

H-France Review Vol. 14 (January 2014), No. 4

Philippe Poirrier, ed., *La Politique culturelle en débat: Anthologie 1955-2012*. Paris: Comité d'histoire du Ministère de la culture/La Documentation française, 2013. 316 pp. Preface, introduction, bibliography, and index. 15.00€. (pb). ISBN 978-2-11-009246-5.

Review by David L. Looseley, University of Leeds.

This anthology of French cultural policy texts is an updated version of one co-edited by Philippe Poirrier under the same title in 2006.^[1] It joins a long list of impeccably researched publications by the Comité d'histoire du Ministère de la culture, founded in 1993 by the late Augustin Girard and intellectually independent of the Ministry itself. The 2013 version of the anthology contains fourteen new texts out of a total of sixty-one (though the editor mysteriously counts only forty-five) and sacrifices hardly any from the original edition. As a result, it is over 100 pages longer, yet retails at the same very reasonable price as the earlier edition.

Academic interest in French cultural policy has steadily increased since the mid-1990s, in France and elsewhere. Two other anthologies had already appeared before 2006. One substantial volume (637 pp.) from 2002, also edited by Poirrier, brings together a wide range of documents, many of them more technical than discursive.^[2] The other, edited by Jeremy Ahearne and published the same year, is entirely in English (all twenty texts are translated from the French) and focuses exclusively on policy debates.^[3] There was, then, an obvious need for a French-language volume which did the same. Following the lead given by a small number of scholars, mostly Anglophone, who became interested in the idealistic discourses and explosive debates that French cultural policy has given rise to, the Comité d'histoire stepped in to fill this gap.

Six years on, however, an expanded edition is clearly called for, in response to at least two factors. Firstly, in 2009 the Ministry of Culture turned fifty and the anniversary was marked by a good deal of new discussion of its achievements and failings, not least at a major conference organised in Paris for October 2009 by the Comité d'histoire itself. The second factor is the unavoidable interrogation of the Ministry's principles, methods and very *raison d'être* brought about by the digital revolution, increasingly seen as a challenge to "cultural democratisation"—the Ministry's founding mission, lyrically formulated and defended by its first incumbent, André Malraux. Today, it is often argued that this mission has been rendered obsolete by the practically universal access to cultural products made available by downloading (legal or otherwise), streaming, digital TV, and so on. And the vexed issue of the Hadopi law (more accurately known as 'Création et Internet') has nicely illustrated this debate for a number of years.

Poirrier's augmented anthology is not, then, the kind of routine updating designed merely to prolong a publication's commercial usefulness. On the contrary, it is a significant reconfiguration of the original that is meant to accommodate these recent, profound shifts in intellectual and political debates about culture in France. This is precisely what it achieves. The reader can now witness textually how the digital age has parachuted policymakers into a bewildering new landscape, while simultaneously gauging just how dramatic this *dépaysement* has been in light of the very different cultural, intellectual and technological circumstances that prevailed when the creation of a Ministry of Culture was being

envisaged sixty years ago. For the evangelical few who in 1955 were calling for a voluntarist state cultural policy--most notably the former and relatively minor state functionary Jeanne Laurent, viewed today as a visionary in almost all policy histories--and equally for those engaged in inventing one in 1959, the issues at stake were grave.

By today's standards, however, they may sound rather quaint: the debate between 'popular' culture and 'popular' education; the need to grant access to the 'greatest works of humanity'; the depredations among the working class of the 'dream factories' of mass culture; and the idea that remedial 'Houses of Culture' should be created to serve as 'cathedrals' of aesthetic and moral improvement. In this respect, the history of the French state's cultural policies is of a slow coming down to earth, an initially reluctant engagement with practicalities. And in this respect at least, recent efforts under Chirac, Sarkozy and Hollande to grapple with twenty-first-century technologies are the latest chapters in a kind of *Bildungsroman*, an epic saga of apprenticeship.

The texts chosen to illustrate this saga allow us to encounter many of the historic figures of the age: social thinkers and intellectuals (Bourdieu, Certeau, Dumazedier, Finkelkraut), pioneers of the arts world (Jean Vilar, Malraux, Jean Dubuffet, Pierre Emmanuel), historians (Marc Fumaroli, Pierre Nora, Jean-Pierre Rioux) and of course political figures, from presidents (Pompidou, Mitterrand, Chirac, Sarkozy) to culture ministers (Jack Lang, Jacques Toubon, the current minister, Aurélie Filippetti), in addition to other kinds of cultural activist (Jacques Charpentreau, Jack Ralite, the late Jacques Rigaud). Indeed, what the full roll-call of those anthologised here effectively highlights is that cultural policy, very much the poor relation in Britain or the United States, has been at the very centre of modern France's obsessions, struggles and self-image: that is, the Republic's on-going identity crisis in the face of globalisation, diversity and cultural relativism.

Poirrier's augmented anthology, then, provides a valuable resource for understanding contemporary France both for teaching and research purposes. But it also demonstrates the contribution the Humanities can make to the study of cultural policy--a relatively young discipline dominated by economics, sociology, political sciences and policy studies, into which Humanities approaches are still having to elbow their way. It succeeds in doing so partly by demonstrating that a historical understanding of French cultural policy is essential; but also by emphasising the importance of text in arriving at such an understanding. So while it will serve as an invaluable tool for all those analysing cultural policies, it will especially assist those seeking to adopt some of the analytical methods of the Humanities as a means of explicating a field in which, in France at least, the 'cultural' in cultural policy is as important as the policies themselves.

NOTES

[1] Geneviève Gentil and Philippe Poirrier, eds., *La Politique culturelle en débat: Anthologie 1955-2005* (Paris: Comité d'histoire du Ministère de la culture/La Documentation française, 2006).

[2] Philippe Poirrier, ed., *Les Politiques culturelles en France* (Paris: La Documentation française, 2002).

[3] Jeremy Ahearne, ed., *French Cultural Policy Debates: A Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

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ISSN 1553-9172