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The architecture of power: François Mitterrand's *Grands Travaux* revisited[1]

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Building on earlier research, this paper proposes a more refined analysis of how the main decision-making processes pertaining to the *grands travaux* were established in the very early stages. Informed by consultation of official archival sources to which access was obtained by special permission (*dérogation*), it shows the manner and extent of the personal intervention by François Mitterrand, and offers new insights into his attachment to the Grand Louvre project, which drove the wider programme of architectural and cultural projects. It shows how and why a set of disparate projects were packaged into a flagship policy, and sheds light on the conflicts of power within the machinery of government under the Fifth Republic, especially relating to cultural policy during the Lang years. It shows how the highly politicised context motivated Mitterrand's drive to circumvent normal administrative processes in order to mark his presidency with a cultural stamp.

Keywords: architecture; cultural policy; François Mitterrand

The Musée du Quai Branly which opened in Paris in June 2006, dedicated to the display of tribal and ethnic art from the civilisations of Africa, the Americas, Asia and Oceania, is the latest in a long list of cultural architectural projects in the French capital.[2] It has been seen as the personal contribution to this ensemble by President Jacques Chirac, in response to a manifesto, signed by 300 cultural specialists in 1990, and initiated by Jacques Kerchache, a major collector of ethnic art. It called for the creation of a dedicated department at the Louvre for ethnic cultures, thus ending the exclusion of ethnic artworks from France's leading national museums. This request was granted by the opening in April 2000 of the new Pavillon des Sessions (formerly Pavillon des Etats and now officially the 'annexe' to the new museum). But Chirac also announced the creation of a completely new museum, bringing together the existing collections of the Musée National des Arts d'Afrique et Océanie (MAAO), formerly housed in a building from the 1931 Colonial Exhibition in the Bois de Vincennes, and those of the Musée de l'Homme, housed in the Palais de Chaillot. Despite strong resistance from the curators of the latter, the project went ahead adopting the now well-oiled procedures on the model of the Pompidou Centre at Beaubourg: the setting up of an *Etablissement Public*[3] to manage the project, and an international competition to choose an architect for the riverside site near the Eiffel Tower on the Quai Branly. In 1999, the commission was awarded to French architect Jean Nouvel, and work started on the site in 2001. Chirac's official justification of the new museum was

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> to see justice rendered to non-European cultures … not only recognising the influence their art has had on our cultural heritage, but also acknowledging the debt we owe to the peoples and countries that produced it, many of which have particularly close ties with France.[4]

However, critics have argued that the President, who is said to have an impressive collection of such art works, also had a personal interest in the museum, since the museum's acquisitions policy has led to the doubling in value of all primitive art prices in France (Dupaigne 2006).

Be that as it may, this new *grand projet culturel* is a reminder of what has become almost a tradition in France, whereby every President of the Republic since Georges Pompidou has personally sponsored at least one such project during his term of office. That this practice should have started under the Fifth Republic, whose constitution gives enhanced powers to the presidency, is obviously no coincidence. As successive presidents have extended the *domaine réservé* into areas of policy in which they have taken personal interest, observers have inevitably compared this with the monarchical tradition of the 'builder king', of which Louis XIV's Versailles is the most famous example. Perhaps surprisingly, Charles de Gaulle did not initiate the practice: rather, he entrusted the cultural domain to a close ally, André Malraux, by creating the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, and asking only to be informed of new urban initiatives. Georges Pompidou, by contrast, was personally committed to creating a new national museum of modern art: as a passionate collector (Cabanne 1981, pp. 248–250), and under the influence of Le Corbusier and Malraux (Michel 1988, p. 122), Pompidou had long nurtured this ambition, and in December 1969, he announced his decision to launch what became the Centre National d'Art Contemporain (CNAC), today known as either 'Beaubourg' after the location of the site, or as the 'Centre Pompidou'. The close identification between the President and the project is reinforced by the large photograph greeting visitors to the building whose completion he did not live to see.

His successor, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, elected in 1974, disliked the modernism of this project, and its completion was assured largely by the determination of his gaullist Prime Minister Jacques Chirac. Giscard did not immediately take any initiatives in the cultural domain, but by the end of his presidency, in 1981, he had launched four new architectural projects: the creation of an institute for Arab cultures (in line with his policy of improved relations with the Arab world after the 1970s oil crises); the science and industry museum at La Villette; the construction of a 'monumental' building on the site known as the 'Tête-Défense', intended to 'complete the royal axis'[5] from the Louvre up through the Carrousel and Arc de Triomphe (a project under discussion since the early 1960s); and finally, the conversion of the Gare d'Orsay into a museum of nineteenth century art. None of these projects had progressed very far by 1981, given the difficult economic climate of the 1970s, nor had they been given high priority by the President. It is claimed that, confident of being re-elected for a second term, Giscard assumed that the projects would reach fruition in the 1980s. This they did, but under the authority of his successor François Mitterrand, who maintained their basic objectives, but also made some significant changes (Collard 1998, pp. 36–37). The only one today identified with Giscard is the Musée d'Orsay, although its conception and design are quite far removed from his personal wish to give pride of place to the paintings of the early nineteenth century Romantics (Jenger 2006, pp. 113 and 158–171, Giscard d'Estaing 2006, Laclotte 2003).

It was under Mitterrand's presidency that such major architectural construction reached its apotheosis, when the terms '*grands projets*' and '*grands travaux*' were coined by the press. Although previous projects had certainly been 'presidential', the nature and scale of

Mitterrand's grandiose building programme far exceeded that of his predecessors, and this fact, combined with the way in which he personally took charge of the projects, gave rise to much criticism for his allegedly 'monarchical' behaviour (Bastié 1993, pp. 695–696, Chaslin 1985, Colin 1994, pp. 132–134, 170–172, Laughland 1994, pp. 172–182, Rioux 1995). These accusations were reinforced by a more general critique of Mitterrand's personal style of exercising power, which came to be known as 'the Mitterrand system' (Dubois 2001, Védrine 1996, pp. 19–77). Indeed, it has now been well established in the abundant literature published in recent years by Mitterrand's advisers, friends, enemies and colleagues that he wished to reserve for himself the final word in all the key decisions of personal interest to him, hence the accusations of the solitary exercise of power. Moreover, Mitterrand baulked at collective decision-making, never allowing his advisers to meet together as in the British style of cabinet government, and always preferring one to one conversations with those he consulted. Against this background, the *grands travaux* became an easy focus for hostile comment in the media, and the historical associations of architectural grandeur as *le fait du prince* (the imperial fiat) provided a rich source of references which caricaturists exploited with relish, illustrating Mitterrand's alleged megalomania with portraits of him as 'Tontonkhamon', 'Mitterramses II', Louis XIV, and Napoleon Bonaparte. These crude but effective representations created a widely accepted image of the Republican monarch whose motivation in pursuing the *grands travaux* was reduced to that of the pursuit of personal glory and a place in History to rival that of his most illustrious predecessors.

Such journalistic accusations and assumptions were never substantiated by any serious evidence as to Mitterrand's real motives and methods, and there has been surprisingly little academic exploration of this subject. My own earlier work in this field sought to address this situation by drawing on a survey of existing literature and official documentation, followed by interviews with key actors. A summary of my conclusions, published in this journal, suggested that the President's allegedly monarchical role in the conception and execution of the *grands projets* had been overstated, and that the reality was more complex (Collard 1998). These conclusions were based on several observations: first, that Mitterrand did not demonstrate the same level of interest or desire for control over all the projects. His main focus during the first presidency was on the Grand Louvre (and later the Grande Arche), and he allowed the other projects to be run in liaison with the relevant minister, without undue interference by their appointed managers. The second observation was that the Elysée communiqué announcing the programme of Grands Travaux on 8 March 1982, was not, as sometimes claimed, the publication of a 'master-plan' secretly devised in opposition, but rather the result of a joint 'packaging' of a series of separate decisions which aimed to present them as a single coherent programme, with the hope that this would give it greater political impact. My third observation was that none of this programme could have been executed without the contribution of various loosely defined 'policy communities', whose commitment to the objectives of the different projects were independent of, but complementary to, the ambitions of the President.

I have since then been able to refine these conclusions, not only as a result of more recent publications, especially in the context of the tenth anniversary of Mitterrand's death, but also through the consultation of a selection of presidential and ministerial archives, to which I have gained access through special dispensations (*dérogations*).[6] In this latest paper on the *grands travaux,* I show in some detail how and why the President put in place the decision-making structures relating to the projects during the critical first months of office, and I offer a new perspective on Mitterrand's personal motives concerning the

Grand Louvre. The general thrust of this analysis demonstrates the President's firm intention of keeping the projects tightly under his personal control, particularly in relation to the Grand Louvre, but it proposes a more complex interpretation of his motivations for doing so.

The *grands travaux* had not featured either in the Socialist Party's political agenda or the President's '110 Propositions' for the 1981 election campaign. However, in the months after his election, Mitterrand was faced with the question of how to deal with the projects already initiated by Giscard, as well as a number of new ones proposed by Lang. He initially acted in an *ad hoc* manner, seeking advice, not only from Jack Lang, his Minister for Culture, but also from his presidential advisor for cultural affairs, his friend the writer Paul Guimard, who in turn referred technical and budgetary issues to a member of the Prime Minister's staff (*chargé de mission*), Yves Dauge, responsible for architecture and urban affairs. Dauge worked directly under Robert Lion, *directeur de cabinet*[7] to the Prime Minister, Pierre Mauroy. Lion played a key role in coordinating government policy from the Prime Minister's office (commonly referred to as 'Matignon'), but he also took an active interest in the architectural projects, because of his own background in the field, and had taken a special interest in the Giscardian project for La Défense, publishing a critical article in February 1981, lamenting the 'end of French architecture' (Lion 1981). Lion came to take on an important advisory role to the President regarding the *grands travaux* in general, as well as the Défense project more specifically, even though this project technically came under the authority of the Minister for Urban Planning & Housing (MUL), Roger Quilliot.

The President's priority: the Grand Louvre

After this early period of mainly 'responsive' decision-making, Mitterrand moved to take the political initiative. He chose the occasion of his first presidential press conference on 24 September 1981, both to make public the decisions taken so far regarding the Giscardian projects, and to make the surprise announcement of his own audacious project to renovate the Louvre, including removing the powerful Ministry of Finance from its sumptuous location in the Richelieu Wing, thereby recovering the whole of the building for the purposes of the 'Grand Louvre'. This declaration came towards the very end of his text, no doubt in order to create the greatest impact on his unsuspecting 'political' audience. The idea was in fact by no means a new one, and had been frequently advocated, even as far back as 1950 by the then Director of National Museums, Georges Salles (Salles 1950), but it had always met with the opposition of the Ministry of Finance. The Louvre was undeniably in a pitiful state: large numbers of works of art were kept permanently in the reserves because of insufficient exhibition space, while 43% of that space was closed at any one time because of lack of funds to pay enough staff. The building itself, poorly maintained, with seven different entrances, was difficult for visitors to find their way round, and the public facilities available were antiquated. As the symbol of French culture, it was not giving off the right signals, and Mitterrand's decision was in reality long overdue, even if it appeared highly ambitious at the time.

It was partly because of the hostility he anticipated from the Ministry of Finance, that the President had prepared this initiative with great secrecy, and in recent years, with the overwhelming success of the Grand Louvre, there has been a minor controversy over the exact origin of the idea and its 'ownership', which Mitterrand himself failed to clarify. Jack Lang's now well publicised claim that it was he who suggested it, is certainly substantiated by the existence of a note sent by him to the President on 27 July 1981,

suggesting that 'a powerful idea to set in motion would be to recreate the Grand Louvre by giving the whole building over to the museum … making it into the largest museum in the world' (5 AG 4 / PG, dossier 6: Musée du Louvre). Mitterrand annotated the note with the comment: 'A good idea but difficult to carry out, like all good ideas'.[8] Lang has suggested that

> as a result of this note, Mitterrand got the idea for the Grand Louvre into his head, and that he [Lang] then asked one of the President's friends from before the war, an art collector called Louis-Gabriel Clayeux, to talk to him about it. Clayeux went to see the President saying: 'Jack Lang's idea is an excellent one, you should consider it', and as a result, everyone thinks that it was Clayeux who had the idea.[9]

Lang's initiating role has indeed been publicly corroborated by personalities such as Claude Mollard, a key member of Lang's *cabinet* (Mollard 1999, pp. 267–269),[10] and Michel Laclotte, who was then Chief Curator of the Paintings Department at the Louvre, and who in 1987 became director of the whole museum (Laclotte 1994, p. 14, 2003, p. 248). Laclotte also acknowledged the important contribution of Clayeux. However, it is notable also that this was the only note that Lang appears to have written to the President on this subject, whereas there are many other notes about the various different cultural projects planned, none of them mentioning the Louvre. Lang's own personal preoccupation was much more obviously with what he referred to as the creation of a 'Beaubourg de la Musique' at La Villette, and he repeatedly wrote to the President on this subject. Significantly, when Mitterrand wrote to ministers asking for ideas of what to include in his first press conference, Lang replied with three pages of suggestions (including 'Le Beaubourg de la Musique'), but nothing on the Grand Louvre.

Nor did Mitterrand himself, at the inauguration of the Richelieu wing in November 1993, mention any input from Lang, claiming to have taken the decision only days before the press conference, as a result of encouragement from Clayeux (Biasini 1995, p. 240). However, when asked by Bernard Pivot on television in April 1995[11] whether he had planned the *grands travaux* before his election, Mitterrand confessed to having been 'obsessed' for a long time with the idea of reorganising the Louvre, and this is also supported by anecdotal evidence.[12] Notwithstanding his strong attachment to the museum, originating from his student days, it is now permissible to suggest that this 'obsession' was at least in part linked to the President's relationship with Anne Pingeot, the mother of his 'unofficial' daughter Mazarine, whose existence was made public by *Paris-Match* only in 1994. A specialist in nineteenth century sculpture, Anne Pingeot had worked as a curator at the Louvre since 1972, and from 1978 onwards she was part of a team under Michel Laclotte preparing the collections for the new Musée d'Orsay (Laclotte 1994, p. 14).[13] She was therefore well placed to report regularly to Mitterrand on the every day implications of the problems of the museum alluded to earlier. Any reference to Anne Pingeot's influence in his making this decision would have been unthinkable while he was President, hence his attribution of the key role in making the decision to his old friend Clayeux, who no doubt did play an important part in preliminary informal consultations, but not necessarily the only significant one. Although it has not been possible to verify this hypothesis, it is arguably confirmed by the fact of Anne Pingeot's active interest in the progress of the project, which has been confirmed by a number of actors interviewed in the context of my research. Moreover, since the tenth anniversary of Mitterrand's death, with some 'loosening up' of the tensions and controversies regarding his legacy, several publications have given further confirmation: one book recounting the private life of the President with his 'second family', goes as far as to devote a whole chapter to the assertion that 'the pyramid of the Louvre was his special

present to her', and that 'from the first day onwards, Anne Pingeot & François Mitterrand followed every detail of the construction' (Chemin and Catalano 2005, pp. 156–158). The journalistic style of this book and the absence of verifiable sources make it unwise to take all its claims literally, but the general thrust of its contents in this particular respect seems plausible. Indeed, even the short biography of Mitterrand, written for the same occasion by Hubert Védrine, one of the president's closest advisers throughout the two presidencies, and since 2003 President of the Institut François Mitterrand (thus a book that can be taken to carry some weight), refers to Anne Pingeot's suggestion to create the Grand Louvre as well as that of Jack Lang (Védrine 2005, p. 74). It is therefore possible to surmise that her influence in making this bold decision could be the main reason for Mitterrand's desire to keep it to himself, and to announce it at a time and place of his own choosing. It also might explain why he saw this particular project as his own personal affair, as opposed to those inherited from Giscard or fought for by Lang (most notably the Opéra-Bastille and the Cité de la Musique). His subsequent desire to reserve all the major decisions for himself is clearly illustrated in the archives, as the following section demonstrates.

All the President's men

Soon after the 1981 presidential press conference, the four men who had been most closely consulted on these matters in the early months started to meet informally, under the implicit authority of the President, in what was initially described as the 'Défense committee' named after the project that they first worked on together. As well as Paul Guimard and Robert Lion, the group consisted of Jack Lang and the Minister for Planning, Roger Quilliot (an old friend of the President), since the Department of Architecture came under his ministry. (Significantly, Lang had tried unsuccessfully to convince the President to transfer this department back to the Ministry of Culture, where it had been based till 1978.) Shortly afterwards, this *ad hoc* committee took on the name of the 'Group of Four', and met first with the president in December to coordinate the different elements of what was to become the programme of *grands travaux*. This group thus gradually began to take over the function of what would normally be considered as inter-ministerial coordination (since several ministries were involved besides the Ministry of Culture), sanctioned initially by the presence of Robert Lion as the Prime Minister's *directeur de cabinet*. The Group of Four would from then on play a pivotal role in the political coordination of the projects, and remained directly responsible to the president, not the Prime Minister, even after Lion left Matignon in May1982. In this way, Mitterrand by-passed from the outset the normal institutional mechanisms of policy coordination (Hayward and Wright 2002) in order to assert his own personal authority in this domain.

The guiding role to be played by the President in close collaboration with the Group of Four was further reinforced in March 1982 with the publication of a communiqué from the Elysée announcing the details of what was from that moment onwards seen by the press as the *grands travaux* 'policy'. The President's authority was immediately imposed in the opening paragraph:

> At the request of the President of the Republic, studies have been carried out for several months into the nature and location of cultural facilities which will mark a renewal of architectural creation in France. The studies have been undertaken under the authority of the four key figures appointed in October by the President.

However, the text was signed neither by the President or the Prime Minister, but by the Group of Four: the idea for such an announcement had not come from the President, but was

devised under the auspices of Robert Lion and Yves Dauge, in collaboration with various planners and architects. From his position at Matignon, Lion saw the potential dangers, both financial and political, of allowing all these projects to go forward without any proper coordination. In a note to the President he warned:

> The launching of the projects in a random and semi-official manner would encourage false rumours, create difficulties for those who have started to work on these projects, and would deprive you of the political impact which would result from the proper announcement of these major projects. (AN 2000 0328 17)

Yves Dauge was also concerned that the President's programme should be pursued as a coherent urban project, rather than a series of gestures imposed in isolation on to the Paris landscape (Collard 1996), as is clear from a long note from him to Lion dated 16 December 1981: 'These major projects must be presented as being part of a united vision, a united plan, coherent with the Universal Exhibition planned for 1989' (AN 2000 0328 17). A working group had therefore been set up, based at Matignon under the auspices of Lion and Dauge, with representatives from the MUL. Their initial preoccupation was with the new architectural scheme for La Défense, following the decision announced by Roger Quilliot in November to scrap the Giscardian project. The group began to work on what they conceived as a presidential declaration of 'a policy of coordinated and coherent public commissions covering all of the operations' (AN 2000 0328 17) which they had originally hoped would be made public in January. They saw this announcement as 'a decisive step' in establishing how the programme would develop and a way of sending a signal, in the expression '*grands travaux*' ('public works' as opposed to '*grands projets*'), to the construction industry, that this programme would lead to much job creation.[14] The archives show clearly that there were countless drafts and revisions of this important document, which Lion, spearheading the whole process, repeatedly sent back to Mitterrand for his approval, until finally the text was announced by the Elysée on 8 March 1982, which is taken as the official launch of the programme of *grands travaux*, or more correctly, 'the major operations of Architecture and Urban Planning'.

The archival records also provide valuable insights into the nature and extent of Mitterrand's involvement. First, his attachment to the detail of the text itself is discernible from his numerous injunctions to Guimard: 'Come and see me before any publication'; 'Don't let the modified announcement be released until you have seen me again'; 'Send me the draft announcement taking account of the latest modifications' (5AG4 / 2516). Second, it seems that he was not entirely happy with the priority given to overall coherence by Lion and his colleagues. At one key moment in late February, Mitterrand made it clear to Lion via Guimard that he wanted personally to make public the decision about the chosen location of the new Ministry of Finance, no doubt because it signified the first move in getting the Grand Louvre project off the ground, and because it provided another opportunity to assert his presidential authority over the legendary power of the Ministry of Finance. But the main announcement was not at that stage ready for public release. Lion, feeling his strategy was being undermined, therefore wrote to Mitterrand on 25 February saying:

> I still believe it is necessary to make the announcement of the totality of your decisions, at the earliest date possible, in the form of a communiqué or a declaration. The Prime Minister could, if you so wish, make this announcement in your name. (5AG4 / 2516)

On the specific point regarding the public announcement of the site of the new Ministry, Lion was to win the argument, but his suggestion that the Prime Minister could, if the President wished, make the main announcement in his name was met with a clear

response from Mitterrand in his annotation to Guimard: 'NO. It is not up to the Prime Minister to announce these decisions. But under your authority, that of the four members of the working party' (5AG4 / 2516). This obviously touched on the key question of political authority. Clearly, as already noted, the Prime Minister was to be sidelined in this domain of presidential interest. But the reason for this was not, as has been commonly claimed, simply that the President had monarchical tendencies, though these may well have been present in his attitude. Rather, it is clear from the archival evidence that even at this very early stage, there were attempts by the Prime Minister's office to moderate the ambitions of the presidential programme, in the light of the worsening economic climate, as illustrated by the following note from Guimard to the President: 'In a general way. I think that no decision of any importance regarding the architectural projects should be taken without your approval. This precaution relates to the possibility of "lightning operations" from Matignon', to which Mitterrand replied: 'Of course, or I will have to get angry'(5AG4 / 2516).

As would become increasingly obvious, there was considerable scepticism within the government (and party) as to the financial and political wisdom of embarking on such a prestigious venture at a time of growing pressure on the budget. Jacques Sallois, Lang's *Directeur de cabinet*, has attested to Mauroy's exasperation at the idea of the Grand Louvre,[15] and in his mémoires, Mauroy has described how from January 1982 onwards, in sympathy with Finance Minister Jacques Delors, he was increasingly preoccupied by the worsening economic situation and by his struggle to persuade the President to accept a policy of 'restraint' (Mauroy 2003, pp. 214–227). Mitterrand however took the view that 'there will never be an architectural policy in France if we think in terms of annual budgets',[16] and he was not prepared to allow such concerns to prevent the pursuit of an ambition to which he was personally committed, even if it meant resorting to 'the imperial fiat' to carry it out.

This question of political authority and the role of the Prime Minister was also at the heart of the issue preoccupying Lion and his colleagues: the coordination of the projects. Lion's persistent concern was to present the projects as a 'package', which meant designating a programme coordinator. But this post was still unattributed at the time of the announcement of 8 March. Earlier discussions had focused on the nominations of managers for the separate projects, but as these positions were filled, the issue of coordination took on a new prominence. A communiqué from Matignon on 9 March had followed the one from the Elysée on the 8 March, making public the names of those appointed to lead the different projects, concluding that 'a mission will be set up in March 1982 to coordinate all of the projects, under the authority of the Prime Minister, who will appoint its director shortly'. But this communiqué had apparently not been approved by the President, for when Lion wrote to the President on 10 March regarding the remaining decisions to be taken (i.e. the nominations for the Grand Louvre and the coordination), still assuming that coordinator would be directly responsible to the Prime Minister, Mitterrand's annotations to Guimard were unequivocal:

> The coordination must be placed under my authority. I am the only person who can guarantee continuity for the 4 to 6 years necessary! It could be you [Guimard], it could be Biasini, but I will make the decision myself. Make this clear to Lion (and Bérégovoy) [General Secretary of the Elysée at that time]. (5AG4 / 2516)

On Lion's subsequent note a week later, the President once again made his position clear to Guimard: 'The problem as I see it is above all that of authority. The decision must remain with the Elysée. Having said that, Lion makes a useful contribution' (5AG4 / 2516). Thus

it became clear to those concerned that the problem of the coordination of the projects was one which Mitterrand intended to keep under his personal control.

The matter of who was best for the job was henceforth considered in a rather different light. Lion had hitherto observed the usual custom of suggesting names of top civil servants, as for all the other new project managers. But Guimard, after consultation, put the following suggestion in a note to the President dated 22 March:

> Your concern for the Elysée to retain control of decisions in this area would not be well served by the appointment of a top civil servant, who would no doubt be inclined to impose his own personality. We must find a man who besides being competent, will be scrupulously committed to ensuring that our instructions are carried out. I suggest appointing Yves Dauge, making it absolutely clear that he will be responsible to you, under my authority. He knows all the dossiers, he is a militant (mayor and county councillor) from within our camp in the party, and his position as advisor at Matignon would resolve the problems of liaison. Besides, it would avoid introducing somebody new into the circuit. (5AG4 / 2516)

And again a week later in a note which succeeded in winning the President's final approval:

> I can add that I have been very appreciative of his collaboration over these past months; that a 'star' for the post of coordinator would not seem to me to be desirable; that his knowledge of the different dossiers could be valuable to us. Quilliot's *cabinet* tell me that he is going to be offered the job of Director of the Urban Planning Department, but that these two activities (assuming that this goes ahead) would not be incompatible. His subordination to instructions from the Elysée must obviously be explicitly set out. [This last sentence underlined by FM]. (5AG4 / 2516)

Dauge's nomination was thus due not to his reputation as one of the top servants of the state, like Paul Delouvrier at La Villette, or Jacques Rigaud at the Musée d'Orsay, but above all to his qualities of political loyalty in addition to his proven technical expertise.[17] However his role as coordinator was still not properly defined, and it is clear that in these early stages, no-one really imagined how important his 'mission' would become (Collard 1992).

Finally, there remained the question of who would be given the responsibility for the management of the Grand Louvre project. The background to the making of this decision is complex and still somewhat mysterious, but the detail is significant because it gives some valuable insight into how Mitterrand made this key decision. As noted above, this project was given special status by the President within the overall programme, and he had publicly earmarked this project as his own personal affair, even if the extent to which this would impact on decisions was not immediately understood by his entourage: 'I agree to all the names proposed except for the GL project which is separate' (5AG4 / 2516). And when Lion suggested that it would be Lang's responsibility as Minister for Culture to propose a candidate for the Grand Louvre, the response was unequivocal: 'I intend to assume this responsibility myself' (5AG4 / 2516). A number of candidates had already been discussed, and there seemed to be a strong weight of opinion in favour of a civil servant named Emile Biasini, not previously known to Mitterrand personally, though his reputation was well established: his career had taken him from colonial Africa to the Ministry of Culture under Malraux, where he had overseen the building of the *Maisons de la Culture,* before moving to the redevelopment of the Aquitaine coast as president of an interministerial mission (Biasini 1995). Lion and Lang both played a key role in bringing Biasini to the President's attention: [18]not only did he have excellent experience but Lang argued that his good relations with the gaullist world would be good for relations with Jacques Chirac. However, Mitterrand's annotation on a note from Lang dated 11 January 1982, recommending Biasini,

shows that he was not at that time convinced by these arguments: 'I am not in favour' (5 AG4 / PG dossier 6). Indeed, according to Lang, the President stuck doggedly to this position for months, for two main reasons: first, Biasini was too closely associated with the Right, and second, there had been some doubts as to the financial orthodoxy of the operations he had carried out in the context of the Aquitaine mission. It is also possible that he did not wish to appear to be endorsing a choice made primarily by others.

In fact, Mitterrand had already of course given considerable private thought to the matter, and had presumably consulted widely through his own informal networks, which also pointed him towards Emile Biasini. Indeed, it was apparently Biasini's connections in Aquitaine, the region of the South West where Mitterrand had his holiday home (at Latché), which brought him to the President's attention, and it was probably the recommendation of two local mayors that convinced him to trust Biasini (Biasini 1995, p. 241). Mitterrand himself later confirmed the importance of Biasini's Aquitaine achievements in influencing his decision in an interview to mark the inauguration of the Grand Louvre in November 1993 (Biasini 1995, p. 241).

> Why did I choose Biasini? Because he had a strong reputation in the overseeing of major construction projects. I had heard a lot about him without knowing him. He was in charge of the development of the Aquitaine coast, where he had succeeded in creating complexes which were neither monstrous nor shocking, which respected the natural environment and which, here and there, were quite successful in terms of their architecture. Besides, I had heard about his main quality – I often use this expression which is not always taken seen as very flattering – that of being a 'bulldozer' that nothing will stop, and he was very familiar with how the administrative system works.

The timing of the choice of Emile Biasini to manage the Grand Louvre project remains somewhat unclear: in a written 'interview' published in 2001, Biasini described the informal manner in which he claims to have been asked by Mitterrand to take on the Grand Louvre, on 12 March 1982:

> I had an appointment with the mayor of Moliets, Mr Destouesse, who asked me to come a bit earlier because the President wanted to see me. At Latché, the President was in a relaxed mood, trimming a hedge. As if he had seen me the day before, he shook my hand and without interrupting what he was doing, he asked me abruptly if I would agree to take on the Grand Louvre project management. I replied that I didn't really know what was involved, but that of course I was happy to accept. 'Well, Jack Lang will ask to see you' he said, and then we left. (Pei *et al.* 2001, pp. 182–183)

Yet the archives clearly show that throughout the rest of March, discussions remained ongoing with regard to the choice of candidate for this post, alongside that of coordinator. Finally, on 6 April, a week after Dauge had been chosen, Guimard, apparently unaware of the meeting with Biasini, wrote to Mitterrand, pointing out that a decision needed to be taken regarding the Grand Louvre, and it was only in response to this note that the President finally gave his written approval, nearly a month after his brief encounter with Biasini at Latché. Whilst this might seem strange to an outsider, many of those who knew Mitterrand well, consider this to be typical of the way in which he apparently liked to take his time over announcing a decision already taken long before (Xenakis 2006, p. 213). In this particular case, the personalised nature of the decision is all the more significant because of the subsequent rift that developed between Lang and Biasini.

Biasini's official nomination was to prove a long and complicated process, which can only be very briefly outlined here, but which would have a major impact on the running of the project. Having played a significant role in persuading the President to appoint Biasini, Jack Lang almost immediately regretted this choice, after Biasini let it be understood that

he considered himself to be directly responsible to Mitterrand (which was his interpretation of the personal invitation to Latché), rather than to the Minister of Culture under whose responsibility the post technically fell. Biasini and Lang held very different views as to how the project should be taken forward: Biasini's priority was to appoint an architect and start work as soon as possible on a new single entrance underneath the central courtyard, which would give the project sufficient visibility to protect it from a potentially hostile future government after 1986. Lang, on the other hand, wanted to use the opportunity of the departure of the Ministry of Finance to carry out a total rethink of the museum, concentrating first on developing a comprehensive and ambitious project brief, with the appointment of an architect to follow. The next months were dominated by a struggle for control between the two men, during which Lang refused to 'convoke' Biasini and officially define his 'mission' with regard to the GL, as would have been normal practice. In September the President intervened in the form of a letter, urging Lang to honour Biasini's nomination but, even so, Lang yielded only in November. Over the following months, Biasini managed to establish his personal authority (and thus that of the President), over the project, thereby marginalising the role of the Minister of Culture: the difficult relationship between these two men would continue to impact on the project as it developed, as future publications will demonstrate. The imposition of Biasini against Lang's will represented the final tactic in the President's overall strategy for ensuring that he had personal control over the projects, and in particular, the one which was closest to his heart.

Thus by April 1982, at the end of a rather tortuous consultative process, Mitterrand had made all the key decisions regarding the building programme ahead. Instead of observing the normal procedures for inter-ministerial decision-making, based at Matignon, he had set up two informal mechanisms directly responsible to himself: first, the Group of Four, invested with direct political authority, though still of course answerable to himself personally, and second, as a still embryonic and more technical coordinating 'mission' under Yves Dauge. This personalisation of the decision-making process under the President largely explains why Mitterrand's interventions were portrayed as 'monarchical'. Further support was then given to this interpretation as a result of his now well-known preoccupation with how he would be remembered in History, which became almost obsessive in the latter years of his second presidency. However, it would be anachronistic to equate this latter 'obsession' with his original motives, which were arguably of a rather different order. Besides, the manner in which he established personal authority over the programme does not necessarily imply that he was motivated by megalomania or the quest for personal glory, as has been widely claimed in the press.

Indeed, if we are to achieve a more measured assessment of Mitterrand's legacy with regard to the *grands travaux*, it is important to look beyond the media image and to distinguish between his initial motivations and the manner in which the management of programme was 'presidentialised', as illustrated by my research. Regarding the former, it is clear that Mitterrand was personally committed to the idea of marking his presidency with a cultural stamp, and that, like all political leaders, he was very sensitive to the legacy he would leave, especially as the first Socialist President of France. He recognised that architecture was the most appropriate medium through which to make a lasting and visible impression on the cultural and historical landscape of the capital, heart of French culture, symbolised by the Louvre. But the *grands travaux* were not gratuitous architectural gestures inspired by the pursuit of a personal quest for self-glorification: they were first and foremost a genuine response to well-documented and long-standing demands for new cultural facilities, presented partly as the motor of a much needed revival of architecture in France, which would also stimulate a construction industry that was in recession. They were intended to

spearhead a cultural revival throughout the country and to restore the international reputation of Paris as a cultural mecca.

Having for all these reasons made the decision to commit to the *grands travaux,* it was logical that Mitterrand should have sought the most effective way of carrying them through to completion, for with his long experience in politics, including building projects in his local constituency, Mitterrand understood the potential constraints involved at every level of this complex area of decision-making. Moreover, he had witnessed the difficulties encountered over the Beaubourg project that Pompidou did not live to see, and had noted Giscard's failure to get his projects beyond the drawing board while in office. The experience of his predecessors thus taught Mitterrand that Time, '*la durée*,' would be a critical ingredient in the successful completion of the programme: the knowledge that his own life might be cut short by the prostate cancer secretly diagnosed in November 1981, must have added poignancy to the setting of an agenda already driven by the pressures of the electoral calendar. But he also learnt from his predecessors that the formal 'presidentialisation' of a project was not a guarantee of its successful completion. He realised that, from the outset, he would need to throw all the weight of his presidential authority into this venture in order to resist the many adverse forces that would inevitably be brought to bear on it, political, administrative, and economic, and not only from within the opposition camp. As my latest research has shown, even before the major economic crisis of March 1983, the setting up of a decision-making system which would short-circuit procedures of normal inter-ministerial coordination, was motivated by the desire to protect the *grands travaux* from 'interventions' from the Prime Minister's office and Finance Ministry, intent on imposing budgetary restrictions. Over time, the President's battles with his own ministers would become more frequent and more antagonistic, as he himself would later confirm:

> I had to defend the *grands travaux* like a cat and a dog, even with ministers that I had chosen myself, mainly M. Delors, M. Bérégovoy & M. Sapin; … the administrators of the Finance Ministry couldn't stand this idea of the *grands travaux.* (Latarjet 1998, p. 130)

Indeed, opposition from the Ministry of Finance was a factor which simply hardened Mitterrand's own determination to assert his authority as President over this legendary bastion of 'opposition'. Resentful and humiliated at being forced to move from the prestigious location in the symbolic heart of power represented by the Louvre Palace, the majority of top civil servants experienced the President's ambitions as an act of provocation; my future publications will show how the case of the *grands travaux* represents a fascinating and possibly unprecedented example of how the tensions between the different centres of power in the Fifth Republic were played out in an ongoing battle for supremacy. Whilst conflicts between them essentially concerned budgetary issues, they also arose over the 'excesses' of bureaucratic regulations, which extended across all domains and levels of the administration. Mitterrand's experience of such *lourdeur* (red tape) made him aware of the threat they posed to his projects, and this clearly weighed heavily upon his choice for the Grand Louvre of Emile Biasini, a 'bulldozer', who knew how to cut through such constraints.

In conclusion, my analysis of the way in which Mitterrand established personal control over the *grands travaux* clearly demonstrates the recourse to what Jack Lang described as the 'sovereign act',[19] and which Mitterrand himself acknowledged as being 'the imperial fiat', arguably not entirely compatible with the conventions of democratic government or collective decision-making (Latarjet 1998, p. 131). In this respect, the allegations of monarchical behaviour are not without some justification. However, I have also shown that the highly personalised manner of organising the execution of the *grands travaux* was motivated not by a personal thirst for self-glorification (notwithstanding a certain desire to leave

a trace in stone), but by demonstrable concerns to ensure that the programme would not fall foul of the many obstacles that threatened it. In a republic whose hallmark since its inception has been a tendency towards increasing presidentialisation and the incremental acceptance of presidential '*domaines réservés*', and for a President who was said in 1981 to have been more powerful than any of his predecessors (thanks to his massive parliamentary majority and ascendancy over the Socialist Party), the case of the *grands travaux* thus presents an interesting paradox. At the end of the day, Mitterrand did manage to impose his will over the Ministry of Finance, but only as a result of persistent scrutiny and relentless determination which necessarily implied his personal involvement in much of the key decision-making. As he himself commented:

> So you see in this case what the President's power is like. I was able to do it, I am the only President to have been able to do it … But at the same time, it is a very good description of the reality of power, in other words, its limits. But the impetus to make things happen, I am happy to say, was within my grasp … I gave the impetus, I was the driving force, I was able to do it. In a general way, I think we renovated and relaunched architecture in France. (Latarjet 1998, p. 131)

Eleven years after Mitterrand's death, Nouvel's striking design for the Musée du Quai Branly is the most recent illustration of this very visible architectural revival, and the overwhelming success of the Grand Louvre, over and above all the other projects, is perhaps the most fitting testimony to the personal commitment and judgement of a President-Prince who, true to his Machiavellian reputation, believed that the end would justify the means.

Notes

1. The author gratefully acknowledges the funding of the research for this article partly by a British Academy Small Grant, and partly by a Leverhulme Research Fellowship.
2. 'The Musée du Quai Branly', Editions Scala, 2006.
3. An *Etablissement Public* is a semi-autonomous state-run corporation.
4. Introduction to the Museum Guide Book, Musée du Quai Branly, 2006, p. 6.
5. This was marked out by Perronet in 1768 at the request of Louis XIV who wanted to link the château of St Germain to the Tuileries.
6. The archives so far consulted, on which this paper is based, are those of the *Mission de Coordination* presided by Yves Dauge, those of Jack Lang and his *cabinet*, and those of the cultural advisers to the President. These archives are normally subject to the 30 year rule (60 for presidential archives), but *dérogations* are granted for research projects considered to be of sufficient merit and significance.
7. This is often said to be the most powerful position in the French administration.
8. Lang's note is referred to (using the wrong date) by Jean Lacouture (1998, p. 49) in the second volume of his biography of Mitterrand. However, Lang's memory of the annotation, apparently unverified by Lacouture, has produced a slightly different version of the president's response: 'Lovely idea. But very difficult to carry out, like all lovely ideas. Talk to me again about this'. The addition of these last few words, which the President used with parsimony, is not without significance.
9. Interview with Jack Lang by the author, December 1995.
10. Mollard's version is however very deferential to Lang and lacks proper analysis: 'A note from Jack Lang to François Mitterrand signals the launch of the project', does not take account of the other factors that I bring to bear on this question, though the annotation is in this case correctly reported. His claim that the President's annotation 'signifies that the ball is henceforth in the hands of the Minister of Culture' is clearly contradicted by subsequent events and decisions.
11. 'Bouillon de Culture', F2, 14 April 1995.
12. During a round table session of the Ministry of Culture's *Comité d'histoire* on 14 November 2001, Guy Vidal, who was responsible for the transfer of the Ministry of Finance to the new building, recounted how Mitterrand told a fellow deputy, Jean-Pierre Fourcade, that he intended to transform the whole Louvre into one big museum if he was elected.

13. Laclotte wrote: 'I was closely associated to the Grand Louvre project, in which I played a secret role, or at least a discreet one'. The secret role was the fact that he was the administrator hierarchically superior to Anne Pingeot, and he was required to 'manage' this delicate situation.
14. A note from Quilliot to the President says: 'If this announcement is made under the heading of 'public works', it will give a positive signal to the construction industry' (5AG4 / 2516).
15. Interview with Jacques Sallois by the author, November 2006.
16. Quotation attributed to Mitterrand by Bernard Latarjet in Andrieux and Seitz, 1998, p. 131.
17. Due to constraints of space, it has not been possible here to give details of the appointments of the individual project managers and their teams in the *Etablissements Publics*.
18. Interviews with Jack Lang & Robert Lion by the author, November and December 1995. All the comments attributed to Lang in this paragraph are taken from this interview. Given the difficult relationship that very soon developed between Biasini and Lang, the existence of this note, which confirms Lang's initial recommendation of Biasini, constituted a significant and surprising revelation for all those interviewed in my more recent research.
19. His note to the President of 27 July 1981, concluded with the sentence: 'Only an act of sovereignty can give substance to the ambitious project of the Grand Louvre'.

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