

CONFLICT OR SYMBIOSIS ?

THE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE DE MELBOURNE AND FRENCH CULTURAL POLICY SINCE 1980¹

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The 6 June 2010 marked the 120th anniversary of the establishment of the Alliance Française in Melbourne.² It was the first branch of the French society in Australia, and was founded just half a dozen years after the parent house in Paris. In 2008, it moved into Eildon Mansion, the grand premises it had recently purchased in Grey Street, St Kilda, barely a few hundred metres from ‘Oberwyl’, another imposing St Kilda house where the founding president, Berthe Mouchette, a school principal, had gathered the society’s first committee meetings. This is surely an appropriate time to reflect on what is one of the most enduring intercultural institutions in Australia: one that is both very officially French—including direct government involvement—and legally and morally Australian (through its board of directors, its members and its clients). As part of the national and international networks of Alliances françaises, the AFM is primarily a site of extensive language learning activity. It is also, however, a major centre of cultural manifestations and exchange, and it is this aspect of its activity that concerns us here.

The particular focus of this article is on the ways in which the cultural programmes of the Melbourne Alliance have evolved over the past three decades. The central question to be addressed is the extent to which this evolution has resulted from policy directions set in France, as distinct from what can be ascribed to local, Australian-based initiatives. There are two important contextual frameworks for the study. The first is the vigorous cultural politics adopted by successive French governments since the 1981 election of François Mitterrand, which have been very explicit about the role to be played by the Alliance Française networks. The second is a process of intensified professionalisation, within the Alliance Française, on both the French and Australian sides of the equation: that is, in terms both of the France-funded staff and the increasing integration of the world-wide Alliance network, on the one hand; and on the other hand, of the local management and governance structures. Some discussion will be devoted to each of these matters by way of introduction to the three case studies that have been chosen to illustrate the evolution of the AFM’s cultural activity: literature, cinema, and the gallery. Let us note immediately that a more complete study would include several other

cultural modes, such as music, theatre and lectures on a whole range of topics—all of which have been traditional and ongoing within the cultural framework of the AFM. We hope to show that the three selected areas have paradigmatic value for the question raised: what is the weight, in the cultural activities of the Alliance Française de Melbourne, of France's cultural policies ?

A Brief Overview of French Cultural Politics since 1980

The importance of 'culture' as a self-conscious dimension of the way in which the French conceive and promote their identity and particularity is well established, and its long history has been thoroughly documented.³ During the heyday of France's colonial empire, culture was at the very heart of the nation's sense of its 'mission civilisatrice', a key expression of the universalist humanist values articulated during the Revolution. The same spirit was at work in the mind of Charles de Gaulle, when he returned to power in 1958 and placed André Malraux at the head of an autonomous Ministry of Culture, intended to make France's prestige shine once more throughout the world.

It should be noted that the Alliance Française in Paris projected itself as a willing vehicle of these missionary attitudes. In a lecture at Nîmes on 6 June 1885 on the role of the Alliance in the world, Charles Gide invited his compatriots to consider France's colonised peoples as a captive and passive audience: 'Arabes d'Afrique noire, noirs du Niger et du Congo, Annamites du Tonkin, races barbares, nous vous frapperons à notre image ; nous vous apprendrons notre langue'.⁴ The imperialism, and the arrogant sense of superiority, could hardly be clearer. Now, while there can be no doubt that when the Melbourne branch of the Alliance was founded, the Paris organisation and the French consular corps played a direct and significant role, there is no evidence that the Melbourne Alliance sought to give expression to the kind of Gallic cultural triumphalism reflected in Charles Gide's speech. On the contrary, there was often considerable tension, even in the first twenty years, between the local French envoys' views of what the priorities of the Alliance should be and do, and what they saw as an organisation given to 'frivolous socialising'.⁵ While the broader history of the relationship between the Melbourne Alliance, the French parent organisation, the global network and the French government is still to be written—and the present study seeks to make a modest contribution to this process—the independent streak against which Paul Maistre and others

periodically struggled is, we believe, something of a constant, important to bear in mind.

All cultural historians agree that when François Mitterrand came to power in 1981, there was a notable shift in orientation in French cultural policy.⁶ The President himself, obviously, exercised significant influence in the changes (as can be seen from the large-scale architectural projects he oversaw in Paris), but the chief architect was the long-serving Minister for Culture, Jack Lang.⁷ The driving principle in Lang's work was 'democratisation' of culture, and it is important to understand that by this term, Lang meant something much more extensive than the efforts of Malraux to make the glories of France's cultural heritage accessible to a larger number of people.⁸ Although, as David Loosely shows, Lang's policies had important continuities with those of the Malraux period,⁹ his definition of what constituted the realm of culture was remarkably broader, and he placed much greater emphasis on creation, as distinct from preservation and dissemination. Malraux had set his course in terms of a mission to:

rendre accessibles les œuvres capitales de l'humanité, et d'abord de la France, au plus grand nombre possible de Français, assurer la plus vaste audience à notre patrimoine culturel, et favoriser la création des œuvres de l'art et de l'esprit qui l'enrichissent.¹⁰

Lang, for his part, claimed a more sweeping mandate:

[L]e ministère chargé de la culture a pour mission : de permettre à tous les Français de cultiver leur capacité d'inventer et de créer, d'exprimer librement leurs talents et de recevoir la formation artistique de leur choix ; de préserver le patrimoine culturel national, régional ou des divers groupes sociaux pour le profit commun de la collectivité tout entière ; de favoriser la création des œuvres de l'art et de l'esprit et de leur donner la plus vaste audience ; de contribuer au rayonnement de la culture et de l'art français dans le libre dialogue des cultures du monde.¹¹

Malraux's top-down traditionalism was thus displaced by a more open, people-centred approach giving priority to the encouragement of creativity over the preservation of existing work, and to diversity (social, regional) over any

unitarian notion of heritage. The idea of a cultural ‘canon’ gives way to a more dynamic and inclusive process, and Lang, famously, abolishes the hierarchies of ‘high’ and ‘popular’ culture in such a way that rock music, comic strips, circus, fashion, gastronomy—not to mention jazz, *chanson* and cinema—can henceforth stand on the same platform (and have access to the same state funding sources) as literature, the Comédie Française and opera.

It is the Lang model of cultural policy that dominates during the period of our study of the Alliance Française de Melbourne, and it will be the main point of reference for our case studies.¹² We need to acknowledge, however, that many of the phenomena that Lang articulates so strongly as policy, and indeed implements as political action, were already ‘in the air’ as it were, in one way and another. The legitimisation of popular culture within the framework of dominant bourgeois culture is in fact one of the strong historical trends in twentieth century France. It is enmeshed with the whole modernist movement, and if one can see particularly strong expressions of it in the events of 1968 (which among other things marked the twilight of gaullist traditionalism) or in the cinema of the New Wave, its origins can be traced much further back. Nevertheless, Lang’s political institutionalisation of this tendency remains an important historical marker.

Professionalisation

Until the mid-1960s, the Melbourne Alliance was essentially an association of amateur enthusiasts, although a glimmer of more professional activity can be seen from the end of the Second World War, with the appointment of a paid permanent secretary.¹³ A more structured organisation, together with a more sustained involvement of members of the academic community, led to a strong expansion of pedagogical work. This in turn eventually allowed Melbourne to become eligible to receive from France a ‘professeur détaché’. Created in the post-war period, the system of ‘professeurs détachés’ is in effect a subsidy provided to the Paris Alliance by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as a mechanism allowing the Alliance network to deploy (usually) trained native-speaker teachers strategically across the world.¹⁴ Known as ‘directeurs’ or ‘directeurs des cours’, they thus have two reporting lines in France, and of course, in addition, they were often considered as subordinate ‘employees’ by

the local committee—not an easy position, and one that frequently calls for great diplomatic skills as well as versatility and enterprise.

The first ‘directeur’ in Melbourne was Maurice Carbonatto,¹⁵ who arrived in 1966. During his tenure, his action closely followed the policy objectives of the General Secretary of the Paris Alliance: ‘enseigner et construire’.¹⁶ He secured stable premises sufficiently large to gather all of the AFM’s activities under a single roof (a long-desired goal never previously achieved), and he greatly expanded the pedagogical work through the use of innovative teaching technologies. The momentum he created was continued and amplified by his successors, and each of these, with the possible exception of the 1972-1974 period so overshadowed by the conflictual French-Australian relations precipitated by France’s nuclear tests in the Pacific, contributed in a dynamic way to the modernisation and professionalisation of the institution.

On the Australian side, analogous moves towards a more professional organisation of Alliance affairs occurred, largely as a consequence of the purchase of a building. The largely archaic association statutes governing the committee contained no instruments to guarantee proper governance or responsibility for an owner of real estate, and so a legal company was formed to serve this purpose. This allowed the AFM to embark on the path that would lead it to successive ownership of buildings in Armadale, Richmond, Robe Street, St Kilda, and finally Grey Street, St Kilda, each purchase bringing with it a substantial financial subsidy from the French government to help with renovations and adaptation. Over a period of some years, and through a series of prolonged and sometimes tense discussions, the committee of the Alliance ceded its historic powers to the company responsible for the buildings and property, creating a structure that trades as the Alliance Française de Melbourne, but that is better able to meet its legal and financial obligations through a properly constituted board.¹⁷ The board oversees the work of the ‘directeur’, who has come to function as the equivalent of a Chief Executive Officer. Aided by a deputy¹⁸ who is also funded by France, the director manages a sizeable administrative and teaching staff (over 40 people), as well as having prime responsibility for the orientation and running of the cultural program.

The stability of the present structures is the result of what we have called ‘professionalisation’: the normalising of a situation in which the directors sent by France are more highly trained and skilled and more experienced, and in which their relationship with the Australian organisation is governed by law and by a whole series of established processes. At the beginning of

our period of interest, arrangements were still much more fluid, and activity depended more closely on (usually cordial) negotiations among the director, the president and the members of the committee. The key director of the time was Bernard Milluy, a creative dynamo who had arrived in Melbourne in 1979, and who, until the mid-1980s, was a spectacular conduit for the Langian concept of cultural democratisation.¹⁹ It was Milluy who launched the *Alliance Magazine*, now 30 years old,²⁰ and he was also responsible for coordinating a vast array of cultural activities that included an exhibition of satirical cartoons, and visits by folk-singers, classical musicians, rock bands and clowns. At the same time, he made a major contribution to the integration of the Alliance into the wider cultural life of Melbourne, and is hence a crucial reference point for our question about the weight of French-generated policy in the cultural activity of the Melbourne Alliance.

Case Study 1: The Library

In his introduction to Bruézière's celebration of the Alliance centenary in 1983, the Paris Secretary General, Marc Blancpain, paid homage to France's enduring literary tradition. If the first task of the Alliance was to teach the French language, that teaching only made sense because it provided access to treasures of the written word:

Sans le livre, cet enseignement ne peut que déboucher sur le vide...
 Une Alliance est infirme qui ne possède pas sa bibliothèque en un temps où, hélas, le livre français est souvent resté, dans les librairies de l'étranger, une marchandise rare et chère. Le livre, aussi, parce que notre civilisation, comme toute civilisation, comme la civilisation, est une civilisation du livre ; le livre est la mémoire de l'humanité civilisée, et l'audiovisuel ne peut que venir (mais doit venir) diversifier et prolonger ses bienfaits.²¹

Blancpain's discourse allows for the development of what he calls in shorthand 'l'audiovisuel', but only within the context of a central and superior book culture. From one angle, we can see that Blancpain's thinking is in line with Jack Lang's support and promotion of the French book trade, and indeed of

his general push for cultural diversity, but the dominant note is a conservative one.

In Melbourne, the library had been an integral part of the Alliance from the beginning. At the very first meeting a central proposal was the creation of a library at the house of Mme Hooper (a committee member), to be open to members each Tuesday from 10 am to noon. (It is amusing to note that Mme Mouchette suggested that the library be divided into three different sections: one for gentlemen, one for ladies, and one for younger women. The suggestion was not taken up, but the committee did not neglect what it saw as its moral responsibility, by composing a list of works deemed to be fit for all readers.)

Nous avons tous, en effet, quelques livres français, trois ou quatre au moins, que nous avons lus et mis de côté pour ne plus les ouvrir. Eh bien, nous vous prions de nous envoyer ces livres, et nous aurons pour commencer une bibliothèque d'environ huit cents volumes, qui sera à la disposition des membres de l'Alliance Française.²²

Over the decades, the lending library became one of the main features of the AFM. Without ever having the benefit of a systematic acquisitions policy, it grew somewhat erratically: regular annual gifts from the Alliance in Paris were supplemented by other donations, often following the tastes of committee members. While there were various historical and biographical works, its main orientation was literary, and there was reasonable coverage of the major authors of the twentieth century. The annual crop of French literary prizes generally found their way into the collection, thus ensuring a certain contemporary tone. We have been unable to locate any record of the catalogue of the library in its strongest days, but minutes of meetings across the history of the Alliance indicate its position as one of the defining factors of the institution; and its proper housing was always, up to the 1990s, one of the key considerations in the Alliance's numerous geographical relocations.

A quite dramatic shift occurred in 1996, following the visit to Melbourne of Jean-Jacques Donard, representing the Bureau des bibliothèques des Affaires Étrangères. Donard was on a politico-cultural mission to Australia and New Zealand.²³ His overt brief was to determine the resources and needs of the Alliance network in the region; he was also promoting an agenda to establish, within the operations of the bigger Alliances, self-learning centres,

with a strong emphasis on audiovisual materials and new technologies. Now, while Jack Lang was no longer in power at that time, the thinking behind the Donard mission was still very much under the sway of his broad cultural policies.

The modernisation proposals came with the promise of financial assistance to facilitate the transformation. Interestingly, as the minutes of committee meetings show, the Melbourne response to the Paris initiative was crafted not by the committee, but by the director, Jean-Pierre Dumont.²⁴ Not all members of the committee were convinced by the reassurances that the library would, in the main, retain its traditional central function. Nonetheless, the director's recommendations were accepted with little resistance, and there were good reasons for that. Firstly, at that time, the committee was preoccupied with the development of new statutes that would bring together, within the Australian legal framework, the old associative structure and the company that owned and managed the Alliance's real estate. This was a technically and politically difficult task in comparison to which the question of the updating of the library was a relatively minor issue. Secondly, within the context of the professionalisation discussed above, the library, in an organisational sense, had become part of the director's brief. Thirdly, Jean-Pierre Dumont, in emphasising the French government's subsidy carrot (AU\$ 10,000), also allowed a glimpse of a stick: 'Si nous ne nous décidons pas de nous conformer aux indications données par le Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, nous risquons de ne plus bénéficier de ces subventions attribuées chaque année sur la base d'un projet.'²⁵ Finally, it can be argued that a majority of the committee was persuaded of the intrinsic value of modernising, on very much the same sort of grounds that it was seeking to modernise the statutes.

In the following months and years, the library was completely transformed. The weeding out of damaged books and duplicates turned out to lead to the wholesale dispersal of most of the collection, which was sold off from boxes in the Alliance foyer. In its place, a contemporary resource centre was created, which continues today. It includes books, but also *bandes dessinées*, CDs and video materials. At the same time, from 1996, a satellite antenna was installed for reception of the broadcasts of *Canal France International (CFI)*, providing news and sports programs and so on. In 1997 and 1998, the Alliance received two further grants from the *FICRE (Fonds d'Intervention pour les Bibliothèques et les Centres de Ressources)*, and in 2004,

the Ministère des Affaires Étrangères again made a significant contribution to a second renovation of the ‘library’, to include a special section for young people, and an updating of the computer facilities. It is clear that the cultural objects now housed in what was once the home only of books are examples of the democratisation process of the Langian philosophy and policy. In reaching out to a wider and more diverse audience, they also illustrate another facet of that democratisation. Today, the catalogue of the AFM library is fully on-line, and is integrated into a national scheme that includes its sister organisations in Perth, Adelaide, Canberra and Brisbane.²⁶

Few would argue today that the changes have not been for the better. The old library housed few treasures. There were some works of historical interest, such as various titles published in the United States during the Second World War and gifted to some Australian Alliances by their British counterpart.²⁷ In truth, however, the only books that were regularly borrowed were the contemporary authors, and these are still available to members. In terms of our primary question, the library transformation would seem to be a clear case of a French-initiated action, in which the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the local director collaborated to implement a cultural modernisation policy originating in France. The local committee was compliant and supportive, but essentially passive.

Case Study 2: The French Film Festival

Since the time of the post-war *cinéma de qualité*, and even more so since the New Wave of the late 1950s, the national cinema has been a specific focus of French cultural policy, and during the Lang years it served as a key battle ground in France’s struggles to protect cultural specificities against the dual threats of the ‘free market’ push from the United States and the internal constraints of the European Union. As Loosely shows, from 1981, the French government strengthened its financial support of the film industry,²⁸ and one of the beneficiaries of that support was Unifrance, the industry-based body that works to promote French cinema throughout the world. Formed in 1949, Unifrance continues to be an engine behind the various festivals of French film held annually in many countries. The aims of Unifrance are of course commercial as well as cultural, and one cannot overlook the fact that the festivals are in part a marketing device.

What is today called the ‘Alliance Française French Film Festival’ is a nation-wide event, organised in all the capital cities of mainland Australia. The event deserves its own history, for its evolution is remarkable and full of colourful anecdotes. In the early years, it was a smallish affair, a direct collaboration between Unifrance and the two Alliances of Melbourne and Sydney. In 1999, under the title ‘The French Film Festival of Sydney and Melbourne’, it offered ten films in both cities. By 2003, it had acquired its present name, but the overall direction had passed to the cultural services of the French Embassy,²⁹ which now plays the major role in the selection of films to be screened. The contribution of the various Alliances Françaises is largely organisational and logistical: securing appropriate venues for screening, setting up the programme of the films selected (including coordination across the Alliance network), managing associated promotional events, sponsorships, and visits by filmmakers and actors. All of these tasks require time, specific experience and rigour, so that it is also not surprising that they should fall mainly on the shoulders of the directors and their administrative assistants, with very little active participation from the local committee or management board.

In Melbourne, a pioneering festival was held in 1984,³⁰ as part of the Milluy strategy to insert Alliance activities into the mainstream cultural life of the city. The Alliance already had a lively cinema programme, though arguably this, too, was more an initiative of successive directors than of the committee. Films shown were initially borrowed from the (quite impressive) French Embassy 16 mm collection, which was itself a manifestation of Paris-based cultural promotion.³¹ Yannick Jézéquel’s response to the authors’ questions offers a nice insight into how things functioned in the 1970s, and illustrates the critical role of the director:

Tous les films venaient de l’ambassade qui disposait d’un stock, avec des nouveautés chaque année, dans lequel je faisais un choix. Un petit dépliant était imprimé à la rentrée (à partir du moment où j’avais acheté une offset) avec le programme des films pour toute l’année. Il n’y avait pas de ciné-club, je crois que c’était gratuit pour les membres et peut-être une participation pour les non-membres.

Étais-tu le projectionniste?

Oui, le seul et l'unique jusqu'à l'arrivée de François Fontaine.³²

L'Alliance possédait-elle son projecteur 16 mm?

Bien sûr, un Debie 16 mm. Par la suite j'en ai récupéré un deuxième à l'ambassade que je voulais utiliser [...] pour une projection sans interruption pour changement de bobine. Mais faute d'un pied pour l'installer, ce dernier m'a servi de fournisseur de pièces de rechange pour le premier.³³

In time a cinéclub was formed, and became so successful that attendances had to be controlled. Today, films continue to be screened at the Alliance to healthy audiences, though now via video-projector.

Between this internal activity and the festival as it has now become, there are great differences of perspective and intention. Film evenings and cinéclub activities serve the Alliance community, whereas the festival is directed at the city as a whole, including of course the professional cinema distribution network. It was in 1990 that the festival became fully integrated as an annual event in the Melbourne cultural calendar, and in 2010 its twenty-first 'edition' was proudly advertised. We have already suggested how much the phenomenon has grown nationally. In Melbourne, in 1999, the ten films, shown in a single cinema over eight days, drew 6,700 spectators. At the time, this was thought to be more than creditable. Film critic Tom Ryan observed: 'One of the more successful of Melbourne's movie festivals in recent years has been the French one'.³⁴ By 2004, the number of films offered had doubled to 20, and the audience to over 12,000.³⁵ In 2010, there were more than 40 films, and an audience of almost 30,000 spread over three cinemas in diverse geographical areas of the city: the Como in Prahran, the Westgarth in Northcote and the Palace in Balwyn. Opening night has become a major fashionable social event.

The benefits for the Alliance of working in partnership with major players in the Melbourne entertainment industry are obvious, and although there is as yet no study of the relationship between the film festival and the burgeoning language classes, it is hard to imagine that the extensive exposure the Alliance has during the festival is without impact. And by taking this form of French culture to the whole city, the Alliance is furthering the democratisation process in yet another direction. This process is amplified by the fact that many

of the films shown in the festival are taken up for distribution by Melbourne's vibrant arthouse cinemas, particularly the Palace Group and Cinema Nova.

As with the library modernisation, the film festival is an example of the implementation of French-based cultural policy, in which the Alliance, through its director, serves as a particularly effective vehicle. It is important to note that there is nothing colonialist or proto-colonialist involved. If the festival is such a success, it is because there is a pre-existing rich general cinema culture in Melbourne (and indeed in Australia). There is no evidence that the Australian side of the Alliance—the board of directors—experiences any conflict in relation to the festival, or any sense of being used. On the contrary, it seems to be a source of great satisfaction and pride.

Case Study 3: The Gallery

Since the Milluy years, there have been over 100 exhibitions in the Melbourne Alliance gallery spaces. Spaces at the Robe Street property and at Grey Street were especially well adapted to this activity, each boasting a former ballroom with expansive walls. In his time, Bernard Milluy organised a number of significant exhibitions, but was obliged to have recourse to spaces beyond the Alliance itself.

With the move to Robe Street, the committee was interested in creating a gallery policy that would give special emphasis to photographic work, but while there have been enough such exhibitions for one to acknowledge continuities in that policy line, the overall spread has been very eclectic. In some instances (relatively few), the Alliance has simply been a showcase for travelling exhibitions mounted in France, such as the 1986 shows on 'La Chanson' and '25 ans de rock français', the 1996 evocation of 'Pasteur superstar', or the 2000 celebration of 'La France : un siècle de passion olympique'. In these cases, the gallery has acted as a vehicle for French cultural outreach in a manner analogous to what we have seen with the cinema, with very little local input other than organisational: unpacking, mounting, putting on an opening, repacking, with perhaps a lecture or talk around the theme of the exhibition.

In some other, more numerous, instances, exhibitions have emerged from individual contacts between artists and a given director or board member. Sometimes these artists happen to be French, but without being sponsored by any official organisation. When one analyses the whole range of exhibitions,

three strong tendencies stand out. The first is that the major focus is on the stimulation and encouragement of creativity—of providing emerging artists an opportunity to show their work and their talent. In a broad sense, this is of course convergent with the Langian preference for creation over preservation, but it would be hard to establish any direct causal link between those policies and Alliance activity. Rather, there seems to be a common appreciation, from both the French and the Australian sides, of creativity as a value in its own right.

The second important tendency is a willingness to embrace a very wide range of thematic material, as well as a variety of media: photography, oil painting, sculpture, water colours, video art and multimedia. Many different national perspectives have been presented. Some have had to do with France, such as Jean Papillon's 'French Faces Down-Under' (1988), Marcel Majman's 'Impressions of France in Winter' (1989), Chantal Herbaut's 'Ma petite France' (1993) or Mariannick Saroul's 'La Provence ou le pays de Cézanne' (1996). But there have been artists from many different backgrounds (Lithuanian, Portuguese, Dutch, Chilean, Cambodian) and subject matter ranging from Russia and Chechnya, to Kosovo and Iraq, to Vietnam and Sri Lanka. Far from being simply decorative, the majority of exhibitions contain work that asks probing questions and demands serious attention. It is particularly gratifying that there has been a long-term commitment to indigenous art and indigenous themes: the AFM gallery's underlying ethos is one of authentic and deep intercultural understanding and exchange.

The third factor is the determination to build ongoing partnerships with local arts organisations. In late 2003, in a joint initiative of the board and the then director, Edouard Mornaud, the Alliance instituted a set of awards for graduates of The Victorian College of the Arts, and the exhibitions associated with these prizes became a regular part of the gallery calendar.

As with the first tendency, the other two can be seen to be very much *in line* with French cultural policy, but once again what dominates is less the idea of a local adoption of that policy than a notion of partnership—a sharing of responsibility and an exchange of freedoms that creates the potential for a fruitful intercultural relationship. Edouard Mornaud expressed it well in one of his editorials:

Les acteurs des institutions culturelles et artistiques, les universités, les écoles et l'Alliance Française de Melbourne avec le soutien de l'Ambassade de France en Australie et de l'Association française d'Action Artistique (AFAA) peuvent ainsi exprimer, au travers de projets divers, leurs points communs et parfois leurs différences [...]. Ensemble, ils bravent, provoquent et narguent parfois les idées reçues ; un défi permanent pour mieux réinventer sans cesse au travers de formes parfois les plus inattendues, nos visions et nos impressions du monde actuel.³⁶

Although a more detailed study would be needed to determine the degree to which the gallery pattern applies to other AFM cultural activities, it would appear to be the case at least with music and theatre as well, where the Alliance serves, through its collaborations with local artists and musicians, as a broad-church cultural centre without any necessary direct affiliation with things French. Key examples of this are the 'jeudis jazzy', which regularly offer live jazz in the downstairs bluestone cellar (former kitchen) of Eildon Mansion, and plays such as *Hypatia* (2009) and *Crime and Punishment* (2010), produced by the Stork Theatre within the Alliance walls.

Conclusion

It would seem that our analyses must lead us to conclude that the response to our original question about the weight of official French cultural policy in the cultural activities of the Alliance Française de Melbourne requires circumspection. In relation to the big issues—the symbolic one of the transformation of the library, with its connotations of a shift from a traditional and conservative literary-based culture to a more forward-looking communication-based model; and the annual film festival, which carries such important implications for France's self-representation as well as in budgetary terms—there can be no denying that French influence is both direct and powerful enough to be considered decisive. On the other hand, the gallery shows the coexistence of a quite different model of cultural partnership and exchange, and it is one that would appear to guide other AFM cultural activities as well.

Within a progressively more professional framework, the Alliance has broadly followed the process of cultural democratisation inherited from France, but it has done so in ways that are marked by its own history and personality. Rather than being the voice of a single culture, it has become a site of rich and varied intercultural dialogue. For Edouard Mornaud, who perhaps more than any ‘directeur’ since Bernard Milluy, strove successfully to integrate Alliance activities with Melbourne’s major educational and artistic institutions, the city’s own cultural diversity and energy made it a ‘terrain propice’³⁷ for his work. And of course, through its now considerable history, the local committee of the Alliance has continued to embody the spirit of the city. Certainly, through its language courses and its cultural activities, the AFM still continues to ‘represent France’ to Australia, but with its now multiple and varied interconnections into the cultural life of Melbourne, it does so in a collaborative spirit that not only works, but thrives.

APPENDIX

‘Directeurs’ of the Alliance Française de Melbourne

Maurice Carbonatto (September 1966–August 1972)
Pierre Siot (September 1972–August 1974)
Yannick Jézéquel (September 1974–March 1979)
Bernard Milluy (March 1979–July 1985)
Patrick Coustance (September 1985–July 1989)
Raymond Foucault (October 1989–July 1995)
Jean-Pierre Dumont (October 1995–July 1999)
Jean-Philippe Bottin (September 1999–August 2003)
Edouard Mornaud (September 2003–August 2007)
Patrice Pauc (10 October 2007–)

Notes

- 1 This article is adapted from Katia Menglet's Honours Thesis, 'Conflit ou Symbiose? L'Alliance Française de Melbourne devant la politique culturelle de la France depuis 1980', submitted at the University of Melbourne in July 2007. The work was based on a combination of secondary sources (most of which are cited here), and the primary archival sources of the Alliance Française de Melbourne.
- 2 Henceforth AFM.
- 3 For two excellent recent studies, see Jean-Michel Djian, *Politique culturelle : la fin d'un mythe*, Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 2005, and Kim Eling, *The Politics of Cultural Policy in France*, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 1999.
- 4 François Chaubert. 'L'Alliance Française ou la diplomatie de la langue (1883-1914)', *Revue historique*, 2004, 306, 4, p. 783.
- 5 Colin Nettelbeck, *The Alliance Française in Australia 1890-1990: An Historical Perspective*, Turner, ACT, Fédération des Alliances Françaises en Australie Incorporated, 1990. For a more detailed account of these early tensions, two articles by Colin Thornton-Smith. 'Paul Maistre, Vice-Consul and later Consul for France in Victoria, 1886-1898, 1901-1908', *Explorations*, n° 17, December 1994, pp. 3-48, and 'More on the reform of the Alliance Française of Victoria', *Explorations*, n° 22, June 1997, pp. 1-4. That reputations, once acquired, die hard is illustrated by Maurice Bruézière in his centenary history of the Alliance Française: in noting the creation of the Melbourne Alliance in 1890, he felt the need to add that the committee was 'surtout composé de dames' (*L'Alliance Française : histoire d'une institution*, Paris, Hachette, 1983, 27). What was at stake was not simply gender, however, but the dominance, within the Alliance, of the local social establishment over the French representatives who, not unreasonably, wanted to see greater emphasis placed on language teaching.
- 6 See, for example, Pascal Ory, *L'Aventure culturelle*, Paris, Flammarion, 1989; Brian Rigby, *Popular Culture in Modern France: A Study of Cultural Discourse*, London/New York, Routledge, 1991; Marc Fumaroli, *L'État culturel : essai sur une religion moderne*, Paris, Fallois, 1991; David L. Looseley, *The Politics of Fun, Cultural Policy and Debate in Contemporary France*, Oxford, Berg Publishers, 1995.
- 7 Lang served in this role from 1981 to 1986, and again from 1988 to 1993.
- 8 For a thorough account of Malraux's ambitions and achievements as Minister for Culture, see Phillipe Urfalino, *L'Invention de la politique culturelle*, Paris, Hachette, 2004.

- 9 Loosely, *The Politics of Fun*.
- 10 Cited in Loosely, *The Politics of Fun*, p. 37.
- 11 Cited in Loosely, *The Politics of Fun*, p. 83.
- 12 It should be remembered that French cultural policy is mediated to the international Alliance network through the Ministère des Affaires Étrangères. The key partner in Australia is the cultural services of the French Embassy. A more direct although unofficial channel of communication between Mitterrand and the Alliance existed during Philippe Greffet's term as Secretary General (1978-1988) when he had Roger Gouze, Mitterrand's brother-in-law, as his second in charge.
- 13 The position was funded by the first direct French Government subsidy. For an account of these developments, see Nettelbeck, *The Alliance Française in Australia 1890-1990*, pp. 14-18.
- 14 See Bruézière, *L'Alliance Française : histoire d'une institution*, pp. 172-173.
- 15 A complete list of the directors up to 2010 is provided in the appendix.
- 16 See Bruézière, *L'Alliance Française : histoire d'une institution*, pp. 169 ff.
- 17 Because of historical habit, the board often continues to refer to itself, and to be referred to by others, as 'the committee'. In this article we have tried to limit the use of 'committee' to the pre-1997 period.
- 18 In the case of the AFM, the deputy has often been given a key role in the coordination of language studies, allowing the director to concentrate on broader policy matters and on cultural activities.
- 19 See Nettelbeck, *The Alliance Française in Australia 1890-1990*, pp. 21-24.
- 20 Under the directorship of Patrice Pauc (from 2007), the AFM has greatly developed and expanded its internet website, with the result that the hard copy *Magazine* plays a less central role.
- 21 Bruézière, *L'Alliance Française : histoire d'une institution*, p. 6.
- 22 The early archives of the Alliance Française are held at the State Library of Victoria.
- 23 Donard was in Melbourne from 21 to 24 June 1996.
- 24 Archives of the AFM, 'Compte rendu de la réunion du comité du 17 juillet 1996'.
- 25 Archives of the AFM, 'Compte rendu de la réunion du comité du 17 juillet 1996'.
- 26 See <http://af-library.calyx.net.au/>.
- 27 For an account of this episode in French publishing history, see Colin Nettelbeck, 'L'Édition française à New York pendant la deuxième guerre mondiale', *Australian Journal of French Studies*, XXXVII, 2, 2000, pp. 222-252.
- 28 Loosely, *The Politics of Fun*, p. 235.

- 29 For a few years in the early 2000s, the Embassy enjoyed the services of a
specialist audiovisual attachée, Chantal Girondin.
- 30 Entitled ‘Film nouveau: A festival of contemporary French cinema 1982-
1984’, it was held in November 1984. It was a Milluy initiative: the Unifrance
arrangement with the Alliance network did not begin until later. The direct
involvement of the French Embassy’s cultural services came later still. More
archival work is needed to document these developments.
- 31 The collection included over 500 feature films from the 1930s to the 1980s,
and over 2,000 documentaries. It is now managed by the Australian Centre for
the Moving Image in Melbourne.
- 32 François Fontaine was the first assistant to be sent to the Melbourne Alliance.
He arrived in 1977. His own testimony was published in *Explorations*, n° 7,
1988, pp. 3-12.
- 33 Email communication of 29 April 2010.
- 34 In *The Sunday Age*, 19 March 2000.
- 35 Attendance figures are announced in the Alliance *Magazine* after each festival.
Film numbers are taken from the relevant festival programmes.
- 36 *Magazine de l’Alliance Française de Melbourne*, décembre 2004–janvier
2005, p. 2.
- 37 *Magazine de l’Alliance Française de Melbourne*, décembre 2004–janvier
2005, p. 2.