

# **The Return of the Social: French Cultural Policy and Exclusion, 1993-2003**

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## **Abstract**

The paper is concerned with the social exclusion agenda in contemporary French cultural policy and investigates the hypothesis that a recurring social agenda for cultural policy has been a driver of policy change. It also explores the relevance of aspects of postcolonial theory to an understanding of that agenda. The tensions involved in recent attempts to evolve policies addressing interculturalism, integration and 'emergent' cultures (such as hip-hop) while also staying true to the French republican tradition of universalism and consensus are illuminated by France's problematic relationship with its colonial past.

*NB. Provisional version: please don't quote.*

## **Keywords**

France, exclusion, postcolonialism, urban cultures.

Since the early 1990s, the French government's cultural policy has been marked by a partial return to social preoccupations, after two decades during which these had generally been subordinate to artistic and professional ones. This return, which has primarily taken the form of a developing social exclusion agenda, is still in its infancy and its impact on policy should not be exaggerated. But its real significance goes beyond its material manifestations. As in other countries, the exclusion agenda has come about pragmatically, as a way of justifying public expenditure on the arts when the value of art for its own sake no longer holds good. But this is not, I suggest, the only motive. In this paper, I shall argue that in France the social exclusion agenda raises fundamental issues about contemporary culture and that these issues need to be understood in broadly postcolonial terms.

I should state at the outset that I am not a card-carrying postcolonial theorist; nor do I have a particularly sophisticated or original take on the theory. It is simply that postcolonialism suggests itself as a way of re-examining French cultural policy now that an exclusion agenda has been developed within it, since in France that agenda has a strongly ethnic dimension due to the successive waves of migration from former African colonies that took place between the 1950s and 1970s. By a 'postcolonial' perspective, I mean one that represents France's domestic and colonial histories as indivisible. The development of the French empire gave rise to the familiar asymmetrical binaries of centre and periphery, the 'French self' and its 'other'. Postcolonial theory deconstructs such oppositions, showing that in reality 'the evolution of the contemporary world is

characterized by a process of hybridization', in which 'Africa and Europe are inextricably linked through their shared histories'; and that, for this reason, 'coming to terms with colonialism is an integral part of understanding contemporary France' (Murphy 2002, p.178-9). However, both French public discourse and French historiography have until recently been reluctant to undertake such a 'coming to terms', which has hindered what Todorov calls 'the establishment of a new cultural identity' (Murphy 2002, p.179). Where the history of cultural policy is concerned, this neglected theoretical framework—neglected by virtually all researchers, including myself—can be especially illuminating. Not only does it allow cultural policies for inclusion to be understood as attempts to move on from a neo-colonial mindset, but it also helps draw out the problems and paradoxes of these attempts. The paper will therefore approach the social exclusion agenda—its development over time and the discourses surrounding it today—as a laboratory in which new conceptions of cultural policy are being tried and tested.

## **The Development of a Social Exclusion Agenda in Cultural Policy**

Once one starts to look, cultural interventionism and colonial ambition can be seen to have been conjoined in France for centuries. Although cultural policy only properly began in 1959 with the creation of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs under André Malraux, as far back as the sixteenth century French culture—literature, language and, from the Revolution, education—became a vector of national identity just as France became engaged in overseas conquests (Parker 2003, p.95). More explicitly, from the early nineteenth century, culture was enlisted in a double-edged 'civilising mission': to consolidate the French empire abroad, and to unify a fractious population at home. In both locations, this mission was justified by reference to Enlightenment universalism. It was therefore no coincidence that De Gaulle's return to power in 1958 initiated both the reluctant loss of Algeria and a voluntarist, state-driven cultural policy: the latter compensated for the former by asserting France's international might in a different register.

A social mission of sorts was written into that voluntarist policy from the first by Malraux and his team, in the form of what became known as 'cultural action', or 'democratisation': taking professionally produced excellence in the traditional arts and heritage to those cut off from them by social background or geographical location. A postcolonial perspective illuminates this mission in a variety of ways. First, as happened throughout the French bureaucracy at this time, some of the new Ministry's senior personnel were drawn from the former colonial civil service. Second, cultural policy became central to the notion of '*francophonie*', a political project designed after decolonisation to create a mutually supportive community of French-speaking nations, with France squarely at its centre. From 1969, when Malraux was sent to the first international conference of Francophone states, to today, with both the French Ministry of Culture and the wider Francophone community mobilised in France's battle for cultural diversity in the face of global standardisation, artistic, linguistic and foreign policies have gone hand in hand.

Third, cultural policy may be seen as a vector of the capitalist modernisation of France in the 1950s and 1960s analysed by Ross (1995), a process to which, in her account, the drama of decolonisation is integral. The rhetoric of modernisation, she argues, was in fact a revisionist attempt to slam the door on France's colonial past as the empire was being dismantled. Lured by a culturally and economically expansionist America, the French state doggedly promoted forward-looking material values, in particular domestic hygiene and the privatised speed and convenience of the modern automobile, even though this placed France in a pseudo-colonial relationship with the USA, which could only be resented as such because France's own sense of itself as a coloniser remained

intact. Therefore, in Ross's view, the denial of the colonial dimension of French national identity helps make sense of the 'peculiar contradictions' (Ross 1995, p.7) of French modernity in the 1960s. One of its consequences today is social exclusion, since denial produced a 'logic of segregation and expulsion' (Ross 1995, p.196) with regard to African-immigrant communities. The imported labour force that had made post-war modernisation possible but without benefiting from it, was moved with its dependents from the urban shanty-towns in which it had settled to the now notorious high-rise suburbs (*banlieues*), with all the attendant social conflicts. A sociologically omnivorous, white middle class, sucking up the working class and petite-bourgeoisie, could now retreat *intra muros* just as France had retreated from Algeria: into its sanitised city spaces, comfortable domestic interiors and smoothly purring cars, leaving everyone else 'outside': in the street, in the suburbs, on the periphery. The self/other paradigm inherent in the empire overseas was thus dismantled, shipped home and re-assembled in the new sociological and spatial configurations of modern capitalism (Ross 1995, p. 7-9).

What Ross does not mention, however, is the part played by the Ministry of Culture's democratisation programme in the modernisation process. Admittedly, in Malraux's idiosyncratic vision, culture was defined largely as the great works of the past. But it was the need to make this heritage available to ordinary people that made the policy modern. The historic buildings of Paris were cleaned, marking the beginning of a process of heritagisation that continues today. Some, like the Opéra de Paris and the Odéon theatre, were also adorned with specially commissioned modernist art work, by Chagall or Masson. Culture was also integrated into France's regional development plans, as arts provision was updated with the creation of shiny new Maisons de la culture in the regions, often housed in new, state-of-the-art buildings in modernist style. Their purpose was to take the high culture of past and present to what became known in the late 1960s as the 'non-public': an undifferentiated block of urban or agricultural workers excluded from it.

Democratisation in this form can be read as neo-colonialist in several ways. First, it removed the colonial legacy from its line of sight by making France's growing ethnic communities invisible within the massified non-public. Unsurprisingly, then, it made precious little impact on either the consciousness or the social realities of those communities. Second, the notion that the non-public was homogeneous effectively reified it. Democratisation *à la* Malraux implied that, with technocratic intervention in arts provision, the non-public could simply be flipped over to become a public. Hence an attendant bureaucratic vocabulary, still common today, of 'supply', 'access', and so on. Yet, whether public or non-public, the excluded remained merely objects: the needy recipients of a pre-packaged culture, legitimated and made accessible by a paternal state. In the process, they were also infantilised. In a new take on the civilising mission, the Maisons de la culture were to bring Parisian culture to the benighted provinces in order to shield the unfortunate members of the non-public from Americanised mass culture, because, like children, they were ignorant of their real spiritual needs.

Objectively, of course, using colonialism as a metaphorical field to describe democratisation is a rhetorical ploy. But this was precisely the rhetoric used to impugn democratisation in the late 1960s, by a new Left which emerged around the May 1968 movement. The Algerian conflict had produced a postcolonial understanding of Gaullist technocratic voluntarism and of modern capitalism as an internal colonisation. Malraux's notion of cultural democracy was therefore attacked for being paternalistic, centralist and hegemonic, for imposing a commodified, bourgeois conception of art which suppressed authentic popular creativity. True cultural democracy was seen as something akin to national independence: it meant participation and self-determination. It would transform all individuals, irrespective of origins, from objects into subjects. from consumers into citizens, by mobilising their inventiveness, autonomy and dissent. From 1968 until the

early 1980s, the cultural democracy movement thus took up the rhetoric of decolonisation, embracing the campaigns of regional, proletarian and other rights movements (feminism, gays and lesbians, ethnic minorities, the disabled) to have cultural difference recognised by the state.

It was this conception of cultural democracy, implying the need for empathetic mediation, which set the Socialist Party under François Mitterrand on the path to an alternative cultural strategy during the 1970s. In dilute, self-contradictory form, this strategy informed the early policies of Mitterrand's new Minister of Culture from 1981, Jack Lang. He surrounded himself with a dynamic team of advisors, some of whom, like Lang himself, had been student activists in the Algerian struggle for independence. They too adopted the decolonisation metaphor, in tandem with 'departitioning' (*décloisonnement*), to call for an end to the hegemony of Paris over the regions and the liberation of France from US cultural imperialism. 'A minister', Lang stated, 'must choose between the exploiters and the exploited' (cited in Looseley 1995, p.77).

Despite some empty rhetoric, Lang did bring about a 'decolonisation' of sorts. Both the notion of the non-public as a single block and the traditional aesthetic hierarchy favoured by Malraux were abandoned in favour of pluralism and inclusiveness. A range of 'new publics' was identified and innovative forms of action targeting their needs were devised, using local voluntary associations as intermediaries: the disabled, the institutionalised (prisoners, the hospitalised, the armed forces), those in deprived rural areas, and 'community' (i.e. ethnic) cultures. Popular creative practices were also recognised that had hitherto been considered deemed infantile and unworthy of the epithet 'cultural'. These two strands came together in a focus on neglected youth-cultural forms like rock, world music and later hip-hop. Such forms, particularly hip-hop, were closely associated with 'les quartiers': socially disadvantaged suburban neighbourhoods, often with high concentrations of unemployed or casual workers, and suffering from ethnic tensions and urban blight. Such provocative measures, known collectively in the media as Lang's 'everything is culture' approach, generated passionate debate about dumbing down.

However, as indicated by the continued use of the term 'public', albeit now in the plural, such groups were still to an extent objectified as consumers rather than producers, as Lang steadily moved from a social to an artistic policy orientation and the amateur sector came to play second fiddle. Lang did, however, take the first steps towards addressing social exclusion, a term that came into use towards the end of his second mandate, in the early 1990s, and was picked up by his successors. A moderate break-through took place in 1995, in the context of President Chirac's overarching strategy of 'fighting social fracture'. That year, his first Minister of Culture, the Centrist Philippe Douste-Blazy, launched a highly selective programme of 'neighbourhood cultural projects', or PCQs (*projets culturels de quartiers*), designed to end the segregation of the social and the artistic by bringing together an established artist and the inhabitants of a *quartier* to work on a collective creative project. In a similar vein, his Socialist successor in 1997, Catherine Trautmann, drove through a charter for the subsidised performing arts, which obliges them to work with their local communities, and another designed to encourage co-operation with popular-education federations. Today, while exclusion is still not very high on the cultural policy agenda, it is a growing area of concern, particularly at local level.

## **Social Exclusion Discourse Today**

Today, social exclusion agendas in French cultural policy are wide-ranging, covering the disabled, the incarcerated, the poor, and those minority ethnic communities 'expelled', as

Ross would have it, to the suburban *quartiers*, particularly first-, second- and third-generation communities of North- African origin. The policy issues concerning these communities are often quite different from those raised by exclusion in other contexts. What is in fact distinctive about the discourse of public and voluntary agencies working in the sector is the perception of a need to 'decolonise' such communities without 'ghettoising' them.

One central principle of that discourse is that, like the formerly colonised, the inhabitants of the *quartiers* must determine and express their own cultural universe. This is evident in the PCQ programme, which was founded on a resolutely upbeat representation of the *quartiers* in which residents are constructed as subjects, not objects. The *quartiers* are deemed to assemble in one space an unprecedented diversity of experiences, histories and cultural identities, to be melting-pots of unconventional, intercultural creativity. When this creativity is given an outlet in some form of group endeavour, individuals frustrated by entrapment in a *quartier* have the chance to achieve self-realisation. The collective nature of the activity is a form of life training, socialising participants, giving them structure, and helping them answer for themselves to others. This in turn helps reconnect communities where unemployment has diminished social intercourse, and 'requalify' the *quartier* itself: its image is enhanced and its self-esteem restored. More tangibly, the young person, contracted to a PCQ in a form of semi-employment, can acquire transferable skills likely to improve job prospects. Participation, then, amounts to an apprenticeship in citizenship

The perceived starting point for the cultural 'decolonisation' of these communities, then, is public recognition of the forms and practices associated with them. Since the 1990s, this has taken the form of promoting 'emergent', 'urban' cultures or 'street arts', by which is chiefly meant hip-hop, which has come to be seen as the voice of the *quartiers*. Promoting such practices is seen as one way of giving them equal civic status. This requires mediation, in order to encourage creativity as process rather than product. As argued by the recent Montfort report (1998), set up to evaluate the PCQs, a work of art has no therapeutic or political value in itself, but the process involved in its creation does: 'The artistic act is necessarily at the heart of the social body, of representations of that body, and indeed of the roles and powers that structure it. The field of art is thus distinct from other social practices [. . .], and especially from situations of subjection and dependence' (Montfort 1998, p.62). Consequently, Montfort redefines 'cultural action', which no longer means simply widening access to existing works of art, as it did under Malraux, but 'appropriate actions that question the world culturally with a view to transforming it' (Montfort 1998, p.63). Clearly, then, for Montfort, art as process becomes 'political' by revealing and even resisting power relations. It is also social by nature. Today, he argues, the belief expressed by many that shared creative activity can help re-establish social cohesion may be interpreted as an attempt to rediscover a commonality of meaning in an age when market individualism suppresses the whole idea of the collective. (Montfort 1998, p.63). Promoting creativity can thus restore both the individual and the community to the status of citizen.

However, this objective does not necessarily entail only the contemporary arts. It may also mean deconstructing established notions of national heritage and collective memory. For example, in the Rhône-Alpes and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur regions, projects have been launched on the memory of immigration and empire, using the recollections of both minority and majority ethnic populations. With the support of the Ministry of Culture, an association called Génériques has launched a national inventory tracing the history of 'foreigners' in France in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In 2001, the then Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin, similarly initiated a Museum of Immigration.

The objective of such initiatives is what one might call the 'decolonisation' of memory. At the 'Local Integration Workshop' organised in 2001 by the ADRI (Agency for the Development of Intercultural Relations), entitled 'Towards a Cultural Democracy', attention was drawn to the inadequacies of French historiography with regard to France's colonial past. Jean-Pierre Saez, of the Cultural Policy Observatory in Grenoble, presented the new projects as a way of rectifying these inadequacies by making French society as a whole aware that immigration has enriched France and is part of its heritage, 'in other words, that the host community and the incoming communities and peoples are existentially connected' (ADRI 2001, p. 74). Earlier in the workshop, Olivier Rousselle, director of the FASILD (Action and Support Fund for Integration and the Fight Against Discrimination), argued that the new projects avoid the kind of assimilationism that expects 'the "good" immigrant' to abandon his or her culture and history, because they valorise cultures not conventionally identified as French and also give an honest representation of France's own hybrid history, rather than defending a mythically pure, classical culture which somehow stopped in the eighteenth century: 'We must therefore get out of the implicit condemnation of cultures and practices which supposedly contradict the French style of integration and universalism' (ADRI 2001, p.26). For Rousselle, another benefit of restoring cultural memory is that it can help tackle what he sees as the problematic nature of 'le retour identitaire' (ADRI 2001, p.26). Some young people born in France of North-African descent attempt to get back to their roots, even though they have no real implantation in their original culture since their parents have deliberately censured it in order not to hinder their children's integration. The result is sometimes a caricature of that culture.

This anxiety about *le retour identitaire* highlights a potential paradox in the discourse of ethnic exclusion, which is not always quite as liberal as it seems. Alongside the validation of otherness and the questioning of metropolitan-French cultural purity, there is also a widespread fear of 'communitarianism', or 'ghettoisation'. At the ADRI workshop, there was substantial agreement that cultural particularism must be reconciled with republican universalism; and, here too, urban cultures were deemed to provide the ideal terrain for the purpose. As Rousselle put it, again on the subject of the 'retour identitaire':

We have to avoid the development of what I shall call 'minority' or 'territorial' fragments which would no longer be part of Republican history. This is why the Republic must reappropriate and give value to cultures which are alternatives to what I have called 'Nike culture' [. . .] Where rap is concerned, we know that the 'Rimbauds of today' tend to be found in the *banlieues*: it is just that we have to seek them out and raise them to the level of a republican discourse.

Two elements are significant in Rousselle's remarks. One is the implicit evocation of the French cultural exception. Like Ross, he implicitly ties together the 'colonisation' of France by the US and France's own colonialism. But he then neatly transcends both by insisting that urban cultures—which are extremely mixed cultures that young people are blending into a new 'culture à la française'—must be absorbed into the Republic because they represent a new French specificity which can help the nation resist global standardisation. France must 'decolonise' in order to itself be 'decolonised'. But—and this is the second element—for this absorption to take place, the Rimbauds of the ghetto must not stay there: they must be brought out into the universal (re)public(an) domain, and indeed brought 'up' to its level. In the description of an exclusion project involving oral literature in a minority ethnic community in Isère, there was an even more revealing allusion to the project's wish 'to allow everyone to express themselves, to stimulate encounters between people from different communities [. . .] and to take the individual out of their membership of a community [*son appartenance communautaire*] in order to give them back their dignity' (ADRI 2001, p.59).

This universalising voluntarism is ambivalent to say the least, since it can quite reasonably be read as a belief that cultural difference remains a danger if it is not in some sense subjected to a process of republican standardisation. As pointed out by anthropologist Michel Rautenberg, one of the few at the workshop who critiqued French universalism, integration in the French republican sense is not necessarily about the equal recognition of culturally distinctive communities but about the reduction of 'handicaps' in the name of individual citizen rights. French universalism is also a lottery in that the degree to which peoples of non-French origin are required to abandon their original cultures will vary according to where they come from. After all, he points out, while there have long been Polish churches in the North of France, the first French mosque is only a decade old (ADRI 2001, p.11-15).

However, although this republican version of integration may appear tacitly assimilationist, restoring the asymmetrical binary of self and other, the issue is not that simple. The advocates of integration in this sense firmly believe that it is in fact the alternative to it that constitutes real assimilationism. From their position, cultural 'decolonisation' must not mean leaving the *quartiers* to their urban cultures and minding our own business, but rather, a departitioning. The roots and references of the inhabitants of *quartiers* are highly diverse, maintains Claude Brévan, the government's 'Interministerial Delegate for the City'; they do not want their emerging creativities to be reduced 'to a single reference, a single identity supposedly peculiar to the sensitive neighbourhoods of urban policy. [. . .] Those engaged in such creations remind us that they want to be recognised for what they do, not for what they are according to our clichés and systems. This legitimate demand couches the question of how we should live together in different terms, rather than reducing it to integration in an "assimilationist" sense'. (ADRI 2001, p.27). According to McGuigan (1996), Habermas takes a comparable position on citizenship and collective identities: 'Multicultural societies need to develop satisfactory forms of co-existence, providing conditions for the reproduction of cultural heritages and, also, realistic openness to change, for "[t]he accelerated pace of change in modern societies explodes all stationary forms of life" (McGuigan 1996, p.151). Be that as it may, the problem for state cultural policy is that it is always open to being accused of a top-down, 'missionary' approach, especially given its stiffly republican terminology.

The constant spectre of assimilation probably accounts for the fact that the word 'integration' is increasingly replaced by the terms 'interculturality' or 'cultural diversity', both intended to remove any hint of condescension and to stress the idea of a genuinely two-way hybridisation (ADRI 2001, p.47-8). The term 'cultural diversity' also confirms Ross's linkage of internal and external 'decolonisations', since, as well as connoting the need for acceptance of a multicultural society at national level, it is now commonly used by the European Union, in preference to 'cultural exception', to designate the need to defend European cultures internationally against global standardisation.

However, interculturality in French public discourse is not an entirely straightforward notion either, for it can imply the one-sided imposition of a supposedly 'universal' aesthetic hierarchy. Neighbourhood cultural action has traditionally been construed as primarily social in intent, the artistic calibre of the work produced being secondary. This is now changing but only at a price, since emergent cultures find themselves expected to conform to the aesthetic values normally applied to traditional forms of cultural production. This is part of what Rousselle meant about bringing Rimbaud out of the ghetto by elevating him to the level of republican discourse. Only by living up to the demanding common standard of art will the Rimbaud of today be able to leave his native *banlieue* and communicate with the wider world.



One instance of the difficulties such a position can produce involves hip-hop dancers working with professional choreographers, as has happened in the Rhône-Alpes region, for example. In such projects, according to Virginie Milliot, hip-hop dancers were encouraged to 'open up to other choreographic languages, or else shut themselves away in an "artistic ghetto"' (Milliot 2002, p.33). As such terminology implies, the professional dancers often took hip-hop's distinctive relation to space and time to be an *absence* of such a relation, jumping to the conclusion that hip-hop itself was a sterile language closed to what they took to be the universal idiom of contemporary dance. Hip-hoppers were therefore expected to betray the defining characteristics of their art, which derive from oral spontaneity and competitive performance, by, for example, writing down and codifying their routines rather than relying on improvisation. This led to what Milliot calls 'logics of assimilation and alienation' (Milliot 2002, p.37):

To 'move from the social to art', they [the hip-hop dancers] [. . .] must learn to conform to theatre audiences' taste, i.e. to produce shows in which these audiences can know where they are. This implies that they go beyond the figurative and expressive logics of their original mode of expression, that they detach the meanings of their creations from their own experience, that they learn to withdraw from membership of particularisms [*s'extraire de leurs appartenances particularistes*], in order to open up to a formal, rational logic represented as universal. Recognition in the world of contemporary dance was therefore only achieved by their becoming socially rootless, [. . .] (Milliot 2002, p.35).

For some, such as the dance group Käfig, the experience was successful and has led to the development of new choreographic configurations that have changed contemporary dance from within. Others, however, got lost in the experience, producing work that had no authenticity. Exactly how to 'decolonise' culture is not always an easy question.

## **Social Exclusion and the 'New Territories of Art'**

One other form that the return of the social has assumed in France, obliquely connected to the social exclusion agenda, are the 'new territories of art' (NTA), or *friches*. Here too, the notion of 'decolonisation' sheds light on the theoretical underpinnings of the enterprise. *Friches* are abandoned industrial buildings that have been squatted or legally converted by arts collectives and put to multidisciplinary uses. In a lexis reminiscent of de Certeau, they are described as 'intermediate spaces', occupying the 'interstices' between centre and periphery, between conventional town-centre arts institutions, whether subsidised or commercial, and small neighbourhood facilities. They therefore, as a junior Culture minister, Michel Duffour, put it, 'question the boundaries between artistic genres, institutional artistic and cultural networks, and public policies in the area of cultural action.' (Lextrait 2001, I, 1). Other keywords of NTA discourse are 'experimentation', 'alternativism', 'collectivism' and 'interaction'.

The NTAs bring a diversity of contemporary arts together in one place, often with some degree of cross-fertilisation. As with the cultures of exclusion, these are usually emerging, 'urban' forms such as hip-hop, techno music or video and computer arts, which cannot find facilities or outlets elsewhere. What also links these diverse spaces is a desire to forge new relations with amateurs and the public that go beyond straightforward consumption. Accordingly, their activities are described as political or social. Local people are often invited into an NTA to observe and debate while an experimental form of creativity is in progress. The aim here is not to have the public witness a work in the making or act as a focus group by saying what it thinks of that work; indeed, the end product of the experiment may not be a work at all. Art is in fact represented as necessarily incomplete, always in process. The public is therefore not



there to witness the result of that process, but the process itself. As with the *projets culturels de quartier*, then, the NTAs challenge the 'historic rupture' between the artistic and the social. As the Lextrait report on the NTAs states: 'artistic responsibility spontaneously articulates with social responsibility (Lextrait 2001, I, 29). And like the PCQs, the new territories of art take cultural action far beyond the simple, 'neo-colonial' conception of democratising access to existing works.

Not all NTAs by any means are involved in social exclusion work as such, though some are, such as the Emmetrop association in Bourges, based in a former factory called L'Antre-Peaux. The association lived in an HLM (social housing estate) for three years, where it engaged in a variety of activities, including IT workshops and the Ziva festival, a multicultural festival of music, dance, street theatre, and graffiti art. But more generally, the social significance of the NTAs lies in their being ideally suited to the task of 'decolonising' culture by promoting interculturality. This is because they are non-institutionalised spaces in constant gestation. They are therefore considered innocent of all aesthetic preconceptions and all expectations regarding cultural capital. The open nature of the industrial site also frees artists from the locations they are traditionally obliged to create for, the theatre or the gallery (Lextrait 2001, I, 27). Brévan argues that the attraction of culture generally as a means of tackling exclusion is that it has the potential to stimulate mobility and greater openness, in the city and in society as a whole. The problem, however, is that, even today, there is a reluctance in some circles to place the cultures of the suburbs on an equal footing with the productions of established arts institutions in town centres. Her answer to this problem, drawing again on the notion of departitioning, is to facilitate the circulation of these two types of cultural output between their respective sites (ADRI 2001, p.27) This is where the post-industrial *friches* come in to their own. They are 'intermediate' spaces between these two poles of production; they are multidisciplinary like urban cultures themselves, and their physical size and emptiness make them highly adaptable to a variety of configurations and new modes of production.

## Conclusion

What ultimately links the NTAs with the social exclusion agenda is the fact that they share a discourse: of departitioning, pluralism, reappropriation and cross-fertilisation; of art as process rather than product, social rather than individual; of overturning the traditional power relations between art forms and between artist and public. They may, therefore, both be read as explicit or implicit attempts to 'decolonise' contemporary culture: to treat the 'public' as agent not object, to remove the missionary element that has been present in cultural policy since the beginning, and to deconstruct cultural space so that artists and those excluded from art can meet as equals, not as producers and receivers, centre and periphery, self and other.

The development of this shared discourse is, I suggest, a significant one. It is the result of a strong wind of aesthetic and cultural change blowing in from the *quartiers* and from minority ethnic communities, in the form of rap, graffiti and other urban or street arts. This wind of change is part of a wider movement, not specifically associated with the *quartiers*, of post-industrial experimentation with aesthetic forms, from video and computer art to street arts, free parties and electronic dance music produced by DJs. Together, these developments represent an interrogation of established creative forms, practices, methods and institutions—the challenge, in fact, of postmodernity. As McGuigan says, 'cultural politics vastly outpaces the lumbering discourses of cultural policy'. In the French case, policy is beginning to catch up though rather slowly, and much more in front-line organisations like local voluntary associations than at central-

government level. Indeed, the French state's tenaciously universalist republicanism, and the difficulty it has experienced until recently in revisiting its colonial past, have hobbled its progress. Increasingly, then, what can be dimly heard in at least some of the calls for the cultures of exclusion to be de-ghettoised is a plea— sometimes disguised, sometimes agonised—for the republican model to be reconfigured in a postcolonial and post-industrial age. After 130 years of almost unbroken republicanism, this can be a delicate, even painful business. Hence the recurrence of an ostensibly consensual lexis of dialogue, negotiation, departitioning and so on. As Saez observed in his closing summary of the ADRI workshop:

French society is at a historic crossroads in its cultural evolution. We might designate this moment by the notion of crisis, in the productive sense of that notion. i.e. not an impasse but a favourable moment for identifying choices for the future. In this particular instance, this means that there is an urgent need to make the symbolic and political structures of the nation evolve with a view to examining the problems of democracy in greater depth, more particularly in its cultural aspects. It is as if France were moving away from the political phase of the postcolonial age and settling into the cultural phase of that age (ADRI 2001, p. 71).

For agents in the field of integration, this does not, he goes on, slightly unconvincingly, mean a fundamental challenge to the republican model. But it does imply the need to 'make it more supple, more daring and self-reflexive, i.e. to see its historic mission in perspective, without concealing any of its limitations or its delusions' (ADRI 2001, p. 71). At a national gathering of representatives of interministerial agencies and other public bodies, this is perhaps as bold a statement as one is likely to get of the need for a fundamental reconfiguration of the debate between universalism and communitarianism.

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