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Vincent Martigny, Laurent Martin, and Emmanuel Wallon, eds., *Les années Lang, une histoire des politiques culturelles, 1981-1993. Dictionnaire critique*. Paris: La Documentation française, 2021. 589 pp. Bibliography, list of acronyms, and index. €27.00 (pb). ISBN 9-78-2111571068; €17.99 (eb). ISBN 9-78-2111574823.

Review by Susan Collard, University of Sussex.

This is a weighty tome with a big ambition: that of providing a comprehensive (but not exhaustive) coverage of the vast programme of cultural policies and actions led by Jack Lang when he was Minister of Culture. It was planned to mark the fortieth anniversary of the election of the first Socialist President in May 1981 and was made possible by the efforts of the Comité d'histoire, whose mission it is to preserve and make accessible the history of the Ministry of Culture under its various ministers by facilitating research and encouraging publications such as this one.

Lang has been a controversial, even mythical, figure, attracting as much criticism as praise, and this subject has already generated many publications over the years, most of them focusing on the Minister himself and the very significant personal role that he played in putting culture at the heart of politics during the Mitterrand era. This volume takes on a wider remit in seeking to produce a critical dictionary of the Lang years, and to do so it brings together the expertise of fifty-one specialists in the field of cultural history, divided into four parts: "Débats et combats," "Acteurs," "Institutions et pouvoirs," and "Champs, disciplines, secteurs."

Part one offers nineteen entries on a range of debates and controversies that marked this period, such as anti-Americanism, anti-racism, democracy and cultural democratisation, diversity, cultural exception, and gender (a total blind spot of the Lang years). The entries are between three to five pages each plus references. Each one attempts a brief overview of the main elements in the debate, and authors are at pains to point out opposing viewpoints. So, for example, whilst Lang's strong invectives against the threat of an Americanisation of French culture are identified in one of his early speeches in Mexico, and followed through in his opposition to the implantation of Euro Disney and his defence of French cinema (which later became the basis of his largely successful development of the idea of the cultural exception in world trade talks in 1993), the author concludes that the overall result was more symbolic than real, with a marked increase of American series showing on French TV, facilitated by the privatisation of public channels in the late 1980s sponsored by the President. Another example is the discussion of cultural democratisation which makes an important contribution to our understanding of Lang's legacy because it involved a major redefinition of the aims and sphere of intervention of the Ministry of

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Culture, first set out by decree in 1959 when de Gaulle established the ministry for André Malraux. Whereas Malraux had been mainly concerned with bringing what some denigrated as high culture to a broader audience, Lang transformed the ministry's mission to redefine culture as plural, encompassing a vast array of cultural activities such as street art, fashion, the circus, rock music, and rap as well as previously spurned minority, regional, and community cultures. Malraux's emphasis on a vertical, top-down, approach to culture, was thus reconceived under Lang as a horizontal recognition of cultural activity that had almost no limits. However, we learn that here again the final record was questionable: all the evidence shows that rather than broadening the audience to new sections of society, Lang's policies of cultural development simply increased the level of engagement of those already involved in cultural activities.

Part two assesses the roles of sixteen key actors, including Lang himself and the President, François Mitterrand whose choice of Lang as Minister of Culture represented his personal engagement with the goal of increasing the importance of culture at all levels of public policy. On Lang himself, Laurent Martin, whose idea it was to compile this volume, challenges a number of myths propagated about Lang's personality, but then offers only a fairly bland evaluation of his legacy as Minister of Culture, sandwiched in between a sketchy outline of his career before and after this period. Those who want to know more should read Martin's biography of Lang published in 2008.<sup>[1]</sup> On Mitterrand, once again the limitations of space result in a somewhat anaesthetised account, this time by Vincent Martigny, of the President's crucial influence over the cultural politics of the era: although we are reminded of the strong disagreement between the two over the privatisation of TV channels, we learn nothing about the President's motives for this. And although Mitterrand's strong interventionist tendencies are highlighted with regard to his role in overseeing the architectural projects in Paris, the *grands travaux*, nothing is said of the difficult relationship between the two men in this context, particularly over the Grand Louvre, a project from which Lang was marginalised by the appointment of a top civil servant, Emile Biasini, to lead it. We do, however, get a better sense of the tensions in this relationship in the entry on Biasini himself, based on consultation of archives by Thomas Hélie, who observes that the President astutely used the complementarity in their different approaches to ensure the completion of the project in the face of strong opposition. Biasini was one of a number of high-level state administrators to have played an important role in the cultural politics of the Lang years and who are the subject of entries in this section, along with others like Pierre Bergé, Patrick Bouchain, Christian Dupavillon, all of whom made significant contributions in their own personally different ways and whose names will resonate with anyone who is already familiar with the cultural politics of the Lang years.

Part three offers discussion of an eclectic selection of thirty-six institutions (mainly certain ministerial departments and the state-run entities set up around each of the *grands projets*) and powers such as the Administration and the Budget, control over which were vital to the successful delivery of the various policies and projects. It is on the architectural projects that we gain some of the most interesting insights, again from Hélie's research based on archival sources. We learn, for example, that regarding the new National Library that Mitterrand proposed for his second mandate, he "would have preferred a more horizontal design" (p. 213), and that in this case, as with the Grand Louvre, the President used a policy of divide and rule to ensure his own ascendancy over the project. Hélie also points in this context to the "little cohabitation" in 1986-1988 between the new Minister of Culture, François Léotard, and the Prime Minister, Eduard Balladur, over the future of the Grand Louvre. This important interlude is not discussed in the entry under Cohabitation, which describes instead how although Lang was one of only fifty-seven

Socialist deputies to win a seat in 1986, he chose to minimise his parliamentary participation, returning to a Chair in Law, whilst his main focus of activity was as a self-styled shadow minister of Culture, determined to secure the re-election of Mitterrand in 1988 and to regain his Ministry. Other institutions discussed include the French Communist Party, the Socialist Party, the Right, Parliament, and Elysée/Matignon as well as a number of entries relating broadly to the theme of Decentralisation, such as Departments, Towns and Cities, Regions and Francophonie. The entry on Decentralisation must be the longest in the book, but the important question of cultural decentralisation is also approached from the various other territorial perspectives, showing both the achievements and the failures in this complex area where even the policymakers were confused about “who pays for what” (p. 246).

The title of the fourth and final part of the book, “Champs, disciplines, secteurs” is hard to translate, but it covers a collection of thirty-seven entries on traditional disciplines like archaeology, architecture, art history, music, photography, the cinema, and dance as well as less conventional ones like cartoons, street art, popular music, culinary arts, and the circus. These are necessarily short summaries of often big subjects like Museums, Theatre, or Heritage but for those in search of a quick read rather than in-depth analysis, they will serve a useful purpose.

The book ends with biographical details for the fifty-one authors, followed by a list of acronyms and abbreviations, a list of the photographs used to illustrate the different sections, and a further list of individuals named in the texts.

Overall, this volume represents a massive input of work from an impressive range of scholars, and it will be a valuable reference point for all those working on this period, especially those who are not familiar with existing literature. It is however much more of a book for the library shelf than as a personal reader. Priced at twenty-seven euros, it is not expensive, but outside France it will likely only capture the interest of a fairly specialist audience of scholars like myself who still maintain a research interest in this fascinating period of French politics.

#### NOTE

[1] Laurent Martin, *Jack Lang, une vie entre culture et politique* (Paris: Éditions Complexe, 2008).

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