

GEORGES PEREC: THE AUSTRALIAN CONNECTION, THIRTY YEARS ON

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‘At the end of my life, I would like to have used all the words of the dictionary.[...] And not only to [...] use all of them but to create some. That’s my ambition. That’s why I write and how I write, at the same time.’¹

The fifth Melbourne Salon was successfully held at the Alliance Française on Tuesday 8 November 2011 on French writer and filmmaker Georges Perec—perhaps best described as a literary experimentalist who was intrigued by the question of form. Almost three decades after his death, the author of *La Disparition* (a novel he wrote without once using the letter *e*) is recognised as one of the most influential and inventive writers of his generation.

Thirty years after Perec gave a lecture at the Alliance Française de Melbourne in 1981, his spirit visited us once again through a lively presentation given by La Trobe University’s Raphaël Trantoul who, in collaboration with Norie Neumark and Maria Miranda, explored Perec’s legacy and relevance to today’s audiences in Australia where his books have sold more copies per capita than in any other English-speaking country.

Perec researcher Raphaël Trantoul shared his expert knowledge and research on the writer including details of his life and theorising on the reason Perec is so popular with Australian readers. Raphaël talked about the Oulipo group (*Ouvroir de littérature potentielle*, roughly translated as ‘workshop of potential literature’), a gathering of mainly French-speaking writers and mathematicians who seek to create works using constrained writing techniques. Perec remains a member of the group, since membership continues after death.

¹ Georges Perec in tape-recorded conversation in English with Kaye Mortley, Paris, August 1981 (extracts available at <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/>).

Norie Neumark and Maria Miranda presented excerpts from their video/sound installation *Searching for rue Simon-Crubellier*, a project which began in Paris in 2004, and took as point of departure the experience of being Australians in Paris and reading Perec's book *Life a User's Manual*. In this book Perec creates a puzzle of a novel set in a building located in the 17th arrondissement of Paris at number 11 rue Simon-Crubellier. *Searching for rue Simon-Crubellier* is a record of a search for an imaginary place—exploring actual and imagined relations to place.

The presentation was expertly chaired by Philip Thiel, who, together with Julien Leyre, ran a creative writing workshop prior to the Salon, using simple Perecquian writing constraints. Perec believed that such constraints in fact liberated the imagination and aided the creative writing process, and this was attested to by the participants of the workshop, who requested that such a workshop be held on a regular basis. Participants of both the Salon and the workshop were equally inspired to at least read some Perec, if not to try out his techniques in their own writing.

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References

- Perec, Georges, 1994, *A Void (La Disparition)*, translated by Gilbert Adair, London, Harvill.
- Perec, Georges, 2003, *Life: A User's Manual (La vie mode d'emploi)*, Paris, Hachette, translated by David Bellos, London, Vintage.

Notes on the speakers

Professor Norie Neumark is Chair of Cinema and Media Studies at La Trobe University. She is a sound/media artist and theorist and she regularly collaborates with Maria Miranda as Out-of-Sync (<http://www.out-of-sync.com/>); their most recent works are *Searching for the Inland Sea*, *Searching for rue Simon-Crubellier* and *Talking About the Weather*.

Dr Maria Miranda is a media artist and Post-Doctoral Fellow at La Trobe University. Her research is focussed on media art practices in public places.

Raphaël Trantoul is Lecturer and Coordinator of the French Studies Program at La Trobe University. He is conducting research on Pécerc's *La Vie mode d'emploi* (*Life: a User's Manual*).

Philip Thiel is a Melbourne-based writer and blogger who conducts yearly experiments that consist of a single action repeated each day <http://thiel.livejournal.com/>.

Julien Leyre is a French-Australian writer, film director, blogger and civil servant.

Notes on the Melbourne Salon

Taking the idea from the LC Salon in Sydney, with which we are now part of a network, the first Melbourne Salon was held in September 2010. The Melbourne Salon is a collaborative venture between ISFAR, RMIT University and the Alliance Française de Melbourne. The Salon is a place where people can engage in French-Australian cross-cultural dialogues: it aims to broaden understanding of French and Australian perspectives on contemporary topics through debate and discussion. The Salon draws participants from a wide range of backgrounds: academics, journalists, writers, musicians, and others who share an interest in discussing ideas in a convivial atmosphere.

The Melbourne Salon meets three times a year at the Alliance Française de Melbourne, 51 Grey St., St Kilda. Talks are in English and subsequent discussions can be in French or English. For further details or to join our mailing list, contact: themelbournesalon@gmail.com.

For more on the Melbourne Salon and the Salon on Georges Pécerc, please visit SBS French radio for an interview with Raphaël Trantoul and Kerry Mullan: <http://www.sbs.com.au/yourlanguage/french/highlight/page/id/191687/t/Dr-Kerry-Mullan-Raphael-Trantoul-The-Melbourne-Salon-Georges-Perc-30-Years-on>.