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Cultural policy explicit and implicit: a distinction and some uses

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Abstract: This paper develops a distinction between ‘explicit’ or ‘nominal’ cultural policies (policies that are explicitly labelled as ‘cultural’) and ‘implicit’ or ‘effective’ cultural policies (policies that are not labelled manifestly as ‘cultural’, but that work to prescribe or shape cultural attitudes and habits over given territories). It begins by defining the distinction through reference to a suggestive inconsistency located within the work of the French thinker Régis Debray. It then specifies the distinction further in relation to certain anglophone references in cultural policy studies and wider political thinking (Geoff Mulgan and Ken Worpole, Raymond Williams, Joseph Nye). Finally, it explores the history of laicity in France conceived initially in terms of a conflict between the implicit cultural policies of the Catholic Church and the republican State, as well as certain tensions implied by the realpolitik of laicity.

Keywords: implicit cultural policy, laicity, soft power.

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Many may have been struck by a peculiar oscillation in the status attributed to cultural policy as a sector of public policy action. It can figure successively as a peripheral and as a central component of governmental strategy, as superficial and as fundamental, as decorative or substantial. Certainly, one can use this disparity as a source of legitimate irony. Philippe Urfalino contrasts the ‘duty’ of contemporary ministers of culture to be ‘grandiloquent’ with the meagre and banal reality of their administrative functions (Urfalino, 2004, pp. 390-3). Or one can try to decide once and for all whether cultural policy ‘is’ peripheral or central, at the risk of doing away with that oscillating ambiguity that seems to be one of its abiding features. As an alternative way of grappling with this ambiguity, I tentatively sketched out some years ago a distinction between two broad categories of cultural policy: *explicit* or *nominal* cultural

policy and *implicit* or *effective* cultural policy (Ahearne, 2004, pp. 112-16). Others have suggested that this distinction may have wider uses, and the present article is a first endeavour to explore these.¹

I shall begin by considering the work of Régis Debray insofar as this provides a particularly clear-cut example of the kind of oscillation indicated above, allowing me to develop an initial definition of explicit and implicit cultural policies. I shall then go on to relate these to certain theoretical references within the anglophone literature which may not seem immediately the most obvious, but which allow the basic distinction to be enriched and specified. Finally, I shall ‘test-drive’ the distinction upon a particular terrain – that of French policies for ‘laicity’, which have been important in the shaping of French political and general culture. I would stress that the aim of the article is not to propose any new master paradigm, but simply to add a supplementary principle of discernment to the body of cultural policy studies.

In order to avoid misunderstanding, one should note that the underlying conception of ‘cultures’ in this article is broad. They are taken to signify embodied systems of values and attitudes. The term is thus not synonymous with that of ‘arts’, which denotes the domain of consciously crafted symbolic works, but clearly the relations between the two represent a key preoccupation of cultural policy studies. The article takes cultural policy to constitute not simply a predefined object for cultural history, but also a particular ‘lense’ through which cultural history more generally can be approached. This lense tends to foreground questions that might be discussed in other contexts in terms of ideology and ‘governmentality’ (it brings into focus actions directed at art and culture by agencies looking to modify the behaviour of populations).²

Cultural policy as a transhistorical political function

Régis Debray is sometimes reminiscent of outright satirists of French cultural policy such as Alain Finkielkraut, Marc Fumaroli or Michel Schneider.³ In a chapter of his political autobiography, *Loués soient nos seigneurs. Une éducation politique*, he semi-humorously passes down to an imaginary young political shark the lessons he has learnt at his own expense over his time in political life. Recalling his time as presidential adviser to François Mitterrand in the Elysée palace between 1981 and 1988, he draws up a list of measures that governments can deploy in order to camouflage inaction (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 bullshit' ('les quatre degrés du bidon' – another translation would be 'bluff').⁴ The first degree of bullshit (B1) corresponds to the creation of a 'crisis unit' or 'task-force' (that is 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.

(Debray 1996, pp. 375-6)

Debray is clearly critical of the rhetorical inflation that he associates with Jack Lang's policy style in the 1980s (and also to an extent with André Malraux's heady outpourings in the 1960s).⁵ In part, this is because, over and above the differences between the two ministers, Debray mistrusts their common emphasis on spontaneity and image at the expense of education and literacy. But it is also because, during the 1980s, Debray became frustrated as he saw what should in his eyes have been a 'minor' domain of government being given undue prominence due to its capacity to supply the media with a regular supply of arresting images (Debray 1993, p. 31). Cultural policy is thus represented in such moments of his thought as a gaudy decoy designed to divert the attention of the public from the government's incapacity to undertake more substantial action.⁶

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 can be 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):⁷

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 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. (Debray 1980, pp. 24-5)

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. Any political order 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.

The point of the preceding paragraphs has not been to criticise Debray for inconsistency in terminological usage across different works. The extracts discussed are revealing instead of a wider fluctuation in the scope generally attributed to the term. They

may well lead us initially to ask whether cultural policy is indeed superficial or fundamental. A first response to this apparent contradiction might be to underline appearance-management (concern with surfaces) as an essential task in the preservation of political power (concern with fundamentals).

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 excessive historical sweep (though it is also this that can provide us with a heuristic framework through which to bring out 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.⁸ The deployment of these two terms can 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 policy (the effective impact on the nation’s culture of its action as a whole, including educational, media, industrial, foreign policy, etc.).

‘Explicit’ cultural policies will often identify ‘culture’ quite simply with certain consecrated forms of artistic expression, thereby deflecting attention from other forms of policy action upon culture. Within the domain of ‘implicit’ cultural policies, one might distinguish also between the unintended cultural side-effects of various kinds of policy and

those deliberate courses of action intended to shape cultures but which are not expressly thematised as such. It is true that policies are usually conceived as deliberate strategic courses of action, but these can usefully be analysed in terms of the patterns of neglect or inattention they imply.

While the founding of a new political order requires the organisation of a culture, one should stress that the perpetuation of this order is only possible through the successful transmission across time of that culture. And 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, and perhaps even prey to bouts of independent thinking...). Cultural transmission, then, is a complex political operation in its own right, and will not take place without some kind of effective policy for culture. In this sense at least, cultural policies are indeed central, fundamental and substantial.⁹

Locating cultural policy: related reflections

The difficulty is, of course, that the most strategically effective forms of cultural policy are not always the easiest to discern as such. Geoff Mulgan and Ken Worpole alerted us long ago to the fact that the cultural policies doing most to shape national cultures were not being framed within bespoke government departments but in the boardrooms of powerful transnational commercial organisations such as (in the 1980s) Virgin, News International or Benetton (Mulgan and Worpole 1986, p. 9). To use the terms I am developing here, effective

cultural policies were not necessarily to be found exclusively in the governmental sphere where they were made explicit. Such policies (strategic courses of action designed to prescribe and shape cultural practices) were also framed within the field of capitalistic commerce, where they remained largely implicit (they were seldom unfolded and discussed *qua* cultural policies within the public sphere).

The lesson of Mulgan and Worpole was thus that the most important forms of cultural policy were not always where people thought that they were. But I do not want simply to superimpose the distinction between the explicit and the implicit on to oppositions between governmental and commercial or public and private policies for culture. For the terms can be subjected to more interesting permutations. As it becomes more routine to think about large transnational enterprises having cultural policies of their own, it can become enlightening to distinguish between those of their policies that are explicit and those that are implicit. Microsoft has its educational programmes and Google has its programme to digitalize the works of the world's heritage. But these are not the courses of action that will do most to prescribe and shape cultural practices over the coming decades, which revolve instead around hidden software codes, recording of web usage, and the exploitation of the knowledge thereby acquired within large economies of scale. Conversely, just because many governments now have explicit cultural policies does not mean that they do not also have policies implicitly geared to the prescribing and shaping of cultures. The French government has had since 1959 a prominent Ministry for Culture, but other governmental programmes over the last two centuries (notably education, or policies for laicity, or television privatisation over the 1980s, or support for EuroDisney) have done much more to shape effective French culture. The USA is said to have a minimal cultural policy based on (substantial) foregone tax income; but as we shall see below, direct and indirect American

endeavours to take its values to the rest of the world go significantly beyond the reach of such explicit programmes.

Raymond Williams devised in 1984 a category of cultural policy as ‘display’ which, again, captured nicely the fact that policies doing most to preserve or inflect cultural attitudes may not be those nominally attributed to ‘culture’. It is worth quoting Williams at length here:

You don’t have to look very far in any particular society to see a culture which is not recognised as a cultural policy or an arts policy specifically, but which is culturally concerned with display. [...]. It is genuinely difficult watching the state opening of Parliament not to realize that one is in the presence of performance. The fact of an overlap between performance, which in a sense is quite analogous to theatre, and the actual display of certain aspects of state power, is there. Now, one may be very conscious of some of the eccentricities of the British constitution in this respect but in fact most States have this kind of public panoply – their changing of the guards.

(Williams 1984, p. 3)

Jim McGuigan fruitfully develops Williams’ insight by drawing up a distinction between ‘cultural policy as display’ and ‘cultural policy proper’ (McGuigan 2004, pp. 61-91).¹⁰

Whereas the former is characterised by various kinds of public panoply and the instrumentalization of cultural resources for political and economic purposes, the latter attends to the ‘proper’ object of cultural policy (defined by McGuigan as aiding the ‘democratic practices of art, culture and the media’ (p. 63), though others may define this differently).

Paradoxically, McGuigan identifies the function of ‘display’ predominantly with an ‘implicit’ pole of cultural policy insofar as it is not explicitly rationalised as pertaining to cultural policy (pp. 64-5). It is ostentatiously manifest but its function and supports are not perceived (McGuigan cites Edgar Allen Poe’s ‘purloined letter’ (p. 70)).¹¹ Thus he discusses incisively how something as prominent as the construction of a EuroDisney site near Paris in the 1980s received ongoing governmental support but scarcely figured in discussions of French cultural policy (pp. 69-70). However, I think we should avoid again superimposing two sets of categories, and conflating in this case ‘implicit’ cultural policy with cultural policy as ‘display’ and ‘explicit’ cultural policy with cultural policy ‘proper’. If we preserve permutational flexibility in our use of the terms, it allows us to pick up more shades and nuances in the messy and always rather ‘improper’ realities of culture and politics. For example, display functions seem to be explicitly built into the most ‘proper’ of cultural policy institutions – think of the very appellations of ‘flagships’ like the Royal Shakespeare Company, the English National Opera, the Royal Ballet, and the rationales adduced in cases for their funding (‘showcasing’ national talent, etc.). Conversely, what may characterise some implicit policies for the shaping of culture is not display but the resolutely covert nature of their operations. And they may, furthermore, busy themselves precisely with ‘proper’ objects of culture such as arts and letters – take, for example, the support of the CIA for organisations like the Congress for Cultural Freedom during the Cold War.

If implicit or effective cultural policy is defined as the endeavour by strategists to shape cultural attitudes and practices over their territory or that of their adversaries, then it brings us into the domain of what Joseph Nye has called ‘soft power’ (Nye 2004). He contrasts this with the operation of such ‘hard power’ resources as military might and economic superiority:

If I am persuaded to go along with your purposes without any explicit threat or exchange taking place – in short, if my behaviour is determined by an observable but intangible attraction – soft power is at work. Soft power uses a different type of currency (not force, not money) to engender cooperation. (Nye 2004, p. 7)

Informed by an acute sense of the problems engendered by America's overreliance on military and economic power, Nye argues in effect that 'soft' power is actually 'hard' in at least two senses: it can secure desired outcomes (which he posits as the purpose of power in the first place), and it is difficult to wield effectively. The soft power of a nation – its image and attractiveness to others - depends in his analysis on three broad factors: 'in part on culture, in part on domestic policies and values, and in part on the substance, tactics, and style of [its] foreign policies' (Nye, p. 68). Of these, in his terms, the 'policies' mentioned and their presentation are most susceptible to government control, whereas the 'culture' is the most difficult to control directly. Interestingly, from our perspective, he does not integrate his categories by speaking of cultural policy as such, or even of policies for culture. But this is the stuff with which he is dealing throughout the book, and he addresses within a geopolitical perspective a number of difficulties or antinomies with which students of cultural policy will be familiar.

Firstly, a government's explicit commitment to a given cultural corpus or programme can in itself be a kiss of death: 'postmodern publics are generally sceptical of authority, and governments are often mistrusted' (Nye, p. 113). Indeed this mistrust is reinforced when covert policy operations such as that alluded to above by the CIA (Nye, p. 115) – or more recent distortions of intelligence material - are exposed and thus become counterproductive. Of course, one could contend that the real arm of American implicit cultural policy is the

export wing of its massive film and entertainment industry. But Nye argues that the industrial logic of this commercial policy does not always serve American interests as effectively as both its defenders and attackers sometimes imagine:

Some sceptics have concluded that Americans should accept the inevitable, and let market forces take care of the presentation of their culture and image to foreigners. Why pour money into the Voice of America when CNN, MSNBC, or Fox can do the work for free? But such a conclusion is too facile. Market forces portray only the profitable mass dimensions of American culture, thus reinforcing foreign images of the United States as a one-dimensional country. (Nye, p. 113).

Thus Nye's geopolitical concerns force him to negotiate the familiar Scylla and Charybdis of cultural policy thought – the explicitly stated directives of State cultural control and the commercially channeled mechanisms of the cultural marketplace. Neither, he argues, can produce effective cultural policy (or 'public diplomacy') in current global conditions.

Such proposals as he does advocate can appear more paradoxical or perverse, depending on one's point of view. He notes that aspects of general American culture that have proved attractive have been those that demonstrate freedom from direct control – 'the absence of policies of control can itself be a source of attraction' (Nye, p. 17). This can extend not just to the realm of free culturo-commercial enterprise, but also to protest movements and the like. The problem here for government is of course (and it is a genuine antinomy) how implicitly to instrumentalise the non-instrumental, governmentally to stage something as ungovernmentally staged. Other policies that he believes have the capacity actually to work are policies whose immediate explicit benefits are the condition of their long-term implicit cultural goals. They include university exchange programs (dollar for

dollar, in Nye's view, the most efficacious of all such policies), or the sending abroad of American doctors, teachers, etc.. Whatever one makes of such interplays between manipulation and generosity, openness and instrumentalization, it seems likely, as Nye notes, that among the various sources of power (military, economic, soft), the influence of soft power in the mix is likely to increase (Nye, p. 30). Explicit governmental cultural policies may be of limited efficacy within that transnational cultural space 'where power is widely distributed and chaotically organised among state and non-state actors' (Nye, p. 4), but to relinquish any aspiration to influence within this space will be perceived by strategists as handing over control to their adversaries. In this context, one might expect implicit cultural policies to grow in importance, reach, and subtlety.

A test-drive: laicity.

We saw above that policies designed to shape and transmit cultural practices are not recent inventions. Régis Debray has noted that the most successful institution for cultural transmission in world history, if we were to adopt longevity as a criterion of evaluation, has been the Catholic Church. I would like in this final section to explore a policy that was designed precisely to oppose the hold of the Catholic Church over the culture of a nation – that of 'laicity' in France.¹² This will allow us to 'test-drive' the notions of implicit and explicit cultural policies in two broad modes. The first mode we might call purposefully 'anachronistic'. This means reaching back behind the contemporary coining of the term 'cultural policy' to explore how sets of policies that could not be thematised in these terms can nevertheless be usefully understood as implicit forms of cultural policy.¹³ This has more than a purely speculative value: it reminds us that the problems and questions confronting

contemporary cultural policies have a long history, and are best understood when placed in a long-term comparative framework.¹⁴ Moreover, while laicity policies during the long nineteenth century could not be formulated expressly as ‘cultural’ policies, they certainly were expressly formulated, and they allow us to probe not just one historical form of culture-shaping strategy, but also the very relations between what is ‘explicit’ and what is ‘implicit’ in government policies for culture.

The second broad mode of test-drive we might call ‘anapostic’ (if ‘anachronism’ means deploying a concept in the ‘wrong’ time, ‘anapostic’ would mean deploying a concept in the wrong place). Laicity today is not generally perceived as forming part of French ‘cultural policy’. But not only is it a significant dimension in governmental endeavours to shape an overall national culture (one could make the case even more forcefully for a country like Turkey). One can also trace how it is discussed by leading thinkers in the French ‘laicity wars’ in terms which are very much those of cultural policy debates.

Olivier Roy distinguishes laicity from secularization by reference to its explicit status as a public policy:

Secularization is not antireligious or anticlerical: one simply ceases to practice or talk about religion, it is a process. Laicity, by contrast, is explicit: it is a political choice that deploys its authority and the power of the law to define the place of religion. Laicity is decreed by the State, which thereby organises public space. (Roy, 2005, pp. 19-20).

Laicity therefore originally countered the authoritarianism of the Catholic Church with an authoritarianism of its own that laid down limits to the cultural reach of the Church. But

laicity should not be reduced to this once necessary authoritarian component. Indeed, one can find in the work of its early architects a desire precisely to free minds from any arbitrary authority. The French revolutionary thinker and politician Condorcet did not coin the term itself, but is commonly seen as the founder of the concept in his insistence that members of the clergy should not be permitted to teach in state schools. But he was equally hostile to what he saw as the attempts of Robespierre and his followers to found an alternative ‘political religion’ in which the Constitution itself should become so many articles of faith, and in which truth itself should be inculcated ‘in the manner of’ prejudice (Condorcet 1994 (1791), pp. 93-6; and Baczko 2000). For Condorcet, even and especially the Constitution should be presented to people’s ‘reason’, that is as just one possible combination of elements (Condorcet 2000 (orig. 1792), p. 217). It should, in other words, be fully explicated rather than remain an object of implicit faith. One might describe Condorcet’s approach in this regard in terms of maximalist explication. All should be removed from the ‘folds’ (*plis*) of secrecy and sacrality and rendered publicly testable and debatable by the people (the *laos*). One can see how this utopian strain in ‘laicist’ thinking was taken up by Ferdinand Buisson, who did frame the word as an official substantive (Buisson 1882) and who, as director of primary education in France between 1879 and 1896, was responsible in large part for its political implementation:

A society inspired by the method [of free thinking] has as its first duty to remove from its public services (administration, justice, education, social aid, etc.) any institutionally religious character, by which we should understand that it must render them neutral not just as regards the established religions, but [...] exclude from them any explicit or implicit dogmatism. Full State laicity is the pure and simple

application of free thinking to the collective life of society. (Buisson 1918, pp. 199-200 (from a 1904 declaration)).

Like Condorcet, Buisson was concerned that the State should not replace religion with an obligatory ‘creed’ of its own, and saw assertive atheism as a further ‘dogmatism’ that should not be transmitted as governmentally backed truth. But, as he himself was well placed to know, the application of laicity had been neither ‘pure’ nor ‘simple’.

Its implementation could not be idealistically pure nor politically simple because it was in direct opposition to a formidable and firmly rooted pre-existing cultural policy apparatus. In the words of Edgar Quinet, writing in vain in 1850 against the reactionary and clerical backlash that would swallow up the short-lived Second Republic, the organisation of the Church called logically not for verbal denunciation but for the counter-organisation of a strong State, which could be the only riposte for nations ruled by ‘sacerdotal castes’ that would not relinquish willingly the ‘full and entire government of your conscience’ (Quinet 2001, pp. 104, 73). When he came to implement the principles developed by Quinet in more propitious circumstances several decades later, Buisson would describe the Church (and specifically, here, its teaching orders) as ‘one of the most astonishing apparatuses of intellectual and moral, social and religious pressure that has ever been forged in this world’ (Buisson 1918, p. 111 (orig. 1902)). And he would contrast – perhaps somewhat disingenuously – its panoply of resources for the propagation of the faith (its soft power arsenal) with the apparent poverty of his own camp:

Those who established religious schools could base their work on the foundation of agreed dogmas, hierarchical superiors, a clergy, an inspired book, an infallible authority, and everything necessary to buttress human frailty, whereas we had nothing

but our faith in human nature, liberty, and the mysterious affinity between the spirit of man and truth, beauty and justice. (Buisson 1918, p. 233 (orig. 1910))

Buisson's narrative is not entirely without foundation, and reflects for example Quinet's late exile and his own early isolation (Hayat 1999, pp. 7-20). But we should not become entirely absorbed in his lay spiritualist idiom. When it came to countering ecclesiastical 'propaganda' with explicitly conceived lay 'propaganda' (cf. Buisson 1918, p. 209), the battle was not one purely of ideas, but rather of two full fledged cultural policy apparatuses – that of the Catholic Church and that of the newly consolidated republican State.

From the beginning, effective policies for laicity were framed in considerably more directive modes than the arch-liberal (and important) declarations of Condorcet and Buisson might suggest. The purpose was both to destroy the hold of the Church and to set something in its place (lest a vacuum precipitate a return to a more reassuring place). An attractive and appealing positive cultural content was required. As Mona Ozouf wrote of the educational thinking of French eighteenth-century revolutionaries, they endowed school with 'the mission of imagining a system of beliefs capable of bringing now independent individuals to live and cohere together, if possible giving these beliefs a degree of seduction and force comparable to those of the religion whose yoke they had just shaken off' (quoted in Baubérot 2004, p. 51). The implicit policy task of replacing one culture with another was, of course, not so easily accomplished even when the appeal to sensibility was overlaid upon faith in critical reason. A century later, Buisson would note in 1902 that the Church could not be left with a 'monopoly' of the 'poetic' dimension of education (thereby perhaps acknowledging the unviability of a policy of pure demystificatory or explicatory reason) (Buisson 1918, p. 147). Indeed he would go considerably further in developing a positive cultural content for lay schooling, becoming something of a prophet for what Williams and McGuigan would

perhaps see as a ‘cultural policy proper’ when he declared in the Chamber in 1910 that France ‘owed’ all its children, and not just an elite, the ‘full sum of human culture’ (Buisson 1918, p. 243).

It is all to his credit, but to remain within the writings of Buisson would give one an insufficient sense of the *Realpolitik* of implicit cultural policy warfare that developed in France during the nineteenth century and that has to some extent flared up again in the early twenty-first century under the auspices of laicity. The principle of pure laicity as developed above, based on maximalist ‘explicitation’ and the development of a ‘universalist’ positive cultural content for transmission, may quite rightly appeal to intellectuals, but they would have been unlikely to have exerted sufficient political and cultural traction to overturn the entrenched hold of an ecclesiastical hegemony. Laicity (a juridico-philosophical principle and its logical consequences) is not quite the same thing as *laïcisme* – the politico-cultural complex that secured enough adherence to overcome clericalism by 1905 (date of the formal separation of Church and State) (cf. Rémond 2005, p. 110). Laicism did have a basic philosophical creed (nineteenth-century French positivism), and more importantly bathed in a potent mix of republican nationalist symbols and references: French primary school children in the 1880s were not just being taught history when they were being taught history. The challenge facing French bourgeois republicans from the late 1870s was to acculturate the French nation into their self-consciously modern framework, notably through the establishment of universal state primary education and the instrumentalisation of newly affordable daily newspapers.¹⁵

Laicism appears to us now, like faith in Science, Progress, Medecine, Communism or Art, as one of the ‘secular enchantments’ that took the place of religion and that held sway over much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Baubérot 2004). Historical experience,

as Marcel Gauchet has noted, has stripped these terms of their capital letters, and left us disenchanted even with these substitute enchantments (Gauchet 2002, p. 39). They have become banalised and appear either as impasses or as complex problems in their own right rather than as unidirectional vectors of human development or salvation. Laicity, as Gauchet has noted, has lost its metaphysical charge due to the decline in the power of the Church, its erstwhile adversary and foil. It seemed by the mid-1980s to have become largely flattened as an issue around which competing culture-shaping policies might mobilize. However, it is striking to note how the increasing visibility of Islam in France since 1989 has reactivated the term and inserted it into a new form of cultural conflict. Commenting on the context of the 2004 law banning ostentatious religious symbols in French schools and the centenary celebrations of the 1905 law separating Church and State, Alain Renault noted a

marked slippage [...] in the reflex action of republican references to laicity: inevitably, in this new context, it was a question not so much of separating Church and State (the 1905 law marked the end of that struggle [...]), but of reflecting the republican community that France wishes to be against the threats of disintegration produced by a religion, Islam, that also in this instance functions as a culture. (Renaut and Touraine 2005, p. 12).

Interestingly, Renault sees the issue very much in terms of a broad cultural policy framework (though one should stress this is not an issue that would come into our field of vision if we retained only what came under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture). He is highly critical of the 'pathos' surrounding references to the term 'laïcité' in French. He views such references as multiply determined, for they serve not simply to regulate the place of religion within contemporary France, nor even just to dramatise the construction of national identity.

They also give indirect expression to the desire to eject from the nation certain categories of citizen or cultural practice. Their cumulative effect is interpreted by Renaut as a deliberate obstacle designed to obstruct moves to develop a ‘policy of recognition’ with regard to ‘cultural and linguistic diversity’ (Renaut and Touraine 2005, pp. 53, 38).

It is true that some participants in the debate argue that laicity should be construed in purely juridical terms (e.g. Roy 2005, pp. 160-1), or that laicity is not an issue for partisan cultural struggle because it involves by definition taking a critical view of all cultures, humanist, nationalist, or religious (Pena-Ruiz 2003). But it is striking that some of the most politically astute of Renaut’s opponents in this regard adopt like him an implicit cultural policy framework within which to address the issue. Régis Debray is neither a doctrinaire nor an idealising laicist. He wrote in 2002 a report for the then Education Minister Jack Lang arguing that the national curriculum should make more space for the lay teaching of religious content, as levels of ignorance regarding religion (*l’inculture religieuse*) were impeding pupils’ understanding both of Western and other cultural traditions (Debray 2002). In the open letter he wrote to the Stasi commission in 2004, he gave emphatic support to the principle of laicity as a means of bringing people adhering to different belief-systems to cohere within a single republic (Debray 2004). However, he stressed that it was not enough to consolidate and/or refine its juridical basis. What governments would have to do would be to bring people to adhere to and identify with laicity as a kind of second-degree community or culture over and beyond the primary groups and cultures to which they were affiliated. This could only happen if work was carried out at a specifically cultural level, via the dissemination of shared narratives, symbols and reference points (anglophone readers may well think of Benedict Anderson’s ‘imagined community’ or Bhikhu Parekh’s ‘community of communities’). In Debray’s words, ‘laicity will be a culture or it will be nothing at all’ (Debray 2004, p. 37). In our terms, it requires an effective cultural policy.

The purpose of this article has been to open up rather than close down perspectives. For some readers, I am sure that I will have opened things up too widely, and thrown cultural policy studies way beyond its historically legitimate expertise in arts subsidy and regulation. But as stated above, ‘culture’ cannot be assumed to be synonymous with ‘the arts’ (why have two words for the same thing?). And the name of our discipline invites us to explore those areas where policies (strategic courses of action) and cultures (embodied systems of attitudes and values) collide and intersect, whether or not these or other terms are used to describe and mask the processes involved. Besides which, researchers in cultural policy studies will be very familiar with some of the problems that a writer like Joseph Nye runs into when he considers the difficulties of wielding soft power, or that Régis Debray encounters when he considers how to re-embed a culture of laicity within France. The very scepticism they may have acquired with regard to voluntaristic cultural programmes represents valuable input in this regard. But to ignore such strategically interesting nexes of culture and policy simply because they do not bear the appropriate labels or crop up in familiar administrative sectors seems myopic.

I would like to close by freeing up a little further the categories I have developed in this paper. The point I have looked to make is that the actual impact of policy upon culture may not always be where we are accustomed to look for it. I have thus suggested that effective culture-shaping policies have often existed in implicit or unthematized mode, and should be distinguished from explicit or ‘nominal’ cultural policies. But that is not to say that explicit cultural policies cannot be effective in their own terms (it must have happened occasionally...). Or that implicit cultural policies cannot be ineffective (that has certainly happened).

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NOTES

¹ The distinction has been taken up in the *International Journal of Cultural Policy*'s definition of its aims and scope, and was likewise deployed in the call for papers of the Fifth International Conference on Cultural Policy Research held at Istanbul in 2008. I am grateful to Oliver Bennett for first suggesting that the distinction could be more comprehensively developed, and for his comments, along with those of David Looseley and Clive Gray, on earlier drafts of this paper.

² For the application of Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality to the study of cultural policy, see Tony Bennett, 1998.

³ Cf. Finkelkraut 1987, Fumaroli 1992, Schneider 1993. On pamphlets targeting cultural policy as a 'genre' emerging towards the end of Lang's period of ministerial office, see Dubois 1999, 293-8.

⁴ On 'bullshit' in cultural policy discourse more generally, cf. Belfiore 2008.

⁵ Jack Lang was Mitterrand's Minister of Culture between 1981 and 1986 and then again between 1988 and 1993.

⁶ It should be noted that Debray's critique is formulated in a less *ad hominem* manner than others. He observed that Lang was one of the few ministers he knew who devoted himself wholeheartedly to his brief (rather than seeing this as a staging post to higher things). He has also gone beyond the *bien-pensant* irony that Malraux routinely provokes to explore the considerable if elliptic insights contained in his work (see Debray 1986, pp. 109-46, and 1999, 179-190).

⁷ For a succinct overview, see Jones 1994, pp. 48-73.

⁸ Two of the most stimulating studies of French cultural policy to have appeared over recent years have adopted for methodological purposes – and justifiably, given the results it produces – what I have defined here as a nominalist approach – see Urfalino 2004 (cf. notably pp. 9, 13-14) and Dubois 1999 (cf. notably pp. 7-8). This should not discourage us from using the term in a broader sense.

⁹ Although he does not use the terms, there is in Debray's oeuvre much that can enlighten us on the procedures and conditions of 'effective' or 'implicit' policies of cultural transmission, from those of the French State since early modern times (e.g. Debray 1993) to those of the Catholic Church since its foundation (e.g. Debray 1991, pp. 123-57 and Debray 1992, pp. 75-107). For a synthesis, see Ahearne 2004, pp. 112-36.

¹⁰ McGuigan actually attributes this distinction to Williams, but Williams does not seem to have used it himself.

¹¹ The reference here is to Edgar Allen Poe's classic 1844 short story 'The Purloined Letter'.

¹² On the Catholic Church as an agent of implicit cultural policy, see, in this volume, O. Bennett (2009).

¹³ Insofar as this approach might need legitimatory authority, cf. John Dewey's analogous deployment of the term 'State' and his associated comments in Dewey 1989 (1927), pp. 65-6.

¹⁴ Cf. Belfiore and Bennett, 2008.

¹⁵ On the republican educational reforms of the 1870s and 1880s, see e.g. Mayeur 2004, pp. 581-608; on the role of affordable national and provincial newspapers, see Martin 1997, pp. 15-107.