

Introduction

The essays in this volume are drawn from the sixteenth George Rudé Seminar in French History and Civilization, held in Brisbane from 9-11 July 2008 and hosted by the University of Queensland's Centre for the History of European Discourses. The conference brought together scholars of modern French history from universities throughout the world, including Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, France, the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada. Keynote addresses by Colin Jones, Christine Bard and Fabrice Virgili were accompanied by nine panels exploring diverse themes in French history and civilization, from gender, the body and culture, to the transformation of the French nation state. The third "theme day" of the conference was dedicated to the subject "Revising gender and sexuality in nation, race and identity."

That the study of French history has such a strong tradition in Australia owes much to the George Rudé Seminar. It was first held in 1978 in honor of the British historian George Frederick Elliot Rudé, who was based in Australia for most of the 1960s. Although his research encompassed England and France, as well as Australia and Canada, Rudé is perhaps best remembered for his research on the crowd in revolutionary France. The Seminar, which meets every second year in Australia or New Zealand, sustains the memory of Rudé's work and contribution to Australian intellectual life by providing a regular forum for the presentation of research on different aspects of French history. Despite—or perhaps because of—its location, it draws scholars from not only the broader Asia-Pacific region, but also from Europe and the Americas, reinforcing the observation made by David Kammerling Smith in the preface to this journal's first volume that "the study of French history has become a truly global endeavor."¹

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¹ David Kammerling Smith, "Preface," *French History and Civilization. Papers from the George Rudé Seminar*, 1 (2005).

George Rudé himself provides perhaps one of the best examples of what it means to be an international scholar working on French history. Born in Norway and educated in England, his academic appointments took him to Australia and then Canada, with visiting positions in the United Kingdom, the United States and Japan. This somewhat peripatetic career path was not initially of his own choosing, a feature that has attracted almost as much attention as his work.

A 1961 document from the file that the Australian Secret Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) kept on George Rudé bears the handwritten inscription, “A most curious case.”² Rudé’s early ties with the British Communist Party had effectively excluded him from employment in British academia, and Rudé was approaching fifty years of age when the University of Adelaide offered him what was his first academic post. Even at the height of the Cold War however, it was clear that Britain’s—perhaps inevitable—loss was Australia’s gain. One intelligence report suggested that despite the fact that Rudé had “openly admitted his membership of the Communist Party,” the University could not bring itself to reject his application. “His qualifications,” it recorded “are so much higher than other applicants for his intended appointment here that the University has no option but to appoint him, short of a public upheaval on the matter[.]”³ Australian academia was still smarting from the scandal that surrounded the University of Tasmania’s dismissal of S.S. Orr, an affair that had raised serious questions about the relationship between personal conduct and academic integrity. Yet Rudé’s achievements made him a difficult candidate to turn down. In 1955 the Royal Historical Society had awarded him the prestigious Alexander Prize for his paper on the Gordon Riots of 1780. The 1959 publication of his first book, *The Crowd in the French Revolution*, confirmed Rudé’s status as a major exponent of the new type of social history emerging in France.

After his appointment, Rudé’s passage to Australia on the *Orcades* was diligently tracked, and he remained under close surveillance by staff once installed at the University.⁴ Upon arrival, he was to be warned that “his past adherence to the Communist Party is known and that any demonstration of his political views at the University will probably cause his dismissal.”⁵ It is perhaps not surprising that subsequent ASIO reports suggested little further need for concern. One account recorded that “he never mentions politics except temperately in his lectures, and mentions neither it nor anything in private discussions which can be construed as having a Communist leaning.”⁶ A note of the following year stated that “Subject has not come to adverse notice since he has been in Australia.”⁷ Despite continued additions to Rudé’s file during his years at the University, the associations of the past remained—at least on the surface—partitioned from his new academic life.

Curious or not, Rudé’s “exile,” as it has often been called, was an enormously productive one.⁸ His first seven years in Australia saw the publication of six books, an

² National Archives of Australia (hereafter NAA), A6119, 2489, fol. 25 ([July] 1961).

³ *Ibid.*, fol. 14 (5 Jan. 1960).

⁴ *Ibid.*, fols 13 (22 Dec. 1959), 18 (27 Jan. 1960), 21 (29 Mar. 1960), 22 (24 Aug. 1960).

⁵ *Ibid.*, fol. 14 (5 Jan. 1960).

⁶ *Ibid.*, fol. 22 (24 Aug. 1960).

⁷ *Ibid.*, fol. 34 (19 Oct. 1961).

⁸ See for example James Fruguglietti, “A Scholar in ‘Exile:’ George Rudé as a Historian of Australia,” *French History and Civilization. Papers from the George Rudé Seminar*, 1 (2005) and Harvey J. Kaye,

output recognized by the University with the award of a Doctorate of Literature in 1967. Although Rudé later suggested that distance from the libraries and archives of Europe was a factor in his decision to leave Australia,⁹ for some observers this distance seemed not to have impaired his work on European history as much as fortified its conceptual underpinnings. Hugh Stretton has suggested that Rudé's Australian appointment may have permitted a greater degree of flexibility in his Marxism, and, due to his reduced access to French and English archives, encouraged him to focus on "more reflective and theoretical work."¹⁰

Writing about his development as a historian, Rudé recalled the influence of Marx in leading him to history and to the conviction that history progresses through the conflict of social classes.¹¹ It was in the examination of these conflicts that Rudé established the methodological framework most closely associated with his work today. Like other practitioners of the new social history, Rudé looked beyond institutions and elites to the experiences of ordinary people. His starting point for *The Crowd in the French Revolution*, based on his 1949 doctoral dissertation, lay in such straightforward—and previously neglected—questions as "Who stormed the Bastille?"¹² This approach was inspired by a desire to look beyond Michelet's idealized vision of "*le peuple*" and past the volatile "mob" of Burke and Taine to the actual composition of the revolutionary crowd. He sought not only to find out the names and professions of its individual members, but also to explore the motives and behavior of these wine merchants, stonemasons and tailors. The discovery of such information required dedicated excavation of police records and other types of archival material that had been previously overlooked, material that would henceforth form "a basic part" of his "research equipment."¹³ Rudé built on these approaches in *The Crowd in History*, published in 1964. Here he extended his investigation of popular movements both chronologically and geographically by looking at a series of riots between 1730 and 1848 in Britain and in France. Patterns of violence, the emergence of leaders in the crowd and investigation of "the irrational" aspects of human behavior were among the new dimensions added to his research.¹⁴

Despite receiving much praise, Rudé's particular approach to "history from below" was not without its critics. Richard Cobb, in a rather waspish review of *The Crowd in History*, attacked Rudé's attempt to find "general laws governing collective behaviour," not least because of the disparate nature of the episodes he examined. Cobb also condemned what he called the "*Rudéfication*" of these events, referring to the counting of heads and tallying of professions made possible by Rudé's extensive archival research. Here Cobb argued that the available material was not only "too fragmentary,"

"Introduction. George Rudé, Social Historian," in *The Face of the Crowd. Studies in Revolution, Ideology and Popular Protest*, ed. Harvey J. Kaye (New York, 1988), 1.

⁹ Friguglietti, "A Scholar in 'Exile'," 10.

¹⁰ Hugh Stretton, "George Rudé," in *History from Below: studies in popular protest and popular ideology in honour of George Rudé*, ed. Frederick Krantz (Montreal, 1985), 47 and 54. For a more critical assessment of the impact of Rudé's "exile" upon his work see Andrew Charlesworth, "Essays in review: George Rudé and the anatomy of the crowd," *Labour History Review*, 55, no. 3 (1990): 30-1.

¹¹ George Rudé, "The changing face of the crowd," in *The Historian's Workshop. Original essays by sixteen historians*, ed. L.P. Curtis Jr. (Berkeley, Cal., 1970), 189.

¹² *Ibid.*, 190 and 193.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 190.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 197.

but also “highly selective” and lacking in “statistical accuracy.”¹⁵ Yet, while Rudé took on board Cobb’s directive to “get into” the heads of the rioters he examined, he stood by his efforts to fuse the unique and the general, continuing his quest to “supplement” individual histories with an attempt to determine “the collective actions, moods, and motives of the ‘crowd’.”¹⁶

It is perhaps here that Rudé’s work reverberates most clearly today. The decline of the social interpretation of the French Revolution led to Rudé’s particular interests and methodological approaches falling out of fashion.¹⁷ His focus on social conflict limited the impact on his work of the cultural and linguistic turns, and reviews of his later publications noted that developments in the study of revolutionary political culture had seemingly passed him by.¹⁸ Yet Rudé’s legacy is easily detected. It is at least partly thanks to Rudé that a “mob” in revolutionary France can no longer be passed off as such but must instead be broken up, identified and interrogated. His commitment to looking beyond traditional sources, past memoirs, pamphlets and parliamentary reports to the type of archival material that reveals, and even records the voices of those individuals in the crowd, still offers a model for many types of history.¹⁹ More broadly, Rudé’s attempt to blend the individual and the collective, reflected in his determination to “look through [the] telescope at both ends,” remains influential, as does his efforts to locate ideas within the social context in which they “germinate” and are absorbed.²⁰ James Friguglietti, pondering what Rudé would have made of the revisionist scholarship of the 1990s, suggests that he may have developed a “post-post revisionist view” of the French Revolution by reconstructing “traditional ‘orthodox’ arguments upon the ruins of the old.”²¹ Such speculation, while it must remain just that, nonetheless reminds us that old approaches may be merged productively with current and future methods of historical enquiry to create new interpretations of the past.

The peer-reviewed essays in this volume show evidence of this while broaching a wide range of cultural, social and political themes. Arranged in loose chronological order, they explore topics in French identity and culture and French state and society from the Old Regime to the post-war period. Associations between privacy, domestic objects and identity form a first point of convergence in three studies where the home provides an important setting. In an innovative analysis of the eighteenth-century interior, Georgina Cole investigates the work of the artist Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, showing how the use of doors in his paintings signals a growing demand for privacy in this period. David Garrioch also peers into the eighteenth-century domicile to examine the relationship between material culture and religious identity in the homes of Parisian Huguenots, exploring how both religious and secular objects could serve to reinforce faith and religious identity in times of religious persecution. In the post-revolutionary period,

¹⁵ [Richard Cobb], “Overcrowding,” *Times Literary Supplement*, no. 3331, December 30, 1965, 1205. See also Charlesworth, “George Rudé,” 30.

¹⁶ Rudé, “Changing face,” 199-201.

¹⁷ James Friguglietti, “Dispersing the crowd. The changing reputation of George Rudé as a historian of the French Revolution,” *Western Society for French History Proceedings*, 28 (2000): 302-3.

¹⁸ See for example Colin Lucas, “Still bubbling in the furnace,” *Times Literary Supplement*, May 19-25 1989, 554.

¹⁹ For a discussion of Rudé’s use of archives, see Kaye, “Introduction,” 8 and n. 29.

²⁰ Rudé, “Changing face,” 201 and 203.

²¹ Friguglietti, “Dispersing the Crowd,” 308.

Jolanta Pekacz charts the rise of the *romance*, a new musical genre considered well-suited to the privacy and intimacy of the home and in particular to women, but one that could potentially restrict their identity as well as reinforce it.

The identity of one of the Revolution's most despised characters, Maximilien Robespierre, is re-examined in Peter McPhee's study of Robespierre's childhood. McPhee sets out to separate Robespierre from his habitual identification with the Terror, bringing to mind Rudé's own efforts in this area,²² and begins by taking us back to Robespierre's hometown of Arras. The city's social hierarchy, and the young Robespierre's complex standing within it, provide fertile ground for new insights into his later motivations, ideas and conduct.

Tensions between state and community in Old Regime France are examined in Hamish Graham's investigation of the management of communal woodlands in the Landes region. Here the nature of absolutism is illuminated through the study of woodland maps whose use suggests that knowledge of these resources functioned primarily to serve the interests of the state. The relationship between power and knowledge is explored in another context in Nicole Starbuck's study of Sir Joseph Banks and Nicolas Baudin's expedition to Australia in 1800. Close examination of Banks's correspondence seeks to uncover the exact nature of his interest in French voyages of exploration and reveals the tensions present in the clash between national and scientific interests. Identity and France's overseas empire come together in Robert Aldrich's contribution on Corsica and French colonialism as the author explores the paradox that saw colonialism strengthen links between the island and the mainland but also reinforce Corsica's distinct identity.

The body and its relationship with the medical profession is the subject of three contributions in this volume. Robert Weston scours eighteenth-century medical consultations on venereal disease, Peter Cryle traces the medicalization of "female impotence" in the nineteenth century and Jonathan Marshall examines the meeting of parascience, Spiritism and avant-garde movements in late nineteenth-century thought about the body and the self. Based on a variety of rich and often little known sources, these papers each display the anchoring of intellectual history in the history of specific social and institutional practices.

The volume concludes with two studies of cultural representations in twentieth-century France. James Cannon's essay depicts the interwar struggle between the Catholic Church and Communist Party to gain influence over the inhabitants of the area surrounding Paris known as the *zone*. An analysis of two competing artistic visions of the *zone*, and of the underlying tensions between Christian and Communist ideals, reveals two competing yet interlinked visions for the future of the French nation. The nation's recent past, and the difficulties of coming to terms with it, is the topic of Nicholas Hewitt's study of popular literature in post-Liberation France. The fiction published in the newspaper *France-Soir* suggests a thirst for reassuring stories that reinforced gender stereotypes, continuity and a return to conventional values and signaled a broader desire to move on from the disruption of the war.

Despite their chronological, geographic and thematic spread, the essays in this volume share a commitment to innovative and often in-depth research based on an imaginative range of sources that includes medical records, music reviews, photographs

²² George Rudé, ed., *Robespierre* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1967), 2.

and novels. Here they not only bring new material to readers, but in doing so promote new questions and reflections about important issues in French history and civilization. Rudé's own work indicated that distance from Europe need not prove a barrier to research in European history and many of the essays here reveal a Rudéan effort on the part of their authors to track down the sources needed to answer such questions as "who?" and "why?" Yet as the number of digitized resources continues to grow, the notion of exile, and the difficulties imposed by distance, is becoming increasingly irrelevant. Google's discussions with the Bibliothèque nationale de France concerning the digitization of its collections, announced during the preparation of this volume, suggest that the way research into French history is carried out around the world may be about to change significantly, at least where printed sources are concerned. Despite ongoing reservations, one cannot help but wonder what Rudé, who had fought his own minor battles with the bureaucratic procedures of the Bibliothèque nationale, might have made of it all.²³

It is now fifty years since the publication of Rudé's *The Crowd in the French Revolution* and the methodological innovation it brought to a field of enquiry which continues to evolve with each generation. Rudé's difficulties in finding a position in the United Kingdom led not only to the strengthening of the study of French history in Australia, but also to the founding of a tradition embraced and elaborated by Australian historians who have ensured its continued development in the form of the Rudé Seminar. As the conference continues to attract researchers from around the world, and as the online publication of *French History and Civilization* brings their findings to an ever larger audience, it seems likely that the Seminar will continue to prompt scholars in Rudé's injunction, borrowed from Engels, that "all history must be studied afresh."

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²³ George Rudé, "The Archivist and the Historian. Eldershaw Memorial Lecture, Hobart-Launceston, 14-15 July, 1970," *Papers and Proceedings* (Tasmanian Historical Research Association), 17 (1970): 111.