

DIALOGUES: THE MELBOURNE SALONS 2012

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Preliminary Note on the Melbourne Salon

Taking the idea from the LC Salon in Sydney (now part of the same 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, and 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 Kerry Mullan at themelbournesalon@gmail.com or on (03) 9925 2264.

For more on the Melbourne Salon and details of forthcoming and previous events, please visit <http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse;ID=axdu41gtvbl>.

David Pledger in conversation with Michael Shirrefs (April 2012)

The first Melbourne Salon for 2012 involved a stimulating conversation on the current state of arts and culture in Australia and France, and more widely in Europe. Having first met in Brussels in 2010, Michael Shirrefs conducted a follow-up interview with David Pledger, former Director of the Collaboration Project between the EU-funded *International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts (IETM)* and the *Australia Council for the Arts*.

The speakers provided a lively discussion on the state of European culture, especially in French-speaking countries, in times of economic upheaval and existential crisis in Europe. It was pointed out that in times of prosperity, it is easy for politicians to be seen as conspicuous patrons of the arts. However,

when fortunes change, the arts can feel the knife very swiftly. And so culture is a most effective canary-in-the-coal-mine in difficult times.

All this is relevant to Australia. Given that it is now five years since Labour achieved government and we are still to see a cultural policy, the lessons of Francophone Europe may provide valuable guides for what to do ... and what not to do.

NOTES ON THE SPEAKERS

David Pledger is the Artistic Director of interdisciplinary arts company ‘not yet it’s difficult’ (NYID). His documentaries, video-art, live performances and interactive artworks have been presented in theatres, galleries, museums, car-parks, stables, film studios and streets in Europe, Asia and Australia. From 2009 to 2011 he was based in Brussels as the Inaugural Director of the Collaboration Project between the EU-funded *International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts (IETM)* and the *Australia Council for the Arts*.

Michael Shirrefs is the producer/presenter of *Creative Instinct*—the weekly arts feature program on ABC Radio National. Michael has been a program-maker for the ABC for many years. He is also known for his research on a large collection of French books given to the State Library of Victoria in 1880 and the exhibition *Paris to Melbourne with an Atlas* which he curated in late 2010 to coincide with the 120th anniversary of the Alliance Française de Melbourne.

Napoleon: Revolution to Empire at the National Gallery of Victoria (July 2012)

For the first time, the Melbourne Salon was held ‘offsite’ at the National Gallery of Victoria. Participants were treated to an informative and entertaining introductory lecture by Dr Ted Gott, Senior Curator International Art, before viewing the exhibition itself. *Napoleon: Revolution to Empire* was the highly successful 2012 Winter Masterpiece at the NGV: a panoramic exhibition examining French art, culture and life from the 1770s to the 1820s. Its story ran from the first French voyages of discovery to Australia during the reign of Louis XV to the end of Napoleon’s leadership as first Emperor of France.

The exhibition covered the stormy period of the French Revolution and the rise to power of the young Napoleon Bonaparte and his new wife Joséphine, great patrons of the arts, sciences and literature. A dazzling couple, leaders of Europe in the ‘Age of Exploration’, Napoleon and Joséphine were fascinated by Australia. This newly discovered continent, the southern part of which had been named Terre Napoléon or Napoleon-land by French navigators, filled Joséphine’s hothouses with dozens of exotic new plants and flowers, as well as furnishing her and Napoleon with a private menagerie of kangaroos, emus and black swans.

As well as telling the remarkable story of France’s close involvement with Australia in the early 1800s, ‘Napoleon: Revolution to Empire’ brought to Australia for the first time hundreds of objects of breathtaking opulence and luxury—paintings, drawings, engravings, sculpture, furniture, textiles, porcelain, glass, gold and silver, fashion, jewellery and armour. Organised in partnership with the Fondation Napoléon, which lent many of their valuable works, the exhibition also featured treasures drawn from Europe’s most important Revolutionary and Napoleonic collections, including the Château de Malmaison, Château de Versailles, Musée Carnavalet and Musée de l’Armée in France, the Napoleon Museum Thurgau in Switzerland, and the Museo Napoleonico in Rome.¹

NOTES ON THE SPEAKER

Dr Ted Gott is Senior Curator of International Art at the National Gallery of Victoria and was the co-curator of *Napoleon: Revolution to Empire*. He has curated and co-curated numerous exhibitions, most recently *Vienna Art and Design; Städel Museum: European Masters 19th–20th Century; Gustave Moreau & the Eternal Feminine* and *Salvador Dalí: Liquid Desire*. He has recently published a number of articles on Emmanuel Frémiet and the cultural history of the gorilla in nineteenth and twentieth-century art and cinema.

¹ Adapted from the NGV website <http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/> (page no longer available).

Sites of knowledge, sites of power: The Paris Museum, collecting the world (1739–1832) (October 2012)

The most ambitious Melbourne Salon to date comprised a stimulating presentation, followed by the launch of a website and three new publications related to the topic of French exploration in Australia. The guest of honour for the evening was Dr Cédric Crémière, Director of the Natural History Museum of Le Havre, here in Melbourne to retrieve the illustrations from the Lesueur collection on loan to the aforementioned Napoleon exhibition.

The Natural History Museum of Paris, founded as ‘the King’s Garden’ in 1635, was a site for cultivating and curating medicinal herbs. The nomination in 1739 of Georges-Louis Leclerc, later Count Buffon, ushered in a significant period of development for the institution and for Natural History as a discipline, thanks to the inspirational spirit of the Enlightenment and the positioning of France as a world power. The Natural History Museum of Paris progressively became the centre of a world network that Buffon and Cuvier in particular were responsible for constructing. At the same time, French science came closer to those in power, associating itself with the conquests of the Napoleonic régime and with the great expeditions it sponsored (Egypt, Terra Australis). Through selected examples and illustrations, the talk revealed how imperialism supported Natural History and why this particular discipline found favour in that context.

NOTES ON THE SPEAKER

Dr Cédric Crémière is an historian of science. Since 2005, he has been Director of the Natural History Museum of Le Havre (Normandy), and is also general curator of the ‘Terre d’eaux’ festival (Land of Waters) held every summer. Following his studies in philosophy and museology, he earned his PhD in 2004 with a thesis entitled *Science at the Museum: Comparative Anatomy at the Jardin du Roi and at the Natural History Museum of Paris, 1745–1898* (to be published in 2013). During that time, he also trained as a Heritage Curator at the Institut National du Patrimoine (National Institute of Heritage). He was Honorary Research Fellow at the Wellcome Trust Centre for the History of Medicine at University College London in 2004, where he conducted research into the history of mechanical obstetrics in 18th and 19th century France. Cédric

Crémière was Honorary Fellow in the Department of History and Philosophy of Science at Cambridge University in 2005. He has curated several exhibitions, including *Avant la naissance, 5000 ans d'histoire* (with René Frydman, Émile Papiernik, Jean-Louis Fischer) in 2008. In 2010–2011 he was selected as an affiliate of the prestigious Institut des Hautes Études pour la Science et la Technologie, with the title of ‘auditeur’.

Dr Crémière is a member of the team, led by Stéphane Schmitt, which is currently engaged in re-editing and re-publishing the complete works of Buffon—one of the most prominent and influential figures in natural history during the eighteenth century.

Launch of the Baudin Legacy Project

The *Baudin Legacy Project* was funded in Australia through an Australian Research Council Discovery Grant and in Belgium from the National Fund for Scientific Research (Fonds national de la recherche scientifique). The five year project commenced in 2005, with its primary aim being to provide an online archive and reference guide accessible to all those interested in the Baudin expedition and French exploration in general. The *Baudin Legacy* web site thus comprises the French transcriptions and the English translations of the writings generated by the expedition: the journals of Baudin, his officers, scientists and crew. This is supported by an iconographical archive and other reference tools including archival sources, library holdings and bibliographies. The project team provided a short presentation and tour of the web site (<http://sydney.edu.au/arts/research/baudin/project/>).

NOTES ON THE SPEAKERS

Margaret Sankey is Professor Emeritus of French Studies at the University of Sydney and is a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities, as well as an Officier dans l'Ordre des Palmes Académiques. She coordinates the *Baudin Legacy* project and has published extensively on different aspects of the expedition. Her research on the Baudin expedition is allied to her interest in early French notions of the Terres Australes and the influence of the Abbé Paulmier's *Mémoires* (1664) on the first French voyages of exploration to the Southern hemisphere.

Jean Fornasiero is Professor of French and Head of the School of Humanities at the University of Adelaide, and a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. Her colleague John West-Sooby is Associate Professor and Head of French, also at the University of Adelaide. They have worked extensively on the early French exploration of Australia, and in particular on the Baudin expedition. They are both members of the *Baudin Legacy* research team and have published widely on that topic. They are the co-authors, with Peter Monteath, of *Encountering Terra Australis: The Australian Voyages of Nicolas Baudin and Matthew Flinders*, which was awarded the Frank Broeze Memorial Maritime History Prize in 2005. They are currently preparing a critical edition, and translation, of the confidential report on the British colony at Port Jackson compiled by Baudin's zoologist, François Péron.

**Launch of *Discovery and Empire: French Ships in the South Seas*
edited by John West-Sooby (University of Adelaide Press)**

The essays in this book, edited by John West-Sooby, deal with various aspects of the history of French exploration in the Pacific. The first section of the volume seeks to analyse the motivations as well as the scientific and political outcomes of the succession of French voyages in the southern hemisphere from the sixteenth century to the early nineteenth century. It focuses in particular on the geopolitics of this period, known as the 'Age of Discovery', and on the rivalries that emerged between France and the other European nations engaged in the exploration of the southern oceans. The essays in the second part of the volume are primarily concerned with questions relating to the contact between the French voyagers and the native populations they encountered, notably the Australian Aborigines.

NOTES ON THE SPEAKER

Associate Professor John West-Sooby teaches French language and literature, in particular the literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as the mediaeval period. He has a long-standing research interest in the nineteenth-century novel, including the works of Maupassant, Barbey d'Aurevilly and, in particular, Stendhal. He has also identified the existence of the picaresque

tradition in twentieth-century writing and has applied this methodology to another of his great interests, French crime fiction. In 2003 he was awarded the Palmes Académiques by the French government, and in 2011 he completed a book with Jean Fornasiero on François Péron and his ‘spy’ document on the colony of New South Wales: *French Designs on New South Wales, a critical edition of the Memoir on the British Settlements in New Holland by François Péron*, Adelaide, Friends of the State Library of South Australia, forthcoming.

Launch of *Aborigènes et peuples insulaires, une histoire illustrée des premiers habitants de l’Australie* by Marc Orlando (Au Vent des Îles)

This book is a translation of *First Australians: An Illustrated History*, edited by Rachel Perkins and Marcia Langton and published by SBS/Miegunyah in 2008; this was followed by the film *First Australians*, a multi-award winning documentary series shown on SBS in 2009. *First Australians* is the dramatic story of the collision of two worlds that created contemporary Australia. Told from the perspective of Australia’s first people, it vividly brings to life the events that unfolded when the oldest living culture in the world was overrun by the world’s greatest empire. Through a vast collection of images and historic documents, seven historians reveal the true stories of individuals—both black and white—caught in Australia’s most transformative period of history.

NOTES ON THE SPEAKER

The author and translator is Marc Orlando, convenor of Translating and Interpreting Studies at Monash University. After teaching for ten years in France and New Zealand, Marc came to Monash in 2007. Marc is the Translation and Interpreting Studies representative with CIUTI, the International Conference of Universities training Translators and Interpreters. He is a professional translator and conference interpreter: his major research focuses on the training of translators and interpreters, where academic research meets professional practice. Marc received the national AUSIT Award Excellence in Translation in 2007. He has translated work on Iraq and Afghanistan by journalist Jon Stephenson, who then twice went on to win the international Bayeux Calvados award for war correspondents with these translations in 2006 and 2011. Marc

also translated *Mau Moko*, Au Vent des Îles, 2010, a book on Maori art and culture, and *Ici*, a play by playwright Rebecca Lister, Melbourne, 2012.

Launch of *Almost a French Australia: French-British Rivalry in the Southern Oceans* by Noelene Bloomfield (in absentia), Halstead Press

Many Australians have only recently realised how close this continent was to becoming partly French, like Canada, with two languages and two cultures, and most Australian history books have neglected these early chapters of our nation's history for almost two centuries.

In a strategic battle with her perennial rival across the English Channel, France sent numerous scientific and commercial expeditions to the Indian and Pacific Oceans in the 1700s and 1800s, attempting to solve the mysteries of the legendary Terra Australis Incognita, and to locate suitable ports for trade below the Equator. Numerous French captains, officers, scientists and crew members died from a variety of illnesses during these voyages and were therefore unable to report their exciting discoveries directly to their King or Emperor. The outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789 and its subsequent turmoil meant that France was not in a position to develop colonies in the southern oceans for many decades.

Noelene Bloomfield explains why the French, despite having claimed the western side of this country, drawing detailed charts and making many thousands of important scientific discoveries, eventually withdrew from the Australian continent, allowing the British *carte blanche* to develop this nation and effectively block France from both Australia and New Zealand.

NOTES ON THE AUTHOR

Noelene Bloomfield, Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Palmes Académiques, is Honorary Research Fellow in European Languages and Studies at the University of Western Australia. Noelene taught French in NSW before gaining a Master of Arts degree in the United States. She lectured at the University of Oregon before joining the staff of French Studies at the University of Western Australia from

1968 till 2002. Noelene published a textbook entitled *Voyage de Découverte* and produced a DVD and a CD-ROM on the extensive French exploration in Australian waters. Her exhibition entitled *A French Australia? Almost!* has been displayed in many locations in Australia and overseas—a French version is currently touring in France. Noelene has recently co-authored a book on the first 100 years of the Alliance Française in Perth, Western Australia.

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