manifest themselves.⁵⁰

Certeau's deliberations were, then, clearly relevant to a public policy agenda shared by a certain number of policy administrators. This agenda was, however, by the late 1970s, not in the ascendancy, and effective policy options were decided ultimately by Giscard d'Estaing's economically neo-liberal and culturally conservative government.

We can see what use certain sections of governmental institutions might have hoped to make of Certeau's analyses. What use might Certeau have made of such institutions? I have already suggested how he could, so to speak, use their resources to produce tools that could be deployed elsewhere, notably in the strategies that subinstitutional groups dispersed throughout the social body might use to produce representations of themselves. At a more mundane level, of course, Certeau could use the institution to acquire for himself an official research position, which was less straightforward for him in the 1970s than the

been sidelined by political decision-makers (Fabrizio, *Essai de bilan d'exécution du 6e Plan en matière de développement culturel*, Secrétariat d'Etat à la Culture, Service des études et de la recherche, December 1975, typed document consulted at the Ministry of Culture's Département d'études et de la prospective).

⁵⁰ Jack Ligot, general *rapporiteur* for the Research Council at the Ministry of Culture and Communication, introducing the dossier 'Economie et Culture', p. 25.

posthumous recognition of his oeuvre might lead us to believe.⁵¹ Finally, he could use his position to exert a certain kind of vicarious ‘representative’ role, standing in for others who were unlikely ever to have a seat at the kinds of meeting he could attend.

This was not necessarily the kind of representative function which Certeau would theoretically have endorsed. It corresponds to a function of *Stellvertretung*, taking somebody else’s place in the absence of any consistent self-representation of the kind I described above. In this perspective, the production of political representation and epistemic representations – i.e. the production of accepted, articulated knowledge – come together. For a long time, activities outside the realm of consecrated culture had scarcely figured in the field of perception characterizing the Ministry of Culture and its networks. Attempts to bring such activities under consideration had been organised essentially around negative categories. Francis Jeanson, director of an innovative House of Culture, had spoken famously in 1968 of a ‘non-public’ that should be distinguished from the ‘potential public’ of cultural institutions (whereas a ‘potential public’ might be attracted to such institutions through appropriate publicity, the ‘non-public’ felt simply unconcerned by what was happening there). The ‘Cultural Action’ report of the Sixth Plan took up Jeanson’s term to designate the Ministry’s ignorance of the cultural aspirations of those who ‘represent numerically the most substantial part of our society, and no doubt also its destiny’. The talk at the 1972 Arc-et-Senans meeting discussed above was of a ‘no-man’s land’.⁵² These were hardly the categories in terms of which the interests of the relevant sections of the population could be effectively represented in sites of strategic decision-making. What Certeau’s analyses do, in politico-administrative terms, is take a dispersed, atomized distribution of isolated practices that were scarcely even perceived as such. It thickens them together, as it were (the most appropriate term would be the German *verdichten*), and constitutes them as a consistent *representation*. Scientifically speaking, the nature of this representation can be and has been challenged. In politico-administrative terms, as a kind of *coup de force*, it adds a new element

⁵¹ See Dosse, *Le Marcheur blessé*, pp. 361-425, 443-62; in a note accompanying Certeau’s postface for the Ministry’s survey of cultural practices (*Pratiques culturelles des Français* (Paris: Services des Etudes et de la Recherche du Ministère de la Culture, 1974), pp. 169-82 (p. 169)), Certeau is described as having been a ‘director of study’ at the Ministry’s research department. Certeau’s postface was also published as the concluding chapter ‘Des espaces et des pratiques’ in *La Culture au pluriel*.

⁵² For Francis Jeanson’s analysis in terms of a ‘non-public’, see ‘The Villeurbanne Declaration’ [1968] (largely written by Jeanson) and ‘Chalon: Four Years of Cultural Action’ [1971] in Ahearne (ed.), *French Cultural Policy Debates*, pp. 70-82. For the use of this term in the 1971 general report of the Commission for Cultural Affairs, see Commissariat Général du Plan, *Rapport de la commission Affaires Culturelles: l'action culturelle*, p. 16. For Edgar Morin’s reference to notions of cultural life beyond the realm of consecrated culture and the counter-cultural scene as a ‘no-man’s land’, see *Analyse et prévision*, p. 131.

to the set of mental categories in terms of which policy options are envisaged and managed, both at national and local levels. Processes of creative appropriation could find a place, as it were, as an autonomous representation on the policy map. Certeau might have remained ironic about the efficacy of such representation by proxy, but it does remain, I would suggest, one of his lasting contributions to cultural policy debates in France.⁵³

3.4 Institutions and Experimentation

Certeau's now classic analyses of the ordinary processes of creative appropriation are well-known. He develops in *L'Invention du quotidien* a series of models designed to bring into focus dispersed and unrecognised forms of creativity. Readers are shown not passively to receive a text, but to produce their own secondary 'text' on the basis of that primary text, recombining and 'metaphorizing' (transporting) its elements so as to generate something new. Those who inhabit the towns built by planners and architects are shown, as it were, to create their own places within those spaces. The same might be said of those who visit the exhibitions of cultural institutions. Users 'insinuate' jarring or unpredictable elements into the cultural systems they negotiate (television schedules, literary canons, factory regulations, recipes), thereby overdetermining those elements and filling the systems with microscopic fissures and rifts. As speaking subjects take hold of a preexisting linguistic system and bend it to their purposes while simultaneously following its laws, so Certeau's ordinary subjects are not simply moulded by the regulations and symbolic structures of social life. These constitute instead the material on which their creative practices of 'reemployment', 'metaphorization', 'insinuation' and 'utterance' can be put to work, with greater or lesser effect.⁵⁴

I have already suggested how the first volume of *L'Invention du quotidien* – Certeau's best-known book for anglophone readers – tends to present these processes as essentially individualised practices (at one point Certeau even compares them to 'wandering lines' drawn by autistic children (*IQ* 57 [34])). This is not, however, the whole story, and they need to be framed in the context of Certeau's other writings if their significance for cultural policy

⁵³ In particular, one could underline Certeau's major contribution to the process by which cultural policy research now produces, as Antoine Hennion has put it, an 'infinitely more varied and specific representation' of diverse 'publics' than in the period when such representations were produced through 'the combination of the theories of critical sociology [i.e., broadly speaking, the sociology of culture inspired by Bourdieu] and the results of global statistical surveys' (Hennion, 'Le grand écart', p. 13).

⁵⁴ See the first volume of *L'Invention du quotidien*; for an overview, see Ahearne, *Michel de Certeau*, pp. 157-89.

thinking is to be grasped. In *L'Ordinaire de la communication* ['The Everyday Nature of Communication'], a report commissioned by the Minister for Culture of the new Socialist government in 1982 and written in collaboration with Luce Giard, the agents of these practices of creative appropriation figure essentially as user-groups (members of informal musical associations, youth clubs, immigrant groups, local computer clubs, etc.), themselves subtly organised around and dynamised by particular members who function as informal cultural intermediaries.⁵⁵ We have seen how Certeau aims both to facilitate such processes of self-organisation, and to 'represent' them in such a way that they become a graspable and credible object for governmental support at national and local levels (rather than a dimly perceived and nebulous 'no-man's land' alongside the more manifest stars of the cultural world). This broader framing of the analytic models developed in *L'Invention du quotidien* also counters the alternately neo-liberal or anarchistic readings that the book can encourage when taken on its own. If individuals have the resources to create their own spaces within the social order, so such arguments run, then government interference is what must be resisted. *L'Ordinaire de la communication*, by contrast, stresses the difficulties that impede the formation of the groupings in question (administrative indifference, lack of facilities or appropriate publicity, lack of information, linguistic and cultural barriers), as well as the significant impact that relatively minor provision can make to the dynamics of their development (access to public spaces, local publications, user-friendly databases, consultancy, etc.). Governmental cultural policy thereby acquires in this respect a role that is both fundamental and 'delicate' (PP 195 [117]):

The daily murmur of this secret creativity provides the necessary foundation, and the only chance of success, for any state intervention. But the existence of such an activity on the part of users can only be the postulate of a policy of stimulation and not its effect, however desired the latter might be. Hence the importance of locating this creativity and of recognising its places and its role.⁵⁶

If such creativity is not 'located' and materially 'recognised', it may wither away or be stifled. Equally, however, it may be rendered sterile and will not attract grass-roots participation if subjected to univocal governmental direction or symbolic exploitation. *L'Ordinaire de la communication* thus advocates 'compensatory and transitive interventions adjusted to given situations'.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ The letter of 28 October 1982 from Jacques Sallois (Jack Lang's cabinet director) giving Certeau and Giard their brief is included at the beginning of the published report: *L'Ordinaire de la communication* (Paris: Dalloz, 1983). The sections of the report written by Certeau and Giard may be found at PP 163-224 [89-139].

⁵⁶ PP 172 [96 – trans. mod.].

⁵⁷ PP 174 [97 – trans. mod.].

While, as we will see below, its propositions are envisaged as part of an overall governmental strategy, it describes how

The partial character, tactical in a certain sense, of the analyses and measures that are put forward here refers to the schema of a democratic society in which the state itself plays only a partial role, without for all that believing itself to be weakened or dispossessed of its legitimate powers. (*PP* 174 [97]).

The practical considerations of *L'Ordinaire de la communication* thus complicate the famous distinction between the strategies of institutions and the tactics of ordinary users as developed in *L'Invention du quotidien*. In order to enable localised tacticians to consolidate their own (micro-)group strategies as described in the previous section, the ‘strategies’ of cultural policy-makers must themselves incorporate locally adjusted ‘tactics’. The relations between ‘strategic’ cultural institutions and their ‘tactical’ users cannot in this framework be reduced to a clear-cut opposition.

Certeau’s underlying reflection on institutions has received less attention than his analyses of those creative practices that elude, resist or skip around institutional constraints.⁵⁸ In the context of his cultural policy thinking, however, we must explore how those practices depend on the institutions against which they seem to work (they are, in a sense, parasitical upon the institutional configurations on which they feed). This will show the peculiar kind of institutional responsibility that falls in Certeau’s framework to the architects of a national cultural policy. For the purposes of exposition, we can isolate three moments in Certeau’s thinking on institutions.

We have seen already how the events of May 1968 signified for Certeau a crisis whereby those institutions that were supposed to ‘represent’ the social body had ceased to do so:

A schism between the irreducibility of conscience and the objectivity of social institutions appeared to me at once as the denounced and unacceptable fact, that is, as the current problem of thought and action.⁵⁹

The protestors had in Certeau’s account demanded a system of representation that would indeed be ‘representative’ insofar as it would ‘give speech to everyone’ and be ‘true’ (*PP* 75 [38]). Insofar as Certeau declares his solidarity

⁵⁸ For some brief but helpful indications, see Luce Giard, ‘Mystique et politique, ou l’institution comme objet second’, in Giard, Martin & Revel, *Histoire, mystique et politique. Michel de Certeau* (Grenoble : Jérôme Millon, 1991), pp. 9-45 (Giard addresses the question of the ‘institution’ as such at pp. 42-4); and Pierre Mayol, ‘Michel de Certeau, l’historien et la culture ordinaire’, p. 201.

⁵⁹ *PP* 39 [10 – trans. mod.].

with this question of ‘conscience’, we might describe this first moment in his reflection on institutions as an aspiration towards a more ‘coherent’ or transparent representative apparatus for the negotiation of political and cultural conflict.

As suggested above, Certeau’s subsequent experience of politico-cultural institutions would direct this aspiration towards less direct forms of expression. His work for the Ministry of Culture and the Cultural Commission of the Sixth Plan led him to contrast the explicit discourse of governmental bodies (an ‘impotent language’) and their implicit functioning (obeying ‘powers that have become invisible’) (*CAP* 190 [121]).⁶⁰ Universities likewise looked similarly unlikely to become transparently representative institutions, ‘managed by an anonymous and saturated administration – an enormous body, sick with inertia, opaque to itself, living a complex life that is nowhere ever explained, that has become insensitive to higher directives, to inoculations of theory, or to outside stimuli’ (*CAP* 114 [60]). The schism denounced in May 1968 as a political anomaly had come by the mid-1970s to appear as something altogether more structural. Indeed, inspired no doubt by the beleaguered predicament of the Ministry of Culture itself in the government, Certeau describes how the ‘invisible powers’ of the State itself were fragmented into equally invisible competing units, taking effective decision-making away from politically accountable or even rationally technocratic directives.⁶¹ Simply to continue denouncing this state of affairs from a position of detached observation would be politically ineffectual. Within this ‘moment’ of his reflection, Certeau looks instead to consider this quasi-structural opacification of institutions as a framework within which to adjust forms of action. Engagement in these institutions provided, at the very least, a tactical purchase on the ‘real’. This could be developed along more strategic lines through coordination in ‘transversal networks’ with like-minded agents embedded in other institutions.⁶² Working as a kind of discreet alien presence within established institutions, such networks could serve within limits to direct resources to particular projects and experiments, or to circumvent political and administrative obstacles. Clearly, this was a style of action developed in a political and institutional context (the conservatively and neo-liberally governed France of the 1970s) inimical to the cultural policy agenda nurtured by Certeau. Nevertheless, it is striking that he did not advocate any simple rejection of institutional engagement: on the contrary, this was seen as a condition of effective action (providing notably essential points of leverage, flows of information, and proxy ‘representation’ for those outside such institutions).

⁶⁰ I develop further the contrast between ‘implicit’ and ‘explicit’ cultural policies in chapter four of the present study, with reference to the work of Régis Debray (see below, 4.1).

⁶¹ M. de Certeau, ‘Actions culturelles et stratégie politique’, p. 353.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 357.

But at a deeper level, institutions are not, in Certeau's reflection, apparatuses that are simply used by a subject who remains external to them. On the contrary, institutions (language, the family, school, of course, but also the broad sphere of cultural policy institutions) are fundamental to the very self-constitution of the human subject. Certeau underlines this 'inaugural' function in a report he wrote for the Pompidou Centre in Paris in 1984, and looks to 'give back to the term "institution" the sense of that which sets up a place, creates, and enables, i.e. the active sense of that which institutes'.⁶³ The key point in this respect, however, is that it is not a single institution that, for Certeau, 'sets up a subject's own space'.⁶⁴ As we saw above with the example of the relations between a child, his school and his family, the subject's conditional freedom emerges through the fact of being situated within a plurality of relations (Certeau would make the same point in a 1985 report for the OECD on the education of social minority groups).⁶⁵ Autonomy is made possible through a play (*jeu*) among heterogeneous points of reference, the *a priori* indeterminable room for manoeuvre opened up by their very plurality. Institutions 'in the plural' are thus not, as a naïve belief in spontaneity might assert, opposed to human liberty, but are on the contrary conceived by Certeau as its necessary condition. It thus becomes a basic overall responsibility for cultural policy to foster what Certeau calls a 'multilocation of culture', maintaining 'several types of cultural reference', and developing a 'play of different cultural authorities' (*ce jeu d'instances culturelles différentes*).⁶⁶ Human subjects are thereby given a multiplicity of sites or reference points through which to construct their itineraries and associations, and against which to situate themselves.

Certeau is not therefore, as some readings of his work might suggest, anti-institutional in any simple sense (though he was clearly hostile to efforts by any single institution to secure a monopolistic hold over the subjective life of its members). He makes the point semi-ironically in a paper given at the Amiens House of Culture in 1978, underlining that, while institutions may stifle the type of creative practices he is looking to champion, they also have a necessary role to play in its recognition and representation:

My goal is not to sack the libraries, to set fire to the museums and to shut the operas. But the overriding and sometimes exclusive importance given to the 'great works' and their diffusion in cultural animation is due to the fact that we are unable to discern the 'creativity' of the public, i.e. of 'consumers'. Insufficient recognition has been given to the anonymous, fragmentary and ephemeral works of the millions of ordinary authors who

⁶³ This report was published posthumously as M. de Certeau, 'Le Sabbat Encyclopédique du Voir', *Esprit*, 123, Feb 1987, pp. 66-82 (quotation from p. 78).

⁶⁴ See Certeau's remarks in *Analyse et prévision*, p. 105.

⁶⁵ See 'Economies ethniques' (1985), republished in *PP* 225-71 (p. 234) [141-74 (p. 149)].

⁶⁶ CAP 121 [66 – trans. mod.].

do not frequent the Houses of Culture. I would like us to ask not just how to circulate Picasso and Stockhausen among ‘the people’, but also how to introduce into the Houses of Culture the genius, the practical thought and the wily intelligence of all those unknown authors.⁶⁷

For an analytic overview placing these issues within an overall Certalian strategy for State cultural policy, we can turn, as it happens, to a text not written by Certeau himself, but by Marc Guillaume in his report *The Cultural Imperative* summarizing the recommendations of the ‘Long Term Culture’ working group of the Ninth Plan.⁶⁸ Guillaume notes at the beginning of the report how Certeau’s writings provided major guidelines for his analyses, and it does not seem inappropriate to read the report as a suggestive extrapolation of Certeau’s reflection for the purposes of strategic cultural planning.⁶⁹ Guillaume distinguishes three broad modes of intervention for the State. Firstly, it must manage its own institutions and their traditional social missions insofar as these constitute fundamental reference points where cultural contradictions are ‘crystallized’ and negotiated. Secondly, it must ‘attend to cultural diversity’ in such a way as to create the conditions in which a plurality of socio-cultural groupings set off from the structures of the State can pursue their own autonomous projects. Finally, in the context of political decentralisation, the republican State must remain an authority for appeal and arbitration when cultural professionals or associations are subject to ‘sectarian’ political pressure at local levels (an obvious case today would be the cultural policies pursued over the last decade by local authorities run by the extreme right National Front).⁷⁰

This section of Guillaume’s text can itself be read as crystallizing admirably a framework that can be induced from Certeau’s oeuvre. However, what is most interesting is perhaps less this tripartite model in itself than the kinds of relations between its parts developed by Certeau in his writings. For, as is clear above in Certeau’s proposal for new uses for a House of Culture, that domain of cultural policy concerned with managing institutions is in his reflection multiply interconnected with the domain attending to the ordinary

⁶⁷ M. de Certeau, ‘Manières de faire: la culture ordinaire’, in Peuple et Culture (ed.), *Pour un renouveau de la pensée sur l'action culturelle*, Paris : Peuple et Culture and Amiens : Maison de la Culture d’Amiens, 1978, pp. 70-78 (p. 77).

⁶⁸ Commissariat Général du Plan (principal rapporteur – Marc Guillaume), *L’Impératif culturel. Rapport du groupe long terme culture* (Paris : La Documentation française, 1983).

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 14; for further details concerning the collaboration between Guillaume and Certeau, see M. Guillaume ‘Vers l’autre’, in L. Giard (ed.), *Le Voyage mystique. Michel de Certeau* (Paris : Recherches de Science Religieuse/Cerf, 1988), pp. 181-6 (pp. 183-4); and Dosse, *Le Marcheur blessé*, pp. 458-60.

⁷⁰ *L’Impératif culturel*, pp. 78-83; these pages are available in English translation in Ahearne, *French Cultural Policy Debates*, pp. 121-6. On National Front local cultural policies, see e.g. P. Poirrier, *L’Etat et la culture en France*, pp. 216-7.

expanses of cultural diversity. These connections can best be brought out if we take as our guiding light the notion of experimentation, crucial to Certeau's cultural policy thinking, and explore its relations with his thinking on cultural institutions.

Certeau's abiding concern was 'to bring closer together the cultural provision of the major facilities and the real practices of culture and communication' that characterised the users of those facilities.⁷¹ When asked to propose remedies for structural blockages affecting major cultural institutions, he would propose institutional experimentations along these lines. One example of this can be seen in his analysis of the situation confronting French universities at the beginning of the 1970s. We have just seen how French universities at the time had become for Certeau the very symbol of opaque institutions, unable to represent the interests voiced by students or wider society. Faced with a new kind of 'mass' clientele (elite students in France do not as a rule attend universities, and undergraduate students that could secure places in other institutions of higher education would increasingly do so), Certeau argued that university teachers should cease trying to 'reproduce' the programme they themselves had inherited. Instead of measuring simply the degree of student 'resistance' to this programme, they should use the questions and current interests of the students as the starting point for their teaching practice (what light can your knowledge shed on my questions about truth, political justice, economic activity, war, language, the cult of celebrity, understandings of nature, or whatever...). Crucially, this should not lead to an *a priori* identification with the students' point of view (for otherwise the space of plurality opened up by the institution would collapse demagogically around a single pole). Instead, they should use these questions, born of current concerns, to 'traverse' experimentally with the students those corpuses of knowledge that the teachers had mastered as a result of their own studies. For Certeau, the massification of university recruitment did not therefore necessarily present a distraction from properly cultural concerns, but instead 'designates for culture its proper definition by referring established *knowledge* to a *practice* of thought, and the conceptual *objects* it carries with it to the human *subjects* who produce them'.⁷² In this sense, the resources of institutionally transmitted knowledge only become part of a live 'culture' (in a quasi-bacteriological sense) when they are taken up by non-specialists in relation to contemporary questions. This does not mean they should 'answer' these questions (their fundamental function is to reframe them), or that these questions should determine exclusively the avenues of research (what is deemed irrelevant today may not be so tomorrow). Moreover, Certeau stressed that such dispersed tactical classroom experiments would give

⁷¹ See *L'Ordinaire de la communication*, reprinted in *PP* 163-224 (p. 194) [89-139 (p. 115 – trans.mod.)].

⁷² *CAP* 89 [42-3 – trans. mod.].

way to lassitude and discouragement if they were not strategically supported and coordinated at the politico-institutional level (*CAP* 117 [63]) – hard-pressed teachers will know what he means. In a theoretical and practical perspective, however, this example shows how (live) culture and experimentation are for Certeau indissociable: culture is the very process through which a social group applies the theoretical resources it has acquired (*theorein* – resources for seeing what you’re doing) to framing the practical and existential problems it faces.

On the one hand, then, where it was a question of the management of established institutions, Certeau’s reflex was to propose co-ordinated forms of institutional experimentation. On the other hand, where it was a question of attending to forms of cultural diversity set off from the apparatus of the State, he proposed support and encouragement for the creation of what one might call experimental micro-institutions. This is particularly evident in *The Everyday Nature of Communication*. Certeau and Giard look to the locally implanted ‘associative movement’ in France as a kind of dispersed and informal ‘research laboratory’ for the development of such micro-institutions.⁷³ These could comprise clubs for trying out new technologies, experimental writing workshops (organised particularly around less ‘noble’ forms of writing), groups producing local newsheets or school papers, groups constituted to protect or manage particular historic or aesthetic features of their environment, etc.⁷⁴ The important point was that the State should not look itself to create such micro-institutions *ex nihilo*. Instead, it had for Certeau and Giard to presuppose a disseminated latent or actual ‘creativity’ in the social body, and look both to remove impediments and provide resources for what might be called its auto-organisation.⁷⁵ Certeau and Giard focus in particular on what they call non-professional ‘cultural intermediaries’ – individuals with particular qualities of dynamism, curiosity, cross-cultural connections, familiarity with institutions, etc, who, experience shows, play a decisive role in the crystallization of such groups (*PP* 195-202 [117-22]). The challenge they laid down for a socialist cultural policy was to help and stimulate such intermediaries without incorporating them into the apparatuses of the State. The effect of such micro-institutions is to reconfigure the sterile face-off between on the one hand imposing and opaque institutions, and on the other hand isolated and atomised individuals. Practical engagement in such groupings can bring individuals a politically instructive training with regard to the larger institutions with which they thereby come into contact (in

⁷³ See *PP* 188 [111]. On the history and legal framework that regulates ‘associations’ in France (substantially equivalent to but legally more formalised than clubs, societies and social movements in the UK), see e.g. Jean Defrasne, *La Vie associative en France* (Paris: PUF, 1995).

⁷⁴ See e.g. *PP* 188, 209-10, 221, 223-4 [110-11, 127-8, 137, 139].

⁷⁵ On the ‘auto-organisational’ strategies of one such grass-roots movement, see e.g. J. Ahearne, “‘Vers un agir complexe’: the *Mouvement des Réseaux d’Echanges Réciproques de Savoirs* and the writings of Edgar Morin”, in *French Cultural Studies*, viii (1997), pp. 341-55.

negotiations for space, resources, policy changes, etc.). At the same time, they provide both a supplement and a crucial social grounding for that ‘plurality of reference points’ in terms of which subjects construct their autonomy.

Finally, one should note Certeau’s own involvement in a number of institutions that were at once official and experimental. We have already considered his involvement both in the Cultural Commission of the Sixth Plan and the Council for Cultural Development – both one-off bodies that did not enjoy a sustained existence, due to the hostility and irritation they provoked among the right-wing governments of the 1970s. He was also involved in a number of projects based at the major experimental cultural centre built at Beaubourg in Paris and opened in 1977.⁷⁶ Indeed, the internal consultancy report he wrote for the Centre in January 1984 will provide us with some concluding remarks concerning the relations between institutions and experimentation in his cultural policy thinking.

Beaubourg has been described as a reconceived and transformed House of Culture, a centre for contemporary creation designed to take account of the demands and social mood expressed in the wake of May 1968. Its ‘inside-out’ construction and architecturally induced porosity with regard to the urban space surrounding it were supposed to demystify the workings of culture. It combined on the same site a number of units – a museum of modern art, a general forum, diverse exhibition spaces, a public library, an avant-garde music centre, etc. – that were supposed to interact in a ‘decompartimentalised’ and ‘global’ whole (to recall the language of the Sixth Plan Cultural Commission).

Certeau was drawn to Beaubourg no doubt because it continued to function ‘like a laboratory as much as a cultural institution’.⁷⁷ However, by the time of his report, the ‘globalising utopia’ (71) that characterised the Centre’s beginnings seemed to have exhausted itself. After extensive consultations with those working in the Centre’s various sections, and having studied Beaubourg’s own documentation, the purpose of Certeau’s ‘pre-report’ was to suggest new types of project and ‘styles’ of action that might give fresh impetus for the post-foundational ‘second period’ (67) into which the Centre was now entering.⁷⁸ I want to introduce into this discussion just two aspects of Certeau’s proposed framework for action.

⁷⁶ For an account of Certeau’s sustained association with Beaubourg (also called the Pompidou Centre), see Dosse, *Le Marcheur blessé*, pp. 463-72.

⁷⁷ M. de Certeau, ‘Le Sabbat Encyclopédique du Voir’, p. 67. Page references in brackets immediately hereafter refer to this report.

⁷⁸ Certeau felt able to write only a ‘pre-report’ rather than a full report, because he had not received as he had requested a collection of dedicated reports written by the different sections themselves, addressing the history of their work and their current orientations (see Luce Giard’s editorial note, p. 66). Given what employees had to say about their workload and working conditions, as well as the probable effects of certain interdepartmental rivalries, this was not perhaps surprising.

Reading the report, one gains the impression that the people to whom Certeau talked were being ground down in a process of attrition: unable ever to ‘escape’ from the flows of visitors to work in peace and quiet due to the ‘progressive’ open-plan design of the premises, they had come to ‘hate the crowds’ (70); different sections were forever wrangling for spaces and facilities they were supposed spontaneously to ‘share’ in decompartmentalised fashion; individual units had no incentive to seek new outlets for their projects as they received no extra resources as a result of particular successes or innovations; there was a relentless quality to the drive to put on ever more things to ‘show’ the public. Throughout the report, Certeau treats these as symptoms of institutional dysfunction rather than a simple failure on the part of individuals to live up to the generous but untested utopia that shaped the foundation of the Centre.

His first broad remedy for these dysfunctions may again seem surprising, given Certeau’s reputation as a champion of users’ ‘tactics’ against the impositions of institutional ‘strategies’. He suggested that the Centre’s problems derived from the very ideal of ‘fusional’ decompartmentalization that once mobilized it. He argued that it should deploy various strategies of ‘differenciation’, allowing the various units to distinguish themselves more clearly from each other as well as from the public, and also distinguishing the different types of public. If each unit were more conscious of and confident in its own historically constituted identity, it would be more willing and able to enter into constructive dialogue with other units (and with subsections of the public, as opposed to unmanageable ‘crowds’). The result would be a more clearly articulated space comprising a plurality of reference points rather than an amalgam cramping all its members (we have seen above how the notion of ‘articulation’ – the combination of elements that retain distinct identities – is a key feature of Certeau’s thought). Effectively, Certeau was suggesting that the institution delimit, clarify and consolidate its strategic identity. Indeed, he argued that it was crucial that it be given properly strategic resources to do so. Units had to be given the opportunity to turn past experiences into a form of ‘capital’ (70, 74), allocating working time to reviewing previous ventures and experiments, and thereby building up a stock of relevant knowledge and a sense of historical orientation (thus countering the sense of being pushed haphazardly from one thing to another).

The second broad remedy I want to consider here follows on directly from this, and provides an interesting perspective on the style of Jack Lang’s overall cultural policy that would by 1984 have become clearly perceptible. Certeau suggested that the ongoing imperative to ‘exhibit’ had produced a hypertrophic ‘exorbitation of the visible’ (70). It was as if the Centre had to be filled ever anew with things to see, in a one-sided process whereby its employees laid on displays which the public came to behold (one might compare this more generally with the relentlessly visual/televisual imperative organising Jack

Lang's policy agenda at the same time).⁷⁹ Certeau urged a less 'epiphanically' orientated system of production (73). The Centre as a whole, he suggested, lacked any sense of experiential dimensions inaccessible to sight, effects of 'secret' and 'shadow' (70-71). The employees themselves needed to be given working time to develop greater 'intellectual ballast' (73) for their projects to counter the inevitable drift towards superficiality induced by the stress on productivity and visibility. This 'interiorization' of their work could only take place, Certeau emphasises repeatedly, if they were given the time and conditions to work through their experiences in *writing*. For Certeau notes, preechoing the reflection of Debray to be discussed in the next chapter, that whereas images 'fuse' their constituent elements in a synchronic whole, the act of writing leads the subject to separate out and 'articulate' the relations between them (72). Moreover, the writings in question should concern not only the experiences of the Centre's employees. If the one-directional vector of 'exhibiting' and 'spectating' was to be enriched, then integrating into written accounts the experiences of particular sectors of a differentiated public at the Centre might be a place to start (74). Such a controlled and considered collaboration with its public (with no pressure for any kind of fusion) could for Certeau bring the Centre back to its key concerns, i.e. the 'social appropriation of technical knowledge and symbolic creations' (75). Indeed, one could see Certeau as projecting, by no means unduly, into this institutional report his own fundamental cultural policy objectives:

What is essential, in relation to the teeming proliferation of uses for which the Centre provides already both a site and a laboratory, is to work out on this basis a policy overcoming the division between the processes of production and those of appropriation, and offering a body of reflection on what a process of sociocultural democratization might look like today. (78)

Bourdieu, as we saw in chapter two, pursued a 'rational' and 'critical' notion of cultural democratization, whereby the 'highest' achievements of humanity could be protected and also placed as emancipatory tools in the hands of the culturally dispossessed. Certeau did certainly not reject such a notion – he did not want to 'sack the libraries [and] set fire to the museums', nor to imprison people in the localised cultures into which they had been born. However, the constant drive of his cultural policy reflection was to challenge the clear divide between cultural 'production' and cultural 'appropriation' around which the scheme of cultural democratization is organised. The elaboration, 'exhibition',

⁷⁹ See e.g. Régis Debray, *L'Etat séducteur: les révolutions médiologiques du pouvoir* (Paris : Gallimard, 1993), pp. 26-30, 109-17; and the discussion in 4.3 below.

and instrumentation of a ‘common language’ were not matters for cultural professionals alone, and Certeau sought to develop a cultural policy vocabulary that could do justice to that fact. This vocabulary could play a part in drawing up a ‘new problematic of cultural development’ as invoked by Augustin Girard (see the introduction to the present study). In the writings of Bourdieu and Certeau, we can observe particularly probing versions of, respectively, the ‘cultural democratization’ and ‘cultural development’ (or ‘cultural democracy’) strands in French cultural policy thinking. As we have seen, for Augustin Girard, the major destabilising force with which these strands of thought have been confronted over the last 45 years has been that of technology.⁸⁰ I will thus turn now, as a supplement to the reflection of Bourdieu and Certeau, to the work of Régis Debray, insofar as this allows us to tackle head-on the relations between cultural-political programmes and technological mutations.

⁸⁰ See Girard, ‘Un cas de partenariat entre administration et recherche scientifique’, in Menger and Passeron (ed.), *L’Art de la recherche. Essais en l’honneur de Raymonde Moulin* (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1994), pp. 138-47 (pp. 146-7), and ‘Une dynamique pour l’avenir’, in *Trente ans d’études*, pp. 89-99 (pp. 89-90).

Chapter Four. Régis Debray

4.1 Cultural policy as a transhistorical function

It would be possible, if one selected one's extracts carefully, to present Régis Debray in the mould of Marc Fumaroli as an outright critic and satirist of French cultural policy. In his political autobiography, *Loués soient nos seigneurs. Une éducation politique*, there is a long chapter where he semi-humorously passes down to an imaginary young political shark the lessons that he has learnt at his own expense over his time in political life. With reference to his time as presidential adviser in the Elysée palace between 1981 and 1988, he draws up a hierarchy of measures that a government can deploy in order to disguise inaction as action (all this in the hope of persuading Debray's fictional protégé 'not to be too subtle'). These are catalogued in ascending order as 'the four degrees of bluff' ('les quatres degrés du bidon'). The first degree of bluff (B1) corresponds to the creation of a 'crisis unit' or 'task-force' (a crisis unit being a person in a Ministry office with a telephone receiving dispatches and telegrams on the requisite subject and wondering what to do with them). Degree B2 includes notably the sending of a 'personal envoyé' from the President (Debray no doubt spent more time than he would have wished playing this role). Degree B3 comprises the mounting of an 'international summit' followed by 'common declarations', or the commissioning of a 'major report' on an issue that will be read by no-one, and especially not by those to whom it is addressed (President, Prime minister or minister). Finally, degree B4 requires the creation of

a *High Council* for this, a *Consultative Committee* for that, a *States-General* (this can cover anything), a *Conference of Nobel Prize Winners* in Paris around the President, an *International College of Creators*. Degree B4 is nearly always assigned to the Ministry for Culture and Communication. This is perfect as a source of hot air, cutting off *culture* from *civilisation*, whereas the former ought simply to be a staging post in the pursuit of the latter.¹

We have already seen in chapter 1 Debray's ambivalence about the action of Malraux who, by separating at a governmental level Culture and Education, figured as both the inheritor and gravedigger of the long-term enlightenment ideal of political emancipation through popular education. This ambivalence

¹ R. Debray, *Loués soient nos seigneurs. Une éducation politique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), pp. 375-6 (referred to hereafter as LS).

turns to a much clearer intellectual hostility when it comes to the style of the cultural policy pursued by the Lang administration over the 1980s (when, of course, Debray was also part of the government). Over this time, Debray sees what should be a ‘minor’ domain of government being given undue prominence due to its capacity to supply the media with a regular supply of arresting images.² If we were to focus exclusively on this critique - to which we will return at greater length below - we might think that for Debray, cultural policy functioned as a gaudy decoy designed to divert the attention of the public from the fact that little real government was taking place.

If we look elsewhere in Debray’s oeuvre, however, the concept of a cultural policy figures in significantly different terms. Far from being simply a decoy, it is presented as the quintessence of governmental activity. The point is perhaps most clearly grasped if we go to the beginning of *Le Scribe: genèse du politique*, where Debray resorts to calculated anachronism in order to recount an ‘allegory’. Taking us back to the eighth century, he presents us with the picture of a Western Europe largely fragmented since the fall of the Roman Empire into a patchwork of tiny chiefdoms. Domination was generally exercised in a direct and local manner, and there was comparatively little scope for more sophisticated techniques of manufacturing consent (the ruling Merovingian dynasty was notoriously unable to check the centrifugal forces honeycombing their domains). Such techniques came to the fore only with the expansionist and ultimately imperial drive of the Carolingian dynasty, when the consolidation and reproduction of authority required the diffusion of a common culture across the extent of empire. Political power required cultural authority for its exercise, and cultural authority required political power for its preservation (Charlemagne was finally consecrated by the Pope in AD 800 as the first Emperor of the West since 476):³

The Carolingian Renaissance establishes a natural link between the resurrection of a centre of authority and the organisation of a culture. Imperial dominion skilfully fused the Catholic mission of the sovereign with the political sovereignty of the Church. *The Carolingians had a cultural policy because they had a political culture* [my underlining]. The requirements of administration reestablished the use of writing. Latin was restored as an ‘international’ tool of communication, shared by the Church and the chancellery. Kings and princes would be, along with clerics, the only people who would learn it. Vernacular dialects would become ‘vulgar tongues’ abandoned to the people [...]. A standardised form of writing [...] was substituted for uncial and visigothic script, for

² See R. Debray, *L’Etat séducteur. Les révolutions médiologiques du pouvoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), p. 31 (referred to hereafter as ES).

³ For a succinct overview, see C. Jones, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 48-73.

the centralisation and unification of immense domains presupposed to begin with the uniformisation and regularisation of the material means of transmission. A great power required great knowledge; a great leader, great scholars [*clercs*]. [...] These would be Charlemagne's secretaries, intendants and ministers.⁴

When we return to the dawn of a culture, Debray tells us, the airs of false modesty it subsequently acquires disperse. The links between culture and political power are clear to see (the same is true for the links between rulers and their 'scribes' - our 'intellectuals'). Any political order, in a Weberian perspective, needs the means to maintain its symbolic legitimacy, and nowhere are these means more prominent than when that symbolic legitimacy must first be instituted or salvaged. In this sense, we might say that 'cultural policy' represents a transhistorical imperative for all political orders.

So is cultural policy for Debray superficial or fundamental? One response to this apparent contradiction might be to underline appearance-management as an essential task in the preservation of political power. At another level, confusion can be avoided here if we separate two definitions of cultural policy. Let us call *explicit* or *nominal* cultural policy any cultural policy that a government labels as such. We can say with Philippe Urfalino that such policies were invented, in France, in 1959 (the founding date of the Ministry for Cultural Affairs). Let us call *implicit* or *effective* cultural policy any political strategy that looks to work on the culture of the territory over which it presides (or on that of its adversary). One might assume that such 'policy' is as old as political power itself. The danger of the second definition lies in its anachronism and its excessive historical sweep (though it is also this that provides us with a heuristic framework within which to plot significant variation). The danger of the first definition is its very nominalism. If the history of cultural policy is conceived only as the history through which that term came, *expressis verbis*, to demarcate an autonomous sector of public policy action, we then lose the use of the term for designating more broadly the reality of political action on culture.⁵ The deployment of these two terms might also help us notably to measure a modern government's explicit cultural policy (what it proclaims that it is doing for culture through its official cultural administration) against its implicit cultural

⁴ R. Debray, *Le Scribe: Genèse du politique* (Paris : Grasset, 1980), pp. 24-5 (hereafter referred to as *S*).

⁵ Two of the most stimulating studies of French cultural policy to have appeared recently have adopted - justifiably, given the results it produces - what I have defined here as a nominalist approach - see Philippe Urfalino, *L'Invention de la politique culturelle* (Paris: La Documentation française, 1996), and Vincent Dubois, *La Politique culturelle. Genèse d'une catégorie d'intervention publique* (Paris: Belin, 1999) (cf. notably pp. 7-8). This should not discourage us from using the term in a broader sense.

policy (the effective impact on the nation's culture of its action as a whole, including educational, media, industrial, foreign policy, etc.).

I shall initially explore further the light Debray sheds on implicit cultural policy as a fundamental component of governmental action before proceeding in subsequent sections to examine his account of explicit cultural policy in France particularly over the 1980s and 1990s. We have seen already how the founding of a new political order requires the organisation of a culture. As a corollary of this, Debray supposes that the perpetuation of this order is only possible through the successful transmission across time of that culture. Now this transmission is a precarious business: any cultural corpus is subject to entropic dispersal and decomposition. It cannot be handed down as a discrete object, as its efficacy depends on its proper incorporation by the human subjects it is supposed to inform (these subjects being as a rule also exposed to hostile takeover by other cultural traditions...). Cultural transmission, then, is a complex political operation in its own right, and Debray looks to underline the hazards to which it is exposed (minimized as they are both by a common-sense model by which one generation simply hands over 'something' to a subsequent generation, and by sociological models of social reproduction). The issues are brought into relief in a comparison with genetic transmission, taken from *Critique de la raison politique*:

Cultural heritage is distinct from genetic heritage in that the former is recorded in memory and the latter in the genome; and what is retained by DNA is infinitely more secure than what is retained by museum creators or university directors. The integrity of an entity is even more precarious in the sphere of ideas than it is in the biosphere. We do not have the genetic helix working for us here, and the structures of politico-cultural organisation do not benefit from the invariance and self-replicating capacity of organic structures. There is, therefore, on this terrain, no guaranteed transmission of what has been acquired, and the flipside of what we call progress is the permanent possibility of regression. Political defense mechanisms must hence compensate for this reversibility that in principle affects any acquired modification.⁶

We saw in our discussion of Malraux in chapter one how, for Debray, if the members of a social group are to cohere 'horizontally' among themselves, they can only do so through common reference to a vertically 'transcendent' principle or figure that stands above them (becoming thereby a more or less lucidly held super-stition) (see above, 1.3). The function of a culture, politically speaking, is to transmit the reference to this transcendent principle (or cluster of

⁶ R. Debray, *Critique de la raison politique, ou l'inconscient religieux* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981), pp. 389-90.

principles). If this reference is weakened beyond a certain degree, or challenged by the infiltration of other references, the political order in question will become vulnerable to a collapse or decisive mutation. In this sense, a vigorous and comprehensive cultural policy is a vital function of any political body.

Debray likes to dwell on two illustrations of the *Realpolitik* implied by this cultural policy imperative: the Catholic Church and the French State. He analyses (from a strictly materialist viewpoint) the extraordinary longevity of the Catholic Church as a political organisation in terms of its expertise in ‘applied mediology’ - i.e. a pragmatic attention to the conditions that have to be fulfilled if a given message is going to be felicitously transmitted.⁷ More relevant to our purposes, however, is his attention to the implicit cultural policies that have characterized the French State over the early modern, modern and contemporary periods.

4.2 *Mediaspheres and the French State*

A State, Debray reminds us in *L’Etat séducteur*, is not something visible to the naked eye: it is not the demarcated land one sees from an aeroplane; it is not the people dispersed across towns and villages on the ground; it is not the rulers in their splendour.⁸ It is a more abstract entity, something like an instituted set of relations between those three terms, ensuring that the people within those frontiers feel they belong together at some level, that they will, as a rule, obey the rules laid down by their rulers without the routine use of physical compulsion. A State, then, is not a visible object, it is a set of relations. Debray’s point, however, is that unless a State produces things that people can continually see - or hear - then that set of relations will break down, and the State will cease to be. The State is therefore under a cultural compulsion (Debray might say a mediological compulsion). It must busy itself with the locomotion, the physical transport of common symbols to all the corners of its territory. This function, as a function, does not change. It is transhistorical. In this sense, as we have indicated above, all states must have a cultural policy.

What do change, of course, are the vehicles of symbolic transmission. These may be horse-drawn carriages or people’s purses carrying portraits of Louis XIV across seventeenth-century rural France or written revolutionary decrees to be proclaimed orally across the new Republic in 1792. They may be steam engines transporting copies of popular daily newspapers in the 1870s or the airwaves carrying images of President de Gaulle on the single television

⁷ See e.g. Debray, *Cours de médiologie générale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), pp. 123-57 (hereafter referred to as CMG); and Debray, *Vie et mort de l’image. Une histoire du regard en Occident* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), pp. 75-107 (hereafter referred to as VMI).

⁸ Cf. ES 65-6.

channel of the early 1960s. Indeed, for Debray, these technical transformations in the apparatus of transmission are of greater consequence than has commonly been supposed. They do not simply put new instruments of power at the disposal of identical rulers. They are not extraneous objects that a sovereign subject can take up and deploy as he sees fit. Instead, these technologies ‘occupy’ the subjects that they maintain in power, co-determining and modelling from within their projects and thought-processes. Indeed, Debray contends that, in the final analysis, political authorities tend to become the instruments of these instruments.⁹ Successive media technologies, as they come to dominate preceding technologies, work to constitute structurally different politico-cultural regimes - or what Debray calls ‘mediaspheres’. These mediaspheres ‘format’ political and cultural life in such a way as to filter what groups can come to power, using what strategies, what programmes and what styles of government.

Some critics accuse Debray of overgeneralising when it comes to mapping out these mediaspheres. This particular objection seems to me ill-founded. Apologists for detail and nuance sometimes forget that the perception of such finer points is logically only possible against the background of a more general framework. A virtue of Debray’s framework, it seems to me, is its capacity to ‘bring out’ such nuances in a way that complicates its initially dichotomous divisions.¹⁰ He has also been accused of engaging in a one-dimensional techno-determinism that looks to explain the complexity of social change in terms of a single factor. This, again, represents an unwarranted simplification of his thought. Certainly, Debray wants to reassert the causal efficacy of technological development against the inveterate humanist tendency to posit techniques or technologies as something external to, rather than constitutive of, the human subject.¹¹ However, as implied by his advocacy of a ‘techno-ethic’ (see below, 4.4), this does not signify a fatalistic resignation to the ineluctable effects of a monolithically conceived technological advance upon political and cultural life. Moreover, ‘media technologies’ are not, for Debray, self-propelling vehicles: they can only take effect in societies when driven and mediated by corresponding institutions of transmission (the Church, a community of scholars, a national education system, a television company under a given system of regulation).¹²

⁹ See *CMG* 75.

¹⁰ For a critique that endorses the value of general periodisations, but suggests other modes of periodisation, see Roger Chartier, ‘Médiologie, sociologie et histoire du livre’, in *Le Débat*, 85, May-August 1995, pp. 17-21.

¹¹ Debray refers in particular in this regard to the work of André Leroi-Gourhan, the anthropologist of prehistory, for whom primitive techniques and tools played a decisive role in the process of ‘hominisation’ of our biological predecessors (cf. Bernard Stiegler, ‘Leroi-Gourhan: l’inorganique organisé’, *Les Cahiers de médiologie*, 6 (1998), pp. 187-94).

¹² Those familiar with Debray’s work will recognise here his distinction between ‘organised matter’ (produced broadly speaking by technologies) and ‘materialised organisation’ (broadly

But we must begin with the general framework. The three now overlaid ‘mediaspheres’ which Debray sees as informing French history are, in their stark succession, the ‘logosphere’, the ‘graphosphere’, and the ‘videosphere’. Each is defined by the dominance of a particular technology for symbolic encoding, and of a particular institutional apparatus for symbolic transmission. The ‘logosphere’ corresponds to the primacy of the spoken word, the principal apparatus for the transmission of which was the Church. This does not mean that writing was not an important technical feature of this apparatus, simply that it came under the dominant gravitational pull of the spoken word - as the period’s Holy Scripture put it: ‘In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.’ The graphosphere, which corresponds to the primacy of the printed word, emerges in Debray’s scheme over the early modern period (following the invention of printing), and finds clear expression notably by the French Revolution and the subsequent republican projects to shape society according to impersonal written constitutions and laws. The principal apparatus ensuring that the printed word would have an effective purchase on society was the sort of national education system that we see drafted over the Revolution and established gradually over the nineteenth century. The graphosphere was, finally, displaced by the ‘videosphere’, over which the principal means of symbolic encoding becomes the image, the principal apparatus for the transmission of which was television networks. By way of initial nuance, we might add that this corresponds also to the rise of a ‘secondary orality’ (a spoken word recorded and reproduced) which reemerges to swamp the printed word itself - the clearest symptom of this being the respective reach of the ten-second soundbite that no-one can escape and the forty-page manifesto that no-one reads.¹³

These are three abstractions for charting the impact of successive media technologies on French and, more generally, with the requisite adjustments, Western societies: the logosphere, the graphosphere, the videosphere. Obviously, printing did not silence speech any more than television put an end to reading. The rise to structural dominance of a given medium does not eliminate its predecessors, but works to bring them into its gravitational pull (which they may resist with greater or lesser success). Subsequently, Debray has framed these three notions with two further concepts: a ‘mnemosphere’ characterising societies prior to the invention of writing, and a ‘numerosphere’ (or what Louise Merzeau calls a ‘hypersphere’) ushered in by the general digitilization of all signs.¹⁴

speaking, institutions). Together, these constitute ‘the double body of the medium’ (see R. Debray, *Transmettre* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1997), pp. 15-71 [1-44] (hereafter referred to as *T*)).

¹³ On secondary orality, see Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge (1982), 1988).

¹⁴ See *T* 183 [116], and also Louise Merzeau, ‘Ceci ne tuera pas cela’, in *Les Cahiers de médiologie*, 6 (1998), pp. 27-39.

It is perhaps not surprising that such a mediological theory of the State and its effective cultural policy should emerge in France. As Debray puts it, ‘in France, mediological questions are always a matter for the State because, more so than elsewhere, the State has been (self-consciously and comprehensively) a mediological affair’ (*ES* 51). From its very beginnings, and particularly at its height over the seventeenth century, the royal French State looked to subordinate the circulation of symbols to strict discursive control:

The regulatory environment for image and sound, which is still more restrictive in France today than in Italy or the United Kingdom, to say nothing of the United States, goes back to the origins of the French State. The absolutist monarchy (and in its wake the Revolution and Empire) took no less than the Roman Catholic Church meticulous care over the industries of the imagination. Nothing of what might strike the eyes or ears remained alien to it. The Great King [Louis XIV] did not even delegate to his superintendent the task of nominating his historiographer. He granted pensions to his academicians, and chose his fables. He controlled his painters just as he maintained under surveillance the book trade, the theatre, and the mail. It was not simply through chance or personal taste that Henri IV, Louis XIII and Louis XIV had themselves represented as Apollo, Hercules, or Jupiter. Such heroization through image - certainly paintings, but also and above all coins, medals, tapestries, prints, almanachs - was part of a programme. Faced with the printing press and engravings, vehicles of propaganda but also potential threats, Henri II and Charles IX had already instituted monopolies and official delegations for anything concerning effigies of the king. The public imagination was subsequently mapped and gridded, via the Academies, the manufactories, and other such workshops for the production of glory. (*ES* 53)

Of course, such comprehensive royal cultural policies would in due course be undermined as they lost their grip over the instruments of symbolic transmission. The advent of the French Revolution was marked - both as one of its principal causes and an amplificatory effect - by an unprecedented and uncontrolled explosion of printed matter.¹⁵ This transition from printed text as a rare good to a readily available and increasingly affordable object heralded the apogee of Debray’s graphosphere (though the jolting concatenation of

¹⁵ See e.g. Jeremy D. Popkin, *Revolutionary News. The Press in France, 1789-1799* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1990).

nineteenth-century French regimes would ensure that this was neither a smooth nor linear process).¹⁶

While Debray is at pains to propose his mediaspheres as value-free tools for the advancement of understanding, it is clear that certain of the concepts involved acquire strong affective charges of opposing polarity. This in itself is not a criticism, unless we were to adopt a truncated view of epistemic objectivity according to which social researchers should only enquire into matters about which they do not care. Nevertheless, it is as well to signal the fact. Thus the apogee of the graphosphere, insofar as it coincides with a specific post-Enlightenment republican tradition in France, acquires not just a descriptive but a normative force in Debray's writing. After what we might call the 'restrictive' graphosphere of the Absolute Monarchy, the implications, from a republican viewpoint, of an increasingly universal graphosphere were mapped out over the revolution by the philosopher Condorcet (see *ES* 93-4).¹⁷ These are built on the foundation constituted by two new historical facts: the transfer of sovereignty from the king to the people, and the technical and economic possibility of diffusing printed material to ever wider sections of that people. Both developments imply a third element: the instruction of the people. For an ignorant ruler is a tyrant, and an ignorant people - according to classic Enlightenment logic - would therefore be its own tyrant. And the people can only profit from the proliferation of printed material if it first receives universal instruction. Indeed, that printed material (textbooks etc.) can itself make the desired instruction possible. In this perspective, a national education system is a necessary and central component in the very concept of a Republic (distinguishing it from a notional system of majority despotism).

The nineteenth-century French 'graphosphere', if we accept the term, could be seen as oscillating between restrictive moments where the quantity, content and readership of printed material were tightly controlled (Napoleon I, Napoleon III) and 'universalising' moments where all three terms expanded (the Second Republic, and the Third Republic by the 1880s). As is well-known, Condorcet's blueprint for a national education system would have to wait almost a century before its systematic roll-out. When this occurred with Jules Ferry's classic educational reforms of 1879-82, the diffusion of Reason as such was pragmatically integrated into a more populist strategy of federating the nation around certain images of France (cf. *ES* 86-7). Even then, however, writing

¹⁶ As regards the press, see e.g. the overviews in Jean-Noël Jeanneney, *Une histoire des médias des origines à nos jours* (Seuil, 1996), chapters 3-5; or M. Martin, *Médias et journalistes de la République* (Paris : Odile Jacob, 1997), pp. 15-118.

¹⁷ For Condorcet's reflection in this regard, see e.g. the selection of his texts collected by Charles Coutel in Coutel (ed.), *Politique de Condorcet* (Paris: Payot & Rivages, 1996), part III, ch. 5, 'Le progrès des Lumières comme préalable à la république', or Condorcet, *Cinq mémoires sur l'instruction publique*, ed. C. Coutel and C. Kintzler (Paris: Flammarion, 1994), especially the first and third memoirs.

remained the dominant medium. And writing, as a technology, carries with it for Debray certain intrinsic virtues.¹⁸ It is a ‘good conductor of abstraction’ (*CMG* 265), which in turn is a good conductor of emancipation. That is to say, it can introduce into the concrete facticity of a situation (a village organised according to feudal custom, say) more universal norms and references against which to measure it (revolutionary decrees, say). It can negate a current state of affairs, in a way that the image cannot. It promotes a rational ordering of the world in terms of disjunctive incompatibilities (either A or B, but not both) and hypothetical projections (if C, then necessarily D) (*VMI* 347-8). As opposed to what Walter Ong sees as the tolerance of primary orality with regard to contradiction and inconsistency, and what Debray calls the ‘alogical’ nature of images, the spread of writing induces incrementally a more rationally orientated political body. This is, so to speak, the utopia Debray inherits from the French graphosphere. It was a ‘cultural policy’ that began with the ideal of a universal education system, and that spread to the entire range of cultural forms: theatre, universal exhibitions, village festivals, opinion-forming newspapers and seminars organised by political parties, public sculpture and architecture, cinema-clubs... (*ES* 89). All these gravitated around the notion of ‘popular education’, or, a term that was once its synonym, ‘popular culture’. While such projects would come to lose nearly all their momentum and resonance - for reasons to be explored below - they continue to represent both a descriptive comparator and, intermittently, a normative reference point in Debray’s attempts to make sense of cultural policies in the videosphere and hypersphere.

4.3 Cultural policy in the videosphere

In the classic terminology of the American logician C. S. Peirce, alphabetically based forms of writing are ‘symbolic’ activities. The relation of a ‘symbol’, in his definition, to its object is one of arbitrary convention: there is no necessary connection between the sounds that make up the word ‘king’, or the letters designating those sounds, and the real entity they serve to signify. An ‘icon’, by contrast, is a sign that stands in direct analogical relation to its object: a portrait of the king is thus an icon. The final type of sign in Peirce’s triad, and the one that will exercise Debray most in his thinking on cultural policy, is the ‘index’. Unlike ‘symbols’, ‘indices’ have a necessary relation to their object; unlike ‘icons’, this relation is not one of pure analogy (they do not necessarily resemble their object), but one of continuity or contiguity. The classic example of an ‘index’ is the smoke that signals a fire. To continue in our vein of

¹⁸ On writing as a ‘technology’, see e.g. Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), or Ong, *Orality and Literacy*.

illustrations, ‘indices’ of the king might be his crown, his seal on a letter (a direct trace of his bodily act), or the scrofula of his subjects cured as a result of his healing touch.¹⁹

The most efficacious signs in ‘graphospheres’, as Debray conceives them, are symbols. Now different types of sign do not represent the world in an identical manner. They organise the world differently as a mental construct, and therefore imply different modes of action upon that world. Alphabetically-based writing is, as it were, doubly cut off from the reality it addresses: it has an ‘artificial’ relation to the phonemes it designates, which in turn stand in a relation of artifice to the reality they designate. This double semiotic break (to which habit blinds us) serves the development of thought: insofar as the world is less directly received, greater work must be applied to organising a representation of that world. Moreover, the fixing of statements via inscription facilitates the controlling of new statements by confronting them with previous statements (for authors like Goody and Ong, the operation of logic as such corresponds less to an innate human faculty than to a capacity developed in the human mind through its interaction with the artifice of writing).²⁰ Clearly, this is a major field of intellectual inquiry, and to develop it any further here might appear to take us away from our subject. Debray’s point is this: insofar as ‘icons’ and, *a fortiori*, ‘indices’ are as signs more subservient to the appearances of the world, they tend to induce more ‘facile’ representations of the world. When, therefore, images in general (and specific types of ‘index’ in particular, to be discussed below) become the most efficacious types of sign in a social order, representations of that social order will become increasingly facile. More complex chains of causality will have, as it were, no element to conduct them. Debray sees in French ‘explicit’ cultural policy of the 1980s a symptom of this process (which also englobes the wider domain of ‘implicit’ cultural policy).

Before coming to these analyses, however, it will be as well to qualify them somewhat. A hasty reading of *L’Etat séducteur* (which the book does not perhaps sufficiently discourage) might conclude that it tells the story of the decadence of government-by-symbol, unable to survive the contagion of government-by-image. However, Debray’s work as a whole, ranging across the *longue durée* of European history, suggests that pure government-by-symbol is in any case impossible. If the condition of government - that is, making people behave in certain ways - is making people believe in certain things, then signs must inevitably be its tools. History would appear to teach us, however, that all effective government since the invention of writing combines the three types of

¹⁹ For Peirce’s formulations, see e.g. C. S. Peirce, ‘Prolegomena to an Apology for Pragmaticism’ (1906), in *Peirce on Signs*, ed. J. Hoopes (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), pp. 249-52 (pp. 251-2); or, for the original division (with some different terms), ‘On a New List of Categories’ (1867), *ibid.*, pp. 22-33.

²⁰ See Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*; Ong; *Orality and Literacy*.

sign distinguished by Peirce. Debray's account in *Vie et mort de l'image* of the spread and consolidation of the early Christian Church is instructive in this regard. Early Christians set out to discredit the 'false idols' of a pagan empire and to replace them with reference to a single and invisible divinity. Against the prevailing idolatry, they were iconophobic. As their proselytising mission spread, however, and they looked to consolidate an attachment to the new religion among new social groups, a more iconodulist tendency asserted itself. This reversal is what Debray calls Christianity's 'subversion within the iconophobic subversion of its origins' (VMI 93):

The more the Church came to terms with worldly existence, the more compromises it made with regard to images. As it gradually won over the Empire, it was won over in its turn by images and Empire - as if it had not been able to do without images in its efforts to inculcate and seduce. As if one could only respond to images through images, since oral and written discourse had not sufficed to break down the cultural walls of the Ancient World. As if it was impossible, after ten centuries of triumphant idolatry, to unify territories and nations without the support of a visual minimum, the vital minimum for institutionalisation. A system of casuistry was put in place. Saint Basil admits, against his own inclinations, that an image of Christ can engage the Christian on the path of virtue, as long as it is "joined to the eloquence of the preacher". Good uses of the image began to be distinguished (that the scholastic doctrines of the Middle Ages would systematize as didactic, memorative, and devotional). The purpose was to gain a purchase on the simple and credulous, to bring the faithful to participate in the liturgies. (VMI 92)

For the Catholic Church, images, like Christ himself, became a mediation between humankind and the divinity. Indeed, Debray sees this decision, made officially at the Council of Nicaea in 787, as momentous: in asserting that the phenomena of the world bore a relation to the Godhead (rather than cutting off phenomena from an absolute transcendence, as other religions did), it served to authorise the serious study and exploration of those phenomena. This in due course would serve to permit the development of the Western traditions of science and art (based as they are on controlled and meticulous observation). Be that as it may, the early Catholic Church's conversion to the virtues of the image leads Debray to formulate a more general law:

This constitutes a recurrent fact in transmissions of doctrine: when the Word or true text engenders the corresponding institution, when the message of Salvation or Revolution (the profane equivalent of the millenium) is propagated beyond its native intellectual perimeter, practices of imagery reemerge and spread. It is as though the transition to

praxis obliges the upholders of a doctrine to satisfy the optical libido of the masses. (*VMI* 94-5)

In the case of the Catholic Church, as its political ambition increased, it ‘regressed, in Peirce’s sense, from the “symbol” to the “index”’ (*VMI* 93). Signs of the cross would become images of a crucifix (a first-degree ‘regression’, as it were, from residually iconic symbol to fully-fledged icon); processions and pilgrimages would be organised around relics, indices of saintly figures whose bodily presence they continued; images themselves would effectively become, in popular worship, idols secreting a sacred presence, ‘indexically’ related to the otherwise impalpable figures of doctrine.

Why this rapid detour through the mediologically conceived rudiments of Church history? For two reasons: to avoid giving the impression that the turn of French socialist governments over the 1980s to particular ‘practices of imagery’ represented in itself a betrayal of politics, when it can be seen in a longer perspective as following the very dynamic of politics; but also to help us see just what was historically specific about such developments in the videosphere as compared to previous mediaspheres.

When the socialist candidate François Mitterand won the presidency in 1981, the hopes of Régis Debray (along with much of the rest of France) were high. High enough, as we have seen, to lead him to secure a post as a full-time presidential adviser in the Elysée palace. Officially assigned to ‘international relations’ (and more intermittently to cultural matters as such), his attention was never far removed from that effective or ‘implicit’ cultural policy evoked above - the effect of government action as a whole on French culture. This preoccupation would in due course, once relieved of the reservations imposed by public office, lead him to take issue with the ‘explicit’ cultural policy of Mitterand’s government. The signs of this intellectual divergence were present, if we are to believe Debray’s political memoirs, from an early stage. Over his first two years at the Elysée, Debray organised regular ‘working lunches’ for the president, bringing together the head of the French State and the leading intellectual figures of the time (Fernand Braudel, Simone de Beauvoir, Louis Dumont, Pierre Nora, Claude Lanzmann, Pierre Vidal-Nacquet, Michel Foucault...), or experts in complex issues (India, the USSR, Islam...).²¹ The programme, as he recounts, turned into a chore for this most anti-intellectual and pragmatic of politicians. Cagey, defensive, the urbane Mitterand would keep these interlocutors at a distance. In purely political terms, they would never be as profitable as the evening receptions organised by Jack Lang bringing together the Parisian world of arts and letters (famous authors, film stars, musicians, along with the inevitable television cameras and photographers). We saw above

²¹ See *LS* 323-4.

how, over the post-revolutionary graphosphere, cultural projects came under the gravitational pull of an educational ideal. In the anecdote recounted here, we see the result of a fission producing two now separate worlds, with arts and entertainment coming centre-stage as the operations of intellectual abstraction were sidelined and attributed a status of fastidious marginality.

The Catholic Church invested in imagery to maintain contact between a human congregation and a doctrine. Where it ‘lapsed’ to the level of the index, such indices participated in the transcendent referent of that doctrine (through a relic, the faithful could touch or at least see the body of a saint). The mode of contemporary government described by Debray in *L’Etat séducteur* cultivates image to maintain contact not between an electorate and a doctrine, but simply between the government and the electorate as such (the point now was to show that the government was itself ‘in touch’ with the body of a public deemed a priori to be more interested in other things). It was not that the ‘doctrine’ has changed; rather, in Debray’s reading, the term ‘doctrine’ (from *doctrina* - teaching) had fallen away. The public was both the addressee and the ‘content’ of messages designed first and foremost to reduce any perceived differences between the government and itself. The substance of governmental action thereby became its appearance. Of course, it is possible to see this dissolution of a transcendent doctrine ‘above’ a polity in favour of the immanent desires of a people as the doctrine of democracy itself (that ‘worst form of government except for all the others’). Let us first, however, consider how Debray uses the notion of ‘public as message’ as a key to interpreting explicit French cultural policy of the 1980s and early 1990s.

Jack Lang famously looked over his time in office to break down the barriers between culture and ‘life itself’.²² Instead of a rarefied domain of distinction set apart from ordinary life, the operative definition of culture at the Ministry expanded to take on all cultural genres with a clientele in French society (from comic strip to fashion, from rap to advertising). Certainly, within the framework of a generalised increase in State cultural expenditure, budgetary priorities did not change as much as appearances might have suggested (with classical genres like opera, orchestral music, and theatre continuing to absorb substantial proportions of the budget).²³ Nevertheless, at the level that concerns us here, Lang’s accession to the Ministry of Culture represented a clear break as regards the perception of nominal cultural policy within France. It became between 1981 and 1993 one of the most high-profile of government administrations, with Lang himself regularly appearing in opinion polls (even during a brief period of opposition between 1986 and 1988) as one of the most

²² See e.g. the speech given by Lang in 1982 at Mexico City, in J. Ahearne (ed.) *French Cultural Policy Debates: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 111-20; and also the 1987 text ‘A Cultural Elan’ by Jacques Renard, Lang’s cabinet director (*ibid.*, pp. 127-34).

²³ See e.g. O. Donnat, ‘Cultural democratization: the end of a myth’ (1991), in *French Cultural Policy Debates*, pp. 135-47 (p. 146).

popular politicians in the country. The ongoing dismantling of those frontiers that had once circumscribed the cultural domain gave in itself a sense of momentum to Lang's programme, while also giving to ever wider sections of the population the sense that they had a stake in that programme. Certainly, the momentum to be derived from such a process was finite, and there had evolved the sense towards the end of Lang's administration in the early 1990s of a certain exhaustion, with the same gestures of decompartmentalisation and transgression being repeated even though virtually all conceivable forms of cultural expression had already at least nominally been integrated into policy. Indeed, a new French cultural genre evolved at around this time: that of the critique, emerging from both the political left and right, of the populist excesses of Lang's policies, usually conducted with reference to a traditional and restrictive 'fine-arts' definition of the cultural domain.²⁴ It would be fair to say that such polemics finally overshadowed the substantial technical achievements of Lang's administration (as regards, say, film policy, book publishing, or the issue of the cultural industries more generally).²⁵

L'Etat séducteur would no doubt have a place in the corpus of critiques attaching to Lang's administration. Having said that, there is in Debray's writing little of the personal animus attaching to Lang that one finds elsewhere. On the contrary, Debray singles out Lang in *Loués soient nos seigneurs* as one of the rare ministers who, in contrast to professional career politicians, actually devoted himself wholeheartedly over a sustained period to the specific issues confronting his Ministry, thereby making a lasting mark on that Ministry (*LS* 364-5). Where it is most penetrating, Debray's critique is 'technical'. He analyses Lang's administration as an arm of government perfectly adjusted to the demands of the videosphere. This cultural policy was thus calibrated according to a relatively new set of technically defined norms. It was, for Debray, a symptom of the primacy of technical determinants over political will.

What were the demands of the videosphere? Debray argues in *Cours de médiologie générale* that

the dominant medium, with regard to previous media, is that with the highest performance, i.e. that which demonstrates the optimal relation between its cost and its effectiveness. In other words, it is the medium that provides the widest and most rapid coverage, at the least cost for the transmitter, and with the least effort (i.e. greatest comfort) for the receiver. The television, in this sense at least, dominates radio, which

²⁴ Examples of these were Alain Finkielkraut, *La Défaite de la pensée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), Marc Fumaroli, *L'Etat culturel. Essai sur une religion moderne* (Paris: Fallois, 1992), Michel Schneider, *La Comédie de la culture* (Paris : Seuil, 1993); Vincent Dubois refers to these as forming a 'new journalistic-literary genre' (in *La politique culturelle*, p. 293).

²⁵ For a measured overview, see David Loosley, *The Politics of Fun: Cultural Policy and Debate in Contemporary France* (Oxford and Washington D.C.: Berg, 1995).

dominates newspapers, which dominate brochures, which dominate books, which dominate manuscripts, etc. (*CMG* 301)

It is a matter of prime strategic importance for a government in a given mediasphere to ‘occupy’, in one way or another, the dominant medium of that mediasphere (for if it is occupied more effectively by another agent, that agent will have greater leverage over the beliefs of the population). Different media, however, cannot be occupied in the same manner. They have to be ‘fed’ differently. Clearly, television lives on a diet of images - and images, moreover, of a particular kind.

This presents those in charge of the State with a problem. For the essential activities of a State are by their very nature organised around writing. In this essentially ‘scriptural’ universe, data is collected, reports are drafted, decrees are formulated, particular cases are judged according to written bodies of law. All this supplies little in terms of image that can feed the dominant medium of the age:

Ushers coming and going in corridors, envelopes being opened and shut, piles of paper moving from right to left in a thousand offices, impersonal meetings being held without any shouting or screaming, a State that is working well has in audiovisual terms a rating of zero; it is desperately banal in dramatic terms, and it is not easy to stage its austerity (to find a way of instilling narrative interest, emotion, heroism, or surprise). How can this State apparatus be brought into a storyline with images when it is basically, as far as its output is concerned, a machine designed to produce anonymously code, law and regulation, i.e. kilometers of printed material every day? (*ES* 29-30)

The apparently intrinsic tedium of State activity is liable to be more keenly felt in the videosphere than in the graphosphere, as the capacity of an item to project itself into a saturated image market becomes the criterion by which its interest is evaluated. In such a climate, the classic post-revolutionary justifications for the ‘abstractions’ of a republican State (redressing regional imbalances, countering local fiefdoms, checking the natural drift of society towards inequality, applying law equally to all...) become harder to transmit. By contrast, the interest, in governmental terms, of a cultural policy such as Lang’s becomes clearly visible. It could supply week in, week out, images (a fashion exhibition in the Louvre museum, the award of a cultural honour to a famous tennis star...) that were arresting enough to allow the government to occupy the requisite slots in a television-dominated system of news coverage.

Moreover, these images were of a particular kind. As we saw with regard to Malraux in chapter one, images are not efficacious in themselves, particularly when they appear as more or less alien to the population on which they are

supposed to act (see above, 1.3). The images orchestrated by Lang's administration stood, by contrast, in an 'indexical' relation to their target population - they had to emerge directly from the tastes and practices of this population as a photographic image emerges through the direct impact of light upon photosensitive film. The overriding concern in their deployment was to display a government 'in touch' with a population. This was reflected, for example, in the succession of 'festivals' that proliferated under Lang, generating images for subsequent retransmission of spontaneity, expressivity and creativity emerging directly from the body of the people. Likewise, a new practical hierarchy of cultural genres evolved, informed by two criteria: firstly, their capacity to signify 'contact' with the effective tastes and practices of a given population; secondly, their capacity to short-circuit or subordinate discursive elaboration. Thus genres like dance, events organised around film stars, fashion, advertising, or industrial design became the vehicles through which the government could make an ostentatious display, as it were, of its participation in the public (a videospherical *ersatz* for public participation in government). The overall rhetorical strategy might be conceived as a kind of argument-by-index: as there is no smoke without fire, the subliminal message might have suggested, so this government cannot so spectacularly share our tastes without sharing our concerns.

As a rhetorical strategy (and notwithstanding its more fundamental achievements), Langian cultural policy wore thin. Like a worn-out talk-show formula, its moves came to seem monotonous, tedious and unsurprising. It would fall victim to the evolutionary dynamic of the videosphere that had initially 'selected' it as a viable species of political spectacle:

As for the cultural scenario, it is too luxurious, it remains an [...] interchangeable ceremony. This inauguration of a new opera-house, that awarding of a Legion of Honour to a great American actor, a world festival of the popular song or comic-strip - they can all be amusing, valorizing, and even sublime. The problem is that it would not have made any difference if they had taken place yesterday or tomorrow; and they give us nothing to anticipate, to fear or hope for. Whether it is a site, a centre, a 'house', a hall, a palace, a room, there is nothing to see around the officials except space, a new space for consumption, with a dazzling array of beautiful 'people' for our delectation, with a handful of stars glorifying the Minister they surround, but our ecstasy remains static, with no temporal horizon to engage it. We admire, we envy, we covet - but we do not thrill to it. The comedy of culture, *mimesis* without *diegesis*, a representation with no story, provides fantastic spectacles but unsatisfactory television series. (ES 123-4).

One might say that in due course the ‘nominal’ cultural policy pursued by Jack Lang ceased to be a viable model of ‘effective’ cultural policy for government in the videosphere: it no longer gave the means to occupy the dominant medium of the age.

This strategic imperative would no doubt have been felt particularly keenly by French governments of the 1980s and 1990s. Until 1982, television in France had been entirely owned and controlled by the State, and the first commercial television channels would only emerge from 1984 onwards. After 1987, when Chirac’s government privatised the leading national channel TF1, the commercial pole in French television clearly dominated the remaining public channels (we saw in chapter two Bourdieu’s proposals for challenging this domination).²⁶ Writing his first explicitly ‘mediological’ study in 1979, Debray could present the ‘informational apparatus’ (the media) in Althusserian terms as a more or less direct tool of the State in the reproduction of its hegemonic domination:

The strength of a system of political domination lies in its not showing its strength, and one is more ready to obey a State that one can love without realizing it is a State. In our part of the world, active consent to the domination of one class is organised by what have been called, since Althusser, the ‘State Ideological Apparatuses’, which allow existing social relations to be reproduced as painlessly as possible.²⁷

Some fifteen years later, by contrast, the real locus of power appeared to have shifted. The relations between the media and the State had inverted, to the extent that Debray suggested conceiving the State as an ‘Ideological Apparatus of the Media Market’ (*ES* 98). If television was the most powerful tool of effective cultural policy, the French government was no longer in control of that tool (the two substantial public channels that did exist (FR2 and FR3) were removed from direct governmental control, were dependent on advertising, and had to compete in terms of viewing figures in a market dominated massively by commercial channels). In order to seduce its electorate, it had to seduce in the first instance those responsible for television schedules and news agenda (who themselves had to obey the technico-economic exigencies of the television market, the effective vectors modelling a government’s overall cultural policy). Debray thus compares the head of government to the president of a commercial public television channel, who must generate day after day a quota of mass audience programming that can stand up to the products of its entirely private-sector competitors. Like the head of such public channels, the head of government must combine ‘the discourse of Jean Vilar’ (a now mythical symbol of the

²⁶ See e.g. Raymond Kuhn, *The Media in France* (London: Routledge, 1995), and above, 2.3.

²⁷ R. Debray, *Le Pouvoir intellectuel en France* (Paris: Ramsay, 1979), p. 219 [194].

heroic ambitions of explicit cultural policy in France) and ‘the practice of TF1’ (the biggest and most commercially aggressive of French privately-owned television companies) (*ES* 99).²⁸ Unlike the head of a channel, however, the government has no free access to transmitters, and no television studio under its control. The architects of its effective cultural policy, the scriptwriters and producers that stage its initiatives, look to insinuate their products, via television, into the general culture of the nation. But the cultural policy they frame is itself framed at another level. They propose, but they do not dispose. Every day, television producers sift through the primary material delivered by various suppliers of storyline (of which government is one) (*ES* 101). Gatekeepers of a kind of anonymous mega-cultural-policy that transcends them, they apply the criteria they must obey to the items before them, deciding which to place first, which last, and which to deprive of effective existence altogether. In this perspective, to accuse a government in such a mediasphere of ‘spin’ is superficial. It is not responsible for the conditions of its survival. These are determined, in Debray’s account, by the requirements of a technical system once it has become deployed, a ‘vast panoply itself organised by and around the central medium’ (*ES* 153).

4.4 A *techno-ethics*

‘Humankind is therefore the animal species that produces by technical means a culture.’

‘Will a *techno-ethics* represent one day for cultural policies what *bio-ethics* represent today for health policies?’²⁹

It may be that Debray’s mediology adopts an excessively dyspeptic response to the cultural apparatus of the present. Its first move is to inspect what might be lost when a new medium establishes its dominance over previously established technologies (such as print). As ‘surprise before Being’ is an age-old trigger for philosophical reflection, so ‘anxiety before the prospect of decline’ provided an initial impulse for Debray’s mediological reflection.³⁰ A system of transmission that had seemed self-evident (the graphosphere) enters a phase of

²⁸ For Jean Vilar’s vision of cultural policy, see J. Vilar, ‘Theatre: A Public Service’ (1960), in Ahearne, *French Cultural Policy Debates*, pp. 39-44.

²⁹ First quotation from *T 121* [79 – trans. mod.]; second quotation from Debray, *Introduction à la médiologie* (Paris : PUF, 2000), p. 214 (hereafter referred to as *IM*).

³⁰ R. Debray, *Par amour de l’art: une éducation intellectuelle* (Paris : Gallimard, 1998), p. 330.

decomposition, its elements reorganised along the gravitational force-fields of other systems (the videosphere, and the subsequent extension or absorption of this into a ‘numerosphere’ or ‘hypersphere’). A certain nostalgia is thus at the root of Debray’s mediology - even if its avowed goal is to sublimate this affect in a properly epistemic endeavour to understand the processes of transmission as such.

As a corrective to this approach, it is worth underlining the extent to which the evolution of cultural technology has constituted a vehicle for the democratization of culture and learning. In a now classic example, the former head of research at the French Ministry of Culture, Augustin Girard, showed in 1978 how the spread of such technology (television, hi-fi, etc.) had done between twenty and a thousand times more than official cultural policy since 1959 to multiply contacts between works of art and the public.³¹ Debray himself notes in *Cours de médiologie générale* the secular trend of this cultural democratization through communicational technology:

Each new medium short-circuits the class of mediators that had issued from the previous medium. Along with the Bible in vulgar tongues and justification through faith, the printed presses short-circuited the Catholic [...] priesthood, allowing the faithful to assuage *directly* their ‘immense appetite for the divine’ (L. Febvre). Thenceforth, it would be the case that ‘everyone is a priest’. Along with satellites and press agencies, television short-circuited the intelligentsia and the professionals of print, allowing consumers to assuage *directly* their immense appetite for culture. Henceforth, ‘everyone is informed’. Everyone can see and hear the authors, artists, and knowledge-bearers - and make a judgment on what they see. (*CMG* 219)

Likewise, the powers-that-be in France have always sought to maintain control over new communicational technology before finally succumbing to a dynamic that takes it out of their hands (*CMG* 313). This process can be seen in the relations between the monarchy and the book trade, the authoritarian regimes of the nineteenth century and the political press, or post-war French governments and television. Certainly this dynamic can be explained as much in terms of capitalistic expansion as of democratic progress.³² Nevertheless, it entitles us to ask the question: is Debray, in what is as much a critique as a description of the videosphere and numerosphere, simply defending the interests of a deskilled ‘class of mediators’ from a previous mediasphere? And is this a legitimate exercise, or does it resemble the Catholic hierarchy’s erstwhile suspicion of the

³¹ Augustin Girard, ‘Cultural Industries’, in Ahearne, *French Cultural Policy Debates*, pp. 102-8 (p. 102).

³² Cf. Cyril Lemieux, *Mauvaise Presse : une sociologie compréhensive du travail journalistique et de ses critiques* (Paris : Métailié, 2000), pp. 23-69.

printed press - or even Plato's anxiety about the vulgarizing capacity of disseminated writing?

The first point to be made in defense of Debray's fundamental interrogation is that there is no intrinsic relation between the increasing sophistication of communicational equipment and the level of sophistication of a social group's intellectual evolution. Clearly, there have been instances throughout history of a mutually reinforcing loop connecting these two factors, but one cannot necessarily be inferred from the other. In Debray's words, 'technical progress has as its flipside the permanent possibility of a cultural regression' (*CMG* 231). Communicational technology is not a neutral conduit for intellectual content. According to the type of symbolic encoding that it privileges (oral or written discourse, printed or electronic image, etc.), it organises, hierarchises, modalizes, and eliminates possible content in specific manners. We have already seen how, for Debray, the videosphere constitutes a poor milieu for the 'conduction' of intellectual abstraction. It is undoubtedly the case that the communicational apparatus of the videosphere is more sophisticated than that of the graphosphere. Given that the signs it disseminates are, however, of a more 'primary' nature (images rather than concepts), it is not out of the question that its long-term effect might be to induce an intellectual regression. Insofar, then, as a simple link between technical progress and intellectual progress (or even homeostasis) cannot be taken for granted, relations between these processes must be thought through in specific terms for each new historical configuration. The implications of these relations constitute, in Debray's terms, a 'civilizational issue' (*un enjeu de civilisation*) (*IM* 207, 210).

Less clear-cut than a comparison between the print of the graphosphere and the images of the videosphere, but just as interesting, would be the comparison between the text transported digitally in the 'numerosphere' (labile, screen-based, synchronically 'connected' to a host of other texts, but liable to disappear from one day to the next, tending towards 'contact' and euphoria) and the text transported via the printed page since the graphosphere (fixed, page- and codex-based, synchronically 'disconnected' but enjoying greater diachronic fixity - one can be more certain that it will be available for subsequent reconsultation – and tending towards detachment and recollection). It seems eminently probable that these different technologies of writing (or differing combinations of the two) will induce differing intellectual economies. One might also note that the closed formal 'architecture' of a book requires the selection, condensation and ordering of information, whereas the superabundant expanses of hypertext permit and encourage a more 'facile' and indefinite accumulation of data at the expense of articulated knowledge. Debray makes occasional reference to such a comparison, though it is not systematically developed - indeed, he has been criticized for failing to integrate our contemporary 'numerosphere' fully into his reflection. It may be, however, that

his very discomfort in this sphere – a kind of *Unbehagen in der Kultur* – has sharpened his perception and generated many of his insights.³³

Debray compares such ‘civilizational’ issues to those addressed by ecology. Ecology studies the effects of a milieu (a localized niche and a more general biosphere) upon living species, and the retroactive effects of species on their milieu. We saw in chapter two how Bourdieu deployed this metaphor to designate the level at which the protection of an ‘autonomous’ culture must be organised, though he was concerned with the logic of social fields rather than specifically technical determinations (see above, 2.4). Debray’s ‘mediological’ focus can in this respect be seen as a supplement to the sociological framework of Bourdieu. Mediology studies in the first instance the effect of a given mediasphere (a systematic configuration of technologies and institutions of transmission) on human cultures - and, in the second instance, the means by which such cultures might consciously ‘retroact’ on their mediaspheres, should they deem it desirable. For, as with mutations in the biosphere, not all symbolic entities can survive the demise of their native mediasphere:

There exist in a single milieu species with a very short lifespan, but with a great capacity for reproduction, and others that manifest a high degree of inertia, but also with a longer lifespan. Living, as far as ideas are concerned, is always a question of surviving. Civilised societies protect species that are threatened with extinction, which cannot resist existing competition, and which, left to themselves, would be eliminated by rivals more suited to prevailing conditions. National parks are set aside for them, in the form of specialised schools, groupings, learned reviews, sects, and duly authorised associations. (CMG 235)

Clearly, the legitimate object of much nominal cultural policy is the preservation of ‘species’ that would otherwise face extinction in the contemporary mediasphere. Art itself, in its traditional understanding, is presented in *Vie et mort de l'image* as one such endangered species. Unable to impose its existence in a space-time modelled by incessant visual flux and inimical to sustained contemplation, it is ‘assigned to museums, the object of properly ecological care and attention, and of ever more anxious concern on the part of the authorities’ (VMI 214). Art, the medium that in Malraux’s vision would bring meaning to life, is itself now under artificial respiration.

The ‘techno-ethical’ and properly political responsibility to preserve the results of previous cultural technologies is of more than narrowly conservationist import. It goes beyond a (legitimate) principle of charity through

³³ Freud’s classic study *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (1930) [literally: ‘Uneasiness/disquiet/discomfort within Culture’] is translated in the standard edition of his works as *Civilization and its Discontents* (*The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: 1953-73), vol. 21).

which a political order devotes resources to what it might not strictly require (say, ‘art’). In Debray’s videosphere, automatic survival is granted to those messages (of short individual life-span, but generically recurrent) that are ‘fittest’ according to its criteria of selection: image-based, consensual or consensually shocking, directly connected to primary appetites, immediately decodable. But the dominance of such criteria, that separate out in an altogether relative sense ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ messages, is not necessarily in the interest of the social body as such. For without the preservation of processes of mediation that are of necessity slow, deferred, abstract, resistant to ambient pressures, the foundations of that social body will become seriously weakened (if culture is a system of references, what happens when all references become volatile and transitory?). Such processes require the necessary forms of cultural technology to be embedded in corresponding institutions:

Schools, like parliament (now short-circuited by the culture of figures and images), or the form of the [old-style] political party, constitute bases for intellectual operations that are necessarily *slow*. How can such pockets for difficult and decelerated modes of mediation be preserved in a milieu of easy and ultra-rapid mediations? The contemporary crisis in schools proceeds, among other factors, from the divergence and imbalance between the natural slowness inherent in the process of instruction, which is a form of maturation and blossoming, and the technical acceleration of ambient modes of diffusion. It is an imbalance between the written word and the screen, between a letter-based technology that follows slow rhythms and ultra-rapid images and sounds. (*CMG* 244)

It is essential to grasp that Debray does not contest the effects of contemporary technology in the name of a non-technical ‘humanity’, or a faculty of reason inherent in that humanity that technology might corrupt. For Debray, as for the anthropologist of prehistory André Leroi-Gourhan, humanity is constituted as such by its very techniques - from the tools and their traces that set paleolithic humankind apart from other mammals to the invention of writing that, in interaction with the human brain, gives rise to rigorous forms of logical thought. It is this ‘constituting’ capacity that makes the question of techniques so important. At an initial level, older ‘letter-based technologies’ and corresponding institutions may appear of secondary political importance. These technologies of transmission, operating diachronically across generations, may appear less vital and of lower yield than the high-performance and high-speed technologies of communication that rake synchronically across a society (*IM* 207). The political point of Debray’s mediology can be summarized as a warning against an overall cultural policy that neglects our stratified technocultural heritage in favour of a monolithic and short-sighted conception of what constitutes technological ‘performance’.

As a final precaution, it is worth demarcating Debray's position as outlined above from a purely formal concern with heritage as such. Indeed, he discerns what we might call a certain 'heritage panic' generated by the very volatility that gathered pace under the videosphere, and looks to maintain a resolute distance with regard to this response. Mitterand's 'great projects' (*grands projets*), the series of vast and vastly expensive constructions that were supposed to represent an enduring heritage of the present for the future, are regarded with suspicion: 'everyone looks for their own way of rising above the televisual flux, the ephemeral flicker of electron and pixel. When you've given up on making History, there's always the Great Projects' (LS 518). Certainly, in retrospect, there is something resonantly empty about Mitterand's projects: if monuments are, etymologically at least, supposed to remind the onlooker of something, these monuments remind us of nothing so much as one man's desire to institute monuments. Likewise, Debray designates as 'heritage abuse' the prevailing aspiration to preserve as monuments traces of all conceivable forms of human activity before they disappear.³⁴ Not only has such a 'Noah's Ark syndrome' been portrayed as politically unsustainable in the long run (both financially and topographically - once areas have been designated as protected sites, they remain so indefinitely, thereby immobilizing future developments in the name of a fetishised past).³⁵ It can also be understood as a mere symptom of the generalised flux it looks to resist: if everything that is solid is melting into air, so the logic goes, let us preserve anything solid that we can. Anything that lets us remain 'in touch' with the past becomes valuable when everything seems to be taking us away from that past. It may be that Debray is unduly Malthusian in his analysis of this understandable and perfectly legitimate grass-roots response to the very dynamic he himself designates in the contemporary mediasphere. At the same time, it is fair to say that this purely 'indexical' relation to the past (where we aspire to be in touch with the past simply as past) short-circuits more arduous but ultimately more constructive symbolic mediations of history. For the accumulation of past vestiges itself degenerates into one more flux of images. It is a representation of history that follows the logic of the videosphere (juxtaposition without hierarchisation and conceptualisation). Instead of asking the difficult but essential questions of what

³⁴ See R. Debray, 'Le monument ou la transmission comme tragédie', in *L'Abus monumental? Entretiens du Patrimoine, Théâtre national de Chaillot, Paris, 23, 24 et 25 novembre 1998, sous la présidence de Régis Debray* (Paris Fayard/Editions du Patrimoine, 1999), pp. 11-32 (p. 12). The term 'abus monumental', the title of this collective volume, acquired fairly wide currency, and it is worth signalling that Debray explicitly rejects it as far as his own reflection is concerned, preferring to speak of 'a monument-deficit against the backdrop of heritage abuse' (*ibid.*).

³⁵ See Maryvonne de Saint-Pulgent, 'Le patrimoine au risque de l'instant', in *Les Cahiers de médiologie*, 11 (2001), pp. 303-9.

meaningful entities should be selected, ordered and transmitted to subsequent generations, and through which institutions these can be effectively transmitted, it simply seeks to transmit everything it can lay its hands on. In this perspective, it may be that the most valuable legacy worth cultivating are precisely the low-speed ‘technologies of the letter’ that have lost their ascendancy, but that remain the most efficient devices yet invented for creating existential order out of chaos.

Summary and Concluding Remarks

The relations between intellectuals and cultural policy have taken on distinctive forms in France. On the one hand, France saw in 1959 the foundation of the first Ministry for Cultural Affairs in the Western world, to which was attached from the 1960s a research apparatus that Mark Schuster describes in international terms as ‘unique in this field’ due to its accumulated expertise.¹ On the other hand, the majority of French intellectuals over the Fifth Republic have entertained what Keith Reader has called ‘non-Statist’ conceptions of political action. The present study has brought together three atypical thinkers in this regard, who, while not bound by the constraints of purely instrumental governmental research, have cultivated in different ways, as Tony Bennett writes of Raymond Williams, a ‘real entanglement with those agendas of social, political and cultural reform which define the effective horizon of presently existing policy processes and concerns’.²

I traced how the cultural policy thought of these figures emerges against that of André Malraux, an abiding reference in French cultural policy debate. In his 1960s writings on cultural policy, Bourdieu attacked the ‘charismatic ideology of art’ at the heart of Malraux’s thought, and argued in effect for a sociologically ‘rational’ cultural policy. I traced in particular the relation of this work to governmental institutions, and interrogated the ‘rationalism’ that aspired to bring all cultural policy institutions under the sway of the educational establishment. Certeau’s challenge to the Malravian policy model was rather differently directed. He analysed May 1968 as a swarm of ‘uncertified’ voices overrunning the barriers of both cultural and educational institutions. Whatever their political fallout, the events had for Certeau given ephemeral but dazzling visibility to a dispersed, anonymous creative potential, and his cultural policy reflection would set out initially to develop the practical and theoretical consequences of this revelation. Together, the critiques formulated by Bourdieu and Certeau would become classic reference points in French cultural policy debates, and as such could be taken for granted in Debray’s writings of the 1990s. This allowed him to explore the ‘admirable’ if erratic insights of Malraux’s reflection, which could thereby be represented as a resource for cultural policy thought, rather than simply an inert foundation or foil. Of particular relevance in this regard was Malraux’s reflection around the ‘Imaginary Museum’, insofar as this foregrounds the multiple technical

¹ Mark Schuster, *Informing Cultural Policy: The Research and Information Infrastructure* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Center for Urban Policy Research, Rutgers, State University of New Jersey/Pew Charitable Trusts, 2002), p. 59.

² Tony Bennett, *Culture: A Reformer’s Science* (London: Sage, 1998), p. 35.

mediations that condition both the subjective experience and the political deployment of culture.

I then looked to draw out the apparently contradictory strands of Bourdieu's cultural policy reflection, building up a general model of a 'cultural policy field' in which culture itself fulfils a multiplicity of functions. His already critical view of existing policies and policy discourses hardened over the 1970s, as he analysed how such discourses functioned as part of a 'dominant ideology' serving the interests of the dominant classes. In a series of 'barbaric' operations, he consciously discredited what one might call the cultural policy game. His critique takes in at once the objects of that game (legitimate and/or popular cultures), its agents (policy strategists, *animateurs*, artists), and its supposed and disavowed effects. However, there occurred an interesting filtering process when Bourdieu provisionally set aside in the 1980s the unchecked tide of critique for the normative prescriptions of policy discourse. In the educational reports Bourdieu produced for Socialist governments over that decade, cultural policy moves that he had previously derided (such as the artificial creation of cultural needs) were integrated into his recommendations, and he developed an altogether less 'pedagogocratic' model of the relationship between the education system and other institutions and modes of cultural action. Such explicit governmental collaboration would prove the exception for Bourdieu. His habitual move, developed particularly over the 1990s, would increasingly be to mobilize those in the cultural field in order to institute autonomous cultural 'counter-policies'. In a field polarized around a dominant pole of transnational cultural industries and a 'dominated dominant' pole of Nation-State cultural policies, I suggested he introduced supplementary platforms from which to broach issues such as television regulations or the GATS negotiations. Again, such deliberately normative interventions produced interesting displacements of his previous analyses. He forthrightly defended the conditions necessary for producing humanity's 'highest' cultural achievements (while not revoking his earlier exposure of the high cultural game); his earlier hostility to the State was overlaid by a more complex negotiation of the 'antinomies' produced by a will for autonomy that could not escape dependency. This negotiation nonetheless stopped short of endorsing engagement in the (non-academic) apparatuses of that State.

If Bourdieu mapped out with admirable clarity the elements that allowed me to construct a 'cultural policy field', Certeau's work suggested how that field is also swarming with a dispersed political and cultural creativity that Bourdieu would come to recognise, but was less adept at representing. Certainly, as Certeau's anglophone readers would expect, he locates and analyses that creativity as it is to be found in the thick of 'ordinary' social groups. He also, however, shows by example how such creativity can work its effects within the bureaucratic apparatuses of cultural policy planning. In particular, we saw how Certeau linked up over the period 1970-1985 the apparently antinomic poles of

engagement in such strategic bodies and his well-known championing of the tactics through which ordinary users and user-groups can empower themselves. His cultural policy reflection was driven notably by three key concerns: criteria for cultural action (what kind of ‘tactics’ might a progressive cultural policy favour?); issues of ‘representation’ (how might tactical groupings of various kinds be ‘represented’ in such a way that strategic players are forced to take account of them?); and the kinds of experimental institutions and institutional experiments that create an interface between the often polarised worlds of ‘strategies’ and ‘tactics’, or cultural production and cultural appropriation.

Debray’s work allowed me to introduce a further dimension into the representation of the cultural policy field and its functioning. This was constituted by the effects of specifically technical determinations on processes of cultural transmission. The existence of any State requires the diffusion across space and the transmission through time of cultural symbols – in this sense a cultural policy is a ‘transhistorical’ function, whether or not it is explicitly formulated as such. However, the technical instruments for such diffusion and transmission vary through history. Debray therefore posits a series of ‘mediaspheres’ defined by the successive dominance of different instruments and institutions of transmission (the mnemosphere, logosphere, graphosphere, videosphere, and numerosphere). Emerging mediaspheres do not eliminate the elements of previous mediaspheres, but bring them into their gravitational pull. They figure in his reflection not as ‘objects’ with which policy-makers must deal, but as englobing spheres which filter out unviable strategies, while modelling those strategies they select as ‘fittest’. The motive force behind these analyses was not purely academic, but derived, I suggested, from a frustration with both ‘implicit’ and ‘explicit’ socialist cultural policies over the 1980s (when he was a full-time advisor to President Mitterand). In particular, the innovative but in many respects demagogic policy of Jack Lang over the 1980s was described largely as a symptom of that videosphere in which it both swam and finally sank (like a worn-out talk-show formula). Debray’s account was questioned in some respects: he passes over precisely some of the more lasting ‘technical’ achievements of Lang’s administration (such as book pricing, and other innovations with regard to the cultural industries), and is no doubt overly dyspeptic with regard to the often democratizing effects of new cultural technologies. More fundamentally, however, it must be stressed that Debray is not a techno-determinist in a facile sense (one should not associate him too closely with McLuhan). Certainly, following authors like Leroi-Gourhan, Goody, Ong, and also Derrida, he sees techniques (such as writing) as constitutive of rather than opposed to humanity. But this does not mean that, for Debray, the challenge posed by technology for cultural policy is simply a summons to ‘adapt or perish’. On the contrary, the distinctive policy challenge that he articulates is the requirement to preserve the resources of a plural and stratified techno-cultural heritage (including pockets for the ‘slow mediation’ of

ideas, tastes, and programmes) against more superficial but seductive notions of technical ‘performance’.

The three bodies of cultural policy reflection analysed in this study are clearly very different in their emphases and orientations. Having said that, an anglophone reader may well be struck overwhelmingly by what they have in common – both the critical energy which they bring to the issue of ‘cultural policy’ (broadly defined), and the elaboration of their thought in relation to the common references of a cultural policy discourse as it has evolved in France. I have already suggested in the introduction to this study how we can triangulate their reflection with regard to three key ‘moments’ of cultural policy reflection in France as articulated by Augustin Girard: the problematic of cultural democratization (Bourdieu), the problematic of cultural development or cultural democracy (Certeau), and the challenges posed for cultural policy formation by technological mutation (Debray). These ‘moments’ constitute, as it were, the centre of gravity of each writer’s cultural policy thinking. What is important, however, are also the links elaborated between these poles of reflection – thus Bourdieu also elaborates a critique of ‘ideologies’ of cultural development; Certeau, in addition to his critique of classic cultural democratization projects, makes important points concerning the uses of cultural technology that would be of particular relevance for the adjustment of policy to the demands of the ‘numerosphere’; Debray underlines how the nature of what is being ‘democratized’ or ‘developed’ is liable to change as the englobing ‘mediasphere’ in which cultural works and practices partake mutates.

These three bodies of reflection also allow us to build up a complex vision of the ‘field’ in which cultural policies evolve and operate. Bourdieu’s work allowed us to lay out the broad geometry of such a cultural policy field, as well as the diverse functions fulfilled by ‘legitimate’ culture within it. In his explicitly normative interventions, he aspired to introduce a further position into that field from which to negotiate (sometimes rather rigidly) the antinomies of cultural policy. His key priority became to protect the autonomy of the cultural field. As regards this fundamental ‘field analysis’, I would not set the work of Certeau or Debray directly against that of Bourdieu, for there is little in them that falsifies the basic structures of his analyses. However, they do introduce certain principles of ‘heteronomy’ that can be grafted on to Bourdieu’s work as supplementary dimensions of cultural policy reflection. These supplementary dimensions can substantially alter the style, emphases and orientations of cultural policy reflection. Focusing perpetually on the ‘other’ of professionally autonomous cultural production, without for all that lapsing into unqualified populism, Certeau looks for ways in which this domain might be more adequately ‘represented’ in the cultural policy field. Debray, on the other hand, focuses on those techniques and technologies that have often been construed as the ‘other’ of culture, or (in Bourdieu’s work) as secondary to social

determinations. Debray supposes that such technologies work to model and constitute human subjectivity and cultures, and that their deployment sets in motion certain concatenations of consequences. In fact, Debray actually questions the value of the term ‘field’ for his mediological analyses, preferring the more ‘tactile’ and englobing notions of ‘milieu’ or ‘sphere’.³ One might thus conceive the cultural policy field as itself existing within the ‘element’ of a given mediasphere (as a structured web of life develops in the ‘element’ of the sea).

Such an overall framework, as well as much of its constituent detail, may appear remote from the day-to-day or year-to-year demands of policy formation. Yet, as René Rizzardo has suggested, the role of research in such domains is not necessarily ‘directly to propose decisions: it is there to augment our intelligence, our aptitude and capacity to take a decision when we have to.’⁴ Indeed, Antoine Hennion has gone further with regard to understandable demands from politicians and administrators that research supply direct policy-relevant ‘results’:

Those responsible for cultural policies and actions would like to make the DEP [the research unit at the Ministry of Culture] responsible for supplying them simply, on demand, with an accessible and synthetic résumé of the stock of available knowledge with regard to the precise problem they must resolve.

But the common stock of research results from which they would like to benefit in this way does not exist. Research moves along in the wake of evolving situations and problematics, and is itself part of the swirls and eddies which ceaselessly displace words and problems...⁵

I have already discussed in the introduction to this study the distinctive ‘research ecology’ that has emerged around cultural policy issues in France, and that has worked, as Hennion has put it, as ‘a sort of machine that takes up again and transforms the questions that it reformulates.’⁶ It has produced a collectively

³ See e.g. R. Debray et al., ‘105 entrées dans la médiologie’, in *Les Cahiers de médiologie*, 6 (1998), pp. 263-83 (p. 278).

⁴ R. Rizzardo, ‘Valorisation de la recherche, évaluation et aide à la décision’, in *Trente ans d'études au service de la vie culturelle, Table ronde organisée à l'occasion du départ à la retraite d'Augustin Girard, chef du Département des études et de la prospective du ministère de la culture de 1963 à 1993* (Paris: Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, 1993), pp. 55-9 (p. 55).

⁵ A. Hennion, ‘Le grand écart entre la recherche et l’administration’ (Paris: Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, Département des Etudes et de la Prospective, June 1996), 19 pp., p. 1.

⁶ Ibid.

organised testing and probing of cultural policy programmes and horizons. The present study has, for reasons explained, set apart in a kind of artificial echo chamber the cultural policy deliberations of three particular thinkers. Certainly, we can gain by setting aside and scrutinizing in this way specific oeuvres. In the end, however, it is important not to reify them simply as individual stars in our mental firmament, but to refer them to that collective process of intellection that can both develop and delimit them.

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