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Philippe Poirrier and René Rizzardo, *Une Ambition partagée? La coopération entre le ministère de la Culture et les collectivités territoriales (1959 – 2009)*. ‘Travaux et Documents’ series, vol 26. Paris: Comité d’histoire du ministère de la culture, 2009. 526 pp. Notes, Annexes: Outline of Research Programme, Indicative Bibliography, List of Contributors. €30 (pb). ISBN 978-2-11-097541-6.

Review by Lorna Milne, St. Andrews University.

In 2009, the Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication celebrated the foundation, fifty years before, of the Ministère des Affaires Culturelles, an institution created partly as a way of involving the talented and loyal André Malraux in De Gaulle’s ministerial team at the start of the Fifth Republic. The anniversary was marked by resolutely forward-looking celebrations, such as the creation of a special website<sup>[1]</sup> and a high-profile, high-level conference<sup>[2]</sup> launched by the present Minister, Frédéric Mitterrand, and attended by an impressive line-up of cultural policy figures including several former Ministers. The body organising the conference was the Comité d’histoire du ministère de la Culture, a high-powered group of academics, cultural practitioners and civil servants, which has existed since 1993 to promote the works of the Ministry by fostering and publishing research into its history. As part of its remit, the Committee also publishes the series *Travaux et documents*, in which the book under review appeared, also in commemoration of the anniversary.

The volume, to which several members of the Committee contributed, complements the other celebrations. It is first and foremost a historical review, although its tone does often toe the Ministry line in emphasising the modernity of an institution looking towards the future. More contrastingly, while the conference considered high-level matters of philosophy and policy—for example, the nature, value and boundaries of “patrimoine”, and the possibility of a common European cultural policy—the book focuses on the administrative, functional procedures that have been elaborated to implement the vision of the Ministry and bring it to life at the local level over the last fifty years. The volume takes as its premise the Ministry’s goal of “decentralising culture”, implicit from the very moment of its creation in its declared mission to “rendre accessibles les œuvres capitales de l’humanité, et d’abord de la France, au plus grand nombre possible de Français; d’assurer la plus vaste audience à notre patrimoine culturel, et de favoriser la création des œuvres d’art et de l’esprit qui l’enrichissent.”<sup>[3]</sup> The intention of the contributors is to show how this ideal has been institutionalised and fulfilled by policy and procedure.

The study is divided into three main parts followed by a conclusion. In the first, an overview of central-local relations in cultural policy, Guy Saez argues first of all that the accepted narrative of French public policy—highly centralised and vertically hierarchical under Gaullism; in crisis and requiring reform by the 1980s; moving towards models of partnership, horizontal connections and recognition of diversity in the present day—is over-simplistic and requires nuance. Contractual undertakings between the state and the local authority, he points out, have formed the basis for the dissemination of cultural policy since 1945, such that *cultural* decentralisation must be separated from the formal decentralisation of *administrative* authorities as exemplified by the legislation of 1982 and 2004. Characterising “la coopération par le contrat” as a distinctive feature of the French cultural domain from a surprisingly early stage, Saez uses it as the basis of a theory of “action publique”: in his eyes, the contract defining cultural action gives rise to a prototype of the partnership model that is so familiar in many other fields

of social and political action today. Saez's historical overview begins with the period prior to the establishment of the Ministry, takes in the Mitterrand decentralisation of the early 1980s, and addresses the preoccupation with quality assurance of the 1990s, seeking to show that, while collaboration came to be approached and negotiated in different ways, and while its budgetary or administrative instruments had to evolve, the principle of contractual cooperation remained steady throughout. He concludes with a set of interesting questions about the future of collaboration between local authorities, a development he sees as necessary but requiring careful thought in the face of globalisation, budget cuts, European initiatives and so forth.

Saez's analytically substantial contribution is followed by two detailed and more descriptive histories of technical frameworks. Pierre Moulinier traces the chronological development of contractual instruments—the different types and levels of agreement that have been used over time and through successive reforms to create webs linking institutions, authorities, artists and other cultural actors. Following this, Philippe Poirrier, in an essay about the particularities of collaboration between the state and France's great municipal units such as Grenoble, Lyon and Bordeaux, reprises Saez's critique of the mythical "centralised state" narrative, even if he does also show how tightly the early Culture Ministry controlled policy and its implementation in the way it generated initiatives and directed their "decentralised" progress through the local *Préfets*.

The second section of the book, "Regards croisés de partenaires" contains interviews and memoirs by twenty-two individuals who hold or have held office in the "collectivités territoriales" and eighteen who have worked on behalf of the state, many of them in the DRACs (Directions Régionales des Affaires Culturelles), giving an insight into some of the personalities involved in cultural policy as well as their experiences. In keeping with the principle of partnership, the section thus provides a collection of relatively unprocessed participant statements, although their utility to the researcher as examples of "eye witness" or even "oral" history may be limited by the fact that all are accomplished administrators, able to offer a smooth overall perspective and an individual analysis of the strengths of successive bureaucratic initiatives. Part three, organised thematically by sector, offers articles on the theatre, historical monuments, museums, literature, cinema, music, dance, contemporary art, artistic education and the national "Inventaire general" of cultural objects and "patrimoine." Unfortunately, the "Communication" strand of the Ministry's mission—arguably the most contemporary function, even though the appellation was first used in 1978—is missing from these discussions.

Finally, a concluding essay by René Rizzardo acknowledges some minor shortcomings of the present partnership approach—the status of amateur artists, for example, is inadequately accounted for in a system that favours professional cultural partners—but Rizzardo insists more forcefully, once again, upon its flexibility and fruitfulness, emphasising the powerful potential of collaborative action in difficult times and promoting shared *cultural* values as a basis for creativity and solidarity in the face of today's social and economic crises.

To the reader who has the patience for it, the volume's most obvious quality is its wealth of historical information relating to cultural governance at local level, procedures for drawing up partnerships, creating contracts, pursuing inspections and so forth, showing in concrete detail the interaction between policy ideals (and indeed ideology, although that is seldom mentioned explicitly), and the practical art of what is possible on the ground. It will be a solid resource for scholars wishing to observe the dynamics of reciprocal influence between policy and implementation; it will also be of use to those with a particular interest in the history of specific towns, regions or strands of cultural activity, although the inclusion of an index would have greatly enhanced this aspect of the book.

In the end, however, the book suffers from its status as an official publication programmed by (understandable enough) partisan loyalties, and its rather arid register really does not do justice to the fabulous variegation of cultural expression available to French citizens today, nor convey any of the

vibrancy of the “decentralised” cultural activities enabled by the procedures it discusses. More seriously, the volume reveals, in spite of itself, the weak points of its own logic. Its methodology, with the inclusion of “regards croisés”, its tone and its focus all attempt to “dépasser les questionnements centre/périphérie au profit d’approches qui mett[ent] au centre les interrelations entre les pouvoirs publics”[4]: that is, they seek to derive a largely harmonious concert of (pro-partnership, “decentralised”) conclusions from a supposedly diverse array of voices and viewpoints.

Yet only just beneath the surface of this harmony is a strong sense of the tension that runs through each aspect of French cultural policy, from the macro-level configuration of the Ministry to the micro-level composition of the book itself – a tension between a dominant discourse about culture emanating from largely conservative-, male-, metropolitan- and high art-dominated policy-makers and the Comité d’histoire on the one hand; and the desire to devolve, diversify and popularise—to hand culture over to the populace, in all its chaotic variousness—on the other. In the book, this is exemplified by a notable fact. The four Départements d’Outre-Mer of Guadeloupe, Guyane, Martinique and Réunion all qualify as “collectivités territoriales”; all have their own DRACs. They all also have, quite plainly, a number of socio-cultural particularities, and rather special relations with the métropole, which might be expected to raise interesting questions of decentralisation with regard to cultural policy, its implementation, partnerships and dialogue. Yet not one overseas “collectivité” is examined, and none of the cultural actors included in section two of the book has been lastingly associated with cultural action in these “confettis d’empire.” The absence of attention to the most culturally and geographically peripheral “collectivités” can only be seen as a sign of the very centralising impulse the books’ contributors work so hard to deny.

What this book as a whole does not do—and does not aim to do—is to link cultural policy and its implementation to other state objectives, whether international or domestic, nor does it provide a sustained analysis of the role played by cultural policy in the politics of reform leading to administrative decentralisation. That said, this volume will provide material for observers of local politics and administration who do wish to take forward such an analysis. Indeed, research of this kind is entering a new phase: as the Ministry of Culture’s celebrations got underway, autumn 2009 also saw the launch of four “projets de loi”, strongly backed by President Sarkozy, for reform of the “collectivités territoriales.” The Interior Ministry’s strapline “simplifier, adapter, alléger” summarises the government’s aims, which include streamlining local authorities; cut-backs on publicly-funded posts, halving the number of elected general and regional councillors; the transformation of the voting system for elected personnel; and professionalisation of their roles.[5] Much discussed in the year since their launch, the reforms were presented for second readings in the Senate and Assembly in September 2010 and appear on track to come into force in 2014. This radical squeezing of resources will have serious implications for culture along with all other decentralised services. Given its unique history of state-local and inter-regional collaboration, together with a certain capacity to transcend party political lines, cultural action may provide an especially interesting focus for study of the changes to be forced upon local powers in the coming decade.

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## NOTES

[1] <http://www.50ans.culture.fr/50ans/>. All websites cited were accessed in September 2010

[2] See <http://www.culture.gouv.fr/mcc/Actualites/A-la-une/Colloque-du-50e-anniversaire-du-Ministere>

[3] *Décret no. 59-889 sur la mission et l'organisation du ministère chargé des Affaires culturelles*, 24 juillet 1959

[4] Geneviève Gentil and Philippe Poirrier, "Introduction", pp. 17-20, p. 18.

[5] See <http://www.interieur.gouv.fr/sections/reforme-collectivites/>

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