Sexual temporalities

Katrina Schlunke

Susannah Radstone, *The Sexual Politics of Time: Confession, Nostalgia, Memory*, London and New York, Routledge, 2007; 256pp, £21.99

Time is extraordinarily labile and yet constantly called back to its ubiquitous task of inventing a now and a then, or a now and before. Even within a project of thinking about an order of sensation that exceeds or undermines teleological time, for example, scholars will deploy findings from biology that purport to measure the time between the moments of sensory memory and when memory proper (that, which can be recalled) is laid down. It is said to be two seconds. Two seconds of non-representational time? This slippage becomes even more overt when we begin to organise vast tracts of cultural phenomena through ideas like 'modern' and 'postmodern'. The brilliance of this book lies in its dogged capacity to keep showing the ways in which each conceptualisation of time, no matter how anti-teleological, becomes tied through its claim to a larger typology (e.g. modernity and postmodernity) to a politics of sexuality, and that those politics produce an often-overlooked variety in how temporality works in film, books, and museums, and as evocations of 'our' time.

Confession, understood as one aspect of the organising form of power within modernity through its assistance in the production of a 'subject in process', has its particular times. The most usual understanding of the time of the confession can be shown via Bruner and Weisser, who suggest 'this separation between the "telling" and "told about" self has a temporal aspect since the "I" that speaks or writes lives in the "instance of discourse" in which he attempts to impersonate a self created out of memory from the past'. This brings together versions of autobiography and aspects of religious confessions, and produces a subject caught up in the 'forward movement of becomingness'. But is this the only confessional temporality? Radstone suggests at least two complications to this now *de rigueur* account of the work of the confession. The first is to remind us that Foucault's confession was always a practice within which, or rather through which, a subject was made and unmade. That is, the subject self was recognised in the moment only to be unmade and made again by themselves and those who listened. The truthful effect of that institutional listening then had to be recognised by those who confessed. Although Radstone does not go this far, perhaps the 'agonism' of this process that is never complete and always ambiguous might also produce moments of such 'self exposure' that it may come closer to Bergson's notion of duration. In his idea of duration he puts forward the possibility of an immediate experience of intensity. In duration we can have

 doi:10.3898/newf.68.rev 01.2009

direct access to the real 'if we could strike our senses or consciousness directly', which is surely what some versions of confession-cum-autobiography do or attempt to do? Bergsonian duration challenges the modern obsession with the regularly calibrated numerical time of the clock and the calendar, and with industrious production of the future, by facilitating a recollection, or rather a preservation, of the past within our current existence such as some acute and self consciously affective autobiographies attempt.

The second is a more social path that makes time in effect proliferate through connection rather than simply carry the individual bourgeois subject forward. This idea uses examples of feminist autobiographies via Rita Felski and Raymond Williams' critique of the urban dystopic ('all these alone people in the city might bump into one and other') to show that in many instances the 'confessional' also produced the means of connection to others. This involves not so much an individual becoming as a becoming with others. As a means of convening community, the confession's temporality becomes not so much a means of producing teleological individualism, as an order of radical connectivity. Perhaps that spill of contagious recognitions could best be described as presentism? Confession may still be producing the single representative subject of (modern) discourse as Foucault suggested, but an appreciation of the moments of 'in-betweenness' within confessional temporal modes and the social becomingness that might also emerge complicates the story. If it is precisely through these discursive acts that feminist sociality can be enacted and a single order of masculine certainty (but perhaps temporarily) undone, then exactly how 'individualistic' is it?

Radstone neatly identifies the two sins of nostalgia; 'nostalgia is criticized for its commodification of the past … [and] it is also conversely criticized for turning social change into private affect'. Nostalgia has routinely been blamed for the sentimentalising of the past, the destruction of history, the postmodern 'effect', and for its association with a conservative politics. Radstone mentions John Major's promulgation of an education system based on 'grammar, spelling, tables', but from Australia I could mention the more insidious call of our ex-Prime Minister John Howard for a return to 'Australian' values. It seems easy at first to see the problem with nostalgia. It 'tells it like it wasn't', and precisely because it often works through the mass media and governing institutions its effects are pervasive. The particular kind of time produced through nostalgia is seen as warm and bland, somehow blanking out a 'real' past which has more political and passionate effects. But what is unreal about nostalgic 'affect'? Is it the longing that Radstone tells us, via Hutcheon and Lerner, 'makes art possible', for example? The productiveness of nostalgia can be seen in the popular histories of the past and the heritage industries as well as in the 'feelings' of different populations that something profound and perhaps un-nameable has been lost.

The critique of Jameson's dismissal of nostalgia in part through a re-reading of Benjamin is very telling. The key insight is that Jameson's 'nostalgia' is 'lacking' and bound up with a phallocentric desire that was

so much more possible when the reassurance of fetishism was also so much more possible. That is, when the phallic mother was so much more easily organised. This makes the appreciation of the Oedipal mother key not only to how we understand the politics of nostalgia but to the broader politics of temporality and its production through figurations of the masculine as well as the feminine. Are our inventions of different temporalities caught up with desires for ideal psychic states? This seems obvious within a particular cultural envelope, but also points to a sometime irritation with this book. Its style is to show one detailed argument after another within the same section, often from diverse areas, e.g. literature and psychoanalysis. Each argument is finely crafted and eventually evolves around a particular sexual politic, but it can be difficult to tell by chapter's end which of the many fine points was intended to be the major one. A complicated chapter which has given us many new insights and very rich re-readings will then end with a modest conclusion about 'the interweaving' of, say, the psychic and the historical, or the need to look at masculinity as well as the feminine. This is simply too modest and sometimes mildly confusing. But in the beautiful exposition of the film *Le temps qui reste*, something of the affective force of the film wends its way through the writing and the argument. This conclusion to a section concerned with nostalgia, masculinity and mourning shows us something of how memory and time can be done differently when both the material world, the idea of the elemental, and an imagining of circles rather than lines come into play.

The whole book is about the possibility that memory has surpassed nostalgia as the central temporal mode of our times. And in the last section, which concentrates on the rise and rise of the memoir, this is explicitly addressed. This involves both a return to psychoanalytic considerations about mythic pasts, and a reimagining of what masculine and feminine could become. We have already learnt from the previous chapters that both confession and nostalgia belong within modernity and postmodernity, and indeed complicate the temporalising of both, but what exactly does memory do? Radstone, after requoting Foucault's contention that confession has been established as one of the key rituals for the production of truth, writes: 'The contemporary rise of memory in general, and of the memoir in particular, might seem to suggest that Western culture may be witnessing confession's supersession by memory'. This is a bold claim in many ways. The published memoir arises out of a publishing industry often combined with a celebrity complex, and supported by various forms of advertising, merchandising and global sell. It is an event, a practice, but also a product. The body and mind (and soul) may be written of within its pages, but they are not actively called into being representative of the discourse of the discerned individual until that memoir is reviewed, read and scrutinised through what I would argue are the more confessional modes of Oprah Winfrey and other talk-back and live examinations of the text/author fusion. I am not disagreeing with Radstone (she's too convincing), but adding a rider that it is not memory alone that

has superseded the confession but the rise of a memory/confessional complex that works through multiple (sometimes global) forms of memorising (e.g. memoir, autobiography) and the spectacle of their scrutiny by television audiences, film-goers, magazine readers, interactive network sites, reality TV and so on. In this way we have a circular re-joining of what Foucault saw as the pre-modern disciplining through the spectacle to the modern truth finding through confession. The disciplining public may no longer be actively tearing flesh from limb but we will, from the privacy of our homes, vote whether we 'believe' a story or hit the keyboards to express our outrage at our changing 'belief' in someone's memoir. This conditional truth produced in part by a dispersed public makes of time an affective event, an emotion perhaps.

But it is in Radstone's conclusions about masculinity and femininity that I found the most exciting reformulation of gender I have read for sometime. Through the examples of memoir, but recalling earlier psychoanalytic work in film and literature, Radstone suggests we may be witnessing a time when the myth both of the phallic mother and of primal phallic masculinity are being undone through a different order of remembrance. As she writes, 'what we are seeing here is a convergence of sorts, as feminine and masculine remembrance open masculinity as well as femininity to their unknowns'. This is to posit remembering in a very powerful and generative position, where it becomes a volatile, connective opening outwards rather than any order of nostalgic narration. And remembering is here understood as both corporeal and psychological, both affective and material - as a temporal figuring it literally transforms what masculine and feminine could be. The next step might be to see how this formulation works alongside the work on queer temporality and becoming that Halberstam and Horncastle, amongst others, are pursuing. But that is another story.

This is a dense but subtle book. And it is certainly an excellent book to teach with. Its approach takes us carefully through the intellectual context of each of its key themes; confession, nostalgia and memory - and these introductory sections are enough in and of themselves to constitute their own book. I have not read before such acute summations of the complex intellectual trajectories that have produced these three notions as foundational concepts to understanding our contemporary times. And so it is an added bonus at the end to find that it is not only time that has been re-written but also the possibilities for gender.

Organising modern emotions

Katrina Schlunke

Gillian Swanson, *Drunk with the Glitter: Space, Consumption and Sexual Instability in Modern Urban Culture*, London and New York, Routledge, 2007; 212pp, £14.99 paperback.

The prediction in 1944 for what would happen to the untreated 'problem girl' was grim: 'the life of rich fantasy gives place to an increasing dementia until the patient glimmers dimly in a corner of the asylum, dull-witted as a cow'. This quote is not lightly emphasised by Swanson, for what was at stake in the national effort to save the 'problem girl' (and the good time girls and the prostitutes and the male homosexuals) was modernity itself. Each of these figures needed to be made to reach out from the possible effects of the Second World War, past any chaotic internal state, to a social, neighbourly and national future marked by progress and a new civilisation emerging from the damage and ruin of war. Swanson presents her extraordinary accounts, of what could be described as a national intervention into the emotions, within a very elegant analysis that lets the full weight of the primary material be felt. While she is obviously sympathetic to the ways in which Nikolas Rose's Foucauldian-inspired work sits easily with these produced 'problem subjects', we also gain a sense of the complexity of the national discourses that are trying to be established. And behind that, we sense the individuals living lives of great change in what came to be understood as modernity. That they would know themselves through their expressed emotions, their sexuality and the places they could take up in this unpredictable space is somehow simultaneously expected and yet extraordinary. We would now expect the processes of a national inquiry to be productive, in the end, of some order of constrained subject/citizen, but what is a surprise in this book is to be moved by the efforts of both the original inquirers as well as those who were subject to their gaze. This ambiguity results, I suspect, from seeing an idea of active government and public commitment to the emotional state of its citizens as both an order of care but also of intrusion, one no longer readily imagined in the national register.

The book begins with the new national focus on maternity and what were considered the effects of war upon it and women more generally. The imagined hysterical collapse on the home front did not occur, and so the establishment of constant familial routine (and so constant mothering) was to become one of the principles of maintaining wartime morale. But that principle of familial routine was caught up in other realities of the war period, such as the seventy per cent (and more) increase in venereal disease (1940-45) and the 'almost doubled' numbers of illegitimate babies in the same period. These

 doi:10.3898/newf.68.rev 02.2009

same women, both constant and different, bedrock and threat to a national order, were not easily recognised by national programmes or amenable to the project of raising and maintaining national morale in wartime. But the situation of war meant that there were strong desires to mange the psychology of a group who may be 'disposed to mental breakdown' - a habit of scrutiny that continued after the war. That breakdown, as mentioned before, did not occur, and, as Swanson quoting Titmus (1950) writes: 'The most prevalent and the most marked symptom of psychological disturbance among the civilian population during the war was not panic or hysteria but bed-wetting'. Think of all those children removed for 'their own good' reacting to national threat and acute familial dispersal. Through this focus on nerves and marital relations and absent children and fathers, there arose an abiding concern, post-war, with the idea of the national character and its maintenance. Coming into the 1950s, this meant making a place for sexually satisfied mothers who, it was hoped, would fashion themselves through modes of acceptable consumption along acceptable paths through the growing cities.

This intimate management of women's lives extended to the 'problem girl', who was said to arise from a 'squalid' family situation that, in many different ways, was failing to keep its momentum progressively forward. At the same time, the psychological and the eugenic converged to create an individual as well as social explanation for existence. While her environment may partly explain her evolution, it was the girl herself, who 'lived for her own personal enjoyment' and was morally and emotionally unstable, that made it necessary that she should be managed by a society that was intent on moving forward. The girls could not be a part of a focused project of modernity if they were endlessly distracted by the new thrills of commercial entertainments, and became chronically inattentive. You begin to see how narrowly defined the 'right' behaviour of the working-class girl was. They were instructed to consume (but just so much), go out (but only some of the time) and agree to be scrutinised, as if as Bentham thought 'the more we are watched the better we behave'.

The Wolfenden Committee was established in the 1950s as a result of agitation to have the visible 'vice' of London's streets and parks stopped. Its more narrow focus became prostitution and male homosexuality. What Swanson so wonderfully portrays is the coming together of new modes of mobility (prostitutes' access to hire cars) and an imaginary of the independent worker (taking picked-up men to an apartment - perhaps in the suburbs) that spread the spatial network of the prostitute while undermining any sense of 'prostitute' being a simple and stable category recording sameness. The volatility of what 'prostitute' might mean emerged as her capacity to produce new social spaces expanded, and it appears that no national committee could bring itself to account for this changeableness, for something that could only be fleetingly seen. This relation between national concerns and what could be seen extended to homosexuality, although that was complicated by individuals seeking homosexual reform through a willingness to tell their story of their

'normal' and private lives.

But orders, and indeed ideologies, of male to male affections are complex and highly diverse, and Swanson counters the limited treatment of homosexual men in the Wolfenden report with a brilliant chapter on Lawrence of Arabia. This is a highly nuanced, historically rich work of imaginative scholarship. It reconstructs the figure of Lawrence (his writing as well as his simulations) with great insight. But does this engrossing work belong in this book? It seems by its content and cut-short conclusions to demand more space than a mere chapter. The arguments begun here deserve to be continued well beyond the modern, and with full rein, to call upon earlier traditions of men who did not like women and men who loved men in the many forms love takes. The material would make a book of its own, and an expanded version of this analysis would make it a highly original one.

The last case looked at is that of the 'perfect poppets' and satisfying male lovers of the Profumo affair. Here the sexual movements are international, as are the potential dangers to national security of bringing different orders and partners of sexual activity too closely together. With Swanson's help one cannot but begin to see the Profumo affair as some kind of harbinger of what postmodern sociality might bring. In it the assumptions of the ordering grand narratives of progress, and the discursive networks of knowledge and categorising, are broken down by multiple crossings as sixteen-year-old girls openly enjoy multiple sex partners with multiple nationalities, and sex as well as friendship with a man who is demonised and feminised. How could a desire for progressive order and the psychological health of the nation manage this order of spatial, political, class and sexual defiance? Particularly when one of the key explanations for the events is simply 'having a good time' - that is, engaging in the modern pleasures of consumption (travel, shopping, sex) that were, in a different order, so actively situated as the new post war aspirations for all.

I have a small quibble with the subtitle - Space, Consumption and Sexual Instability. I think that this is one of the best contextual works on Modern Emotions, and should have been marked as such. The leading emphasis on space is not, I would suggest, an adequate naming of the focus of the book. But the leading title, Drunk with the Glitter, is perfect. With its 'lure of urban cultures and the altered states that they were understood to stimulate', you see the sexed and embodied subject caught in all that was solid melting into air; a pulsing, confusing, and alluring modernity with its attendant psychological and emotional shifts that inspired new orders of national attention.

Ultimately this book enables us to think more carefully about our own contemporary moment of post or high modernity. We may now reach toward experience and affect, emotions and the senses, as a way out of a representational gridlock, but we might remember as we do just whose feelings and experiences have been a national problem for so long. The reports that form one of the key archives of this book saw the everyday modern as under attack from the unruly emotions of problem groups. And so they took steps

through psychology and ideas of national character and fitness to ensure that an ordered emotionality was as much a sign of progressive modernity as constant and considered consumption. One of the many pleasures of this genuinely arresting book is noticing one's own changing sympathies with the past. Where a detailed examination of the measures and vocabularies deployed by national inquiries into the 'problem' of prostitutes or young women or male homosexuals, including discussions of their 'feelings', would once make us worry about the intrusion; now, after the affective turn, that consideration seems so very contemporary and important.

Booknotes

Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek, *Philosophy in the Present*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2009; 104pp, £9.99 paperback

Philosophy in the Present is a meeting of two of the most important philosophers of our time: Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek. The question posed by this book is: what role should the philosopher play in the world today? Badiou and Žižek each contribute an essay on this subject before the book closes with a discussion between the two.

Badiou: 'A genuine philosopher is someone who decides on his own account what the important problems are, someone who proposes new problems for everyone. Philosophy is first and foremost this: the invention of new problems' (p2). As such, the philosopher intervenes when and where it is necessary to invent a new problem. But in order to do this the philosopher requires some sort of sign, and here Badiou introduces the notion of the 'philosophical situation' to demonstrate how the philosopher comes to know to intervene. A philosophical situation occurs where there is an incommensurable conflict; where there is distance between power and truth; and where there is no common measure between event and law. How does the philosopher intervene? The task is 'to throw light on the fundamental choices of thought'; 'to throw light on the distance between thinking and power, between truths and the state. To measure this distance. To know whether or not it can be crossed'; and 'to throw light on the value of exception. The value of the event. The value of the break. And to do this against the continuity of life, against social conservatism' (p12). The philosophical concept is that which draws together the problem of choice, the problem of distance, and the problem of exception. 'The most profound philosophical concepts tell us something like this: "If you want your life to have some meaning, you must accept the event, you must remain at a distance from power, and you must be firm in your decision"' (p13). In all philosophical situations there is an incommensurable, a relation between heterogeneous terms, or, 'relations that are not relations' (p15). This is where philosophy takes place; incommensurability is the sign for the philosopher to create new problems.

Žižek: 'You're sitting in a café and someone challenges you: "Come on let's discuss that in depth!" The philosopher will immediately say, "I'm sorry, I must leave", and will make sure he disappears as quickly as possible' (p49). Why is this? 'Philosophy is not a dialogue. Name me a single example of a successful philosophical dialogue that wasn't a dreadful misunderstanding. This is true also for the most prominent cases: Aristotle didn't understand Plato correctly; Hegel - who might have been pleased by the fact - of course didn't understand Kant. And Heidegger fundamentally didn't understand anyone at all. So, no dialogue' (p50). For Žižek, the philosopher's task is not to debate but to change the concepts of the debate, of the problematic

 doi:10.3898/newf.68.booknotes.2009

situation; the philosopher rejects the concepts of the debate.

This book brims with vitality and the conversational style makes it a joy to read; I can almost picture these two contemporary thinkers sat together rejecting concepts and creating new problems. Žižek still manages to get a few laughs out of his short piece, and his contrasting style seems to complement Badiou's. This is an accessible introduction to the thought and style of both thinkers, as well as an important intervention into the problem of philosophy today.

David W. Hill

Ben Carrington and Ian McDonald (eds), *Marxism, Cultural Studies and Sport*, London and New York, Routledge, 2009; 250pp, £25.99

Capitalism is in crisis, and so, entirely un-coincidentally, is professional sport, a principal branch of what I'm afraid we have to call the military-industrial-financial-media-entertainment complex. Bankers and hedge-fund managers, after a decade manipulating digital simulacra of money, turn out to be conjurers rather than magicians, though we (not they) pay the price. Meanwhile a footballer dives to 'win' a penalty; a rugby player feigns injury using a joke-shop blood capsule to enable an otherwise illegal substitution; a Formula One driver is ordered to crash so that his team-mate can win. 'Punishment' is lenient at best. Cheats prosper.

In this moment, then, *Marxism, Cultural Studies and Sport* is particularly welcome. There can be no better time to examine the ways in which both Marxism and Cultural Studies have enabled an examination of sport that can go beyond the merely biomechanical, the simplistically psychological or sociological descriptions of most sports studies, and beyond the cynical world of sports journalism and the nerdish bloggery of contemporary fandom. In proposing a closer relationship between Marxism and Cultural Studies, the editors duly acknowledge that neither approach has taken sport seriously or consistently enough - paradoxically, the existing branch-line of the Marxist sociology of sport disappeared in the turn to culture which marked the adoption of Gramsci's ideas, while in that child of the turn, Cultural Studies, work in the past decade has finally begun to address sport.

So there's a lot to talk about, and the book does very valuable work, the first three editorial chapters laying the groundwork and exploring possible alliances between a revolutionary Marxism of reinvigorated political-economic critique, and the identity-oriented politics of resistance which still suffuses Cultural Studies. The following section establishes further a critical political economy of sport as alienated labour. Rob Beamish's essay on the failure of de Coubertin's attempt to establish a symbolically emancipatory Olympics against the desires of capital and nation match Anouk Bélanger's and Garry Whannel's explorations of the commodified sports spectacle.

The third section offers Brett St Louis and Jayne O. Ifekwinige's essays on race, masculinity and femininity, set mainly in the context of professional American sports, athletes, and celebrity culture; these are offset by Grant Farred's somewhat eccentric discourse on 'Scouse' identity in relation to two key Liverpool FC players. The final section (and this is probably the best way round) turns to key theorists. For Toby Miller, Foucault's work can genuinely illuminate Marx's - he insists on the value of reading sport as a technique of the self that, at the same time, literally embodies relations of power and domination. Alan Barner, on the other hand, attempts to rescue Gramscian hegemony from what he sees as the notion's dilution from its progenitor's assumption that power relations were class relations, and that their resolution was only possible through revolutionary politics. Finally, David Andrews somewhat bleakly knits present-day commercialised, corporatised and spectacularised professional sport into Jameson's 'late' capitalism.

The book is - as it should be - an uncomfortable read. Fore and Afterwords, by the slightly self-righteous Harry Cleaver and the more playful Michael Bérubé, might lead the reader to think that this is merely because the two approaches (Marxism and Cultural Studies) are not yet ready for productive alliance, but taken as a whole the book also represents a sense of unease shared among many on the left, as the present crisis unfolds without more than symbolic opposition (and even that is pretty thin on the ground). Perhaps, just perhaps, more work in this area might, in helping us more fully to appreciate the role of sport in the military-etc. complex, also help us to see more clearly the way out of late capital's constrictions. So let's do it.

Andrew Blake

Joanna Zylinska, *Bioethics in the Age of New Media*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2009; 240pp, £19.95 paperback

Joanna Zylinska's book is a wide-reaching and rich text. It has much to offer, particularly to researchers and students in philosophy and bioethics. Its project is to re-imagine bioethics through a critical theorisation of the current conditions of the field and a series of contemporary case studies. These cases - popular science writing, makeover television and bioart - are designated as 'bioethics in action'. These are used to call for a condition 'of letting oneself be-together-with-difference' (pxv) for a new bioethics.

A central strand of Zylinska's bioethical formulation could be designated as a move towards a non-human relationality, and in this respect it joins a body of work signalling new forms of relation. These could be labelled as: feminist relationality in science studies; the turn to Levinas and the face of the other in socio-political and philosophical accounts of the subject; and the turn to interspecies encounter. These developments have

references to Haraway's pronouncement that: 'the terms pass into each other; they are shifting sedimentations of the one fundamental thing about the world - relationality' (p37). However, Zylinska departs from Haraway, and she is intensely critical of Haraway's later work, arguing that in the case of companion species Haraway remains disappointingly humanist. Nevertheless, relationality underpins parts of Zylinska's thesis on being together with difference, and she uses this in conjunction with Levinas in an attempt to leverage her own work 'off the hook of humanism' (p118) on which she contends that Haraway's work remains. In her departure from relationality Zylinska instead develops her own formulation 'of letting oneself be-together-with-difference' (p173). She proposes that this formulation should be regarded as 'a hospitable - if not uncritical and unconditional - opening toward technology' (pxv). Although these are intriguing arguments, this reading misses many of the directions that Haraway develops in *When Species Meet*.

In Zylinska's pursuit of a being together with difference that is beyond humanism, she advocates a new 'nonnormative ethics of responsibility' (p163) through her case studies. Bioart operates as the most fruitful case of her 'bioethics in action' (p162), and she provides an insightful review of this area. Zylinska suggests that in the work of Stellarc, SymbioticA, Critical Art Ensemble, Eduardo Kac and Adam Zaretsky, bioart can enact a new ethics if the following conditions are met: 'It is only in the never receding obligation to address the question of the (other) human and nonhuman, and to come to terms with the human's "originary technicity", that these different projects will be truly ethical' (p160). Zylinksa draws on Bernard Steigler's work here by accepting his argument that technology is 'originary', or that it is what makes the human. This is, for Zylinska, one of the most central conditions for ethical possibility. Thus, a new bioethics requires both an acknowledgement of the already technical nature of the human, and an acceptance of openness to non-human others. The figure for this new bioethics is imaginative and striking, appearing as: 'a way of cutting through the flow of life with a double-edged sword of productive power and infinite responsibility' (p179). This formulation seems to echo Karen Barad's conceptualisation of the 'agential cut', although Zylinska never references Barad's philosophical work directly.

In sum, Zylinska argues that the realm of institutional bioethics needs radical revision to come to terms with the kind of 'being-in-difference' that she contends is the condition of the lives of 'humans, animals and machines in the age of new media' (p174). Zylinksa implies that, although biotechnologies pervade everyday life, the spaces for ethical engagement are limited, and with this I concur. In this context Zylinska's project is a rich, provocative and contentious intervention, and I have found many parts of this book helpful in my own thinking. I do not agree with the arguments about Haraway, or about makeover television, but they have offered stimulating challenges.

Kate O'Riordan

Jean-François Lyotard, *Enthusiasm: The Kantian Critique of History*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2009; 74pp, $18.95 paperback

Enthusiasm was first presented by Jean-François Lyotard as a paper in 1981 at a seminar hosted by Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe at the Ecole Normale Supérieure. Positioned between his Freudo-Marxist work (*Libidinal Economy*) and that on social justice and ethics (*The Differend*), *Enthusiasm* expresses the intellectual concern at the time about the limitation of politics for social change, that crisis of the left that came to be post-Marxism.

Here Lyotard takes a Wittgensteinian philosophy of phrases and maps it on to the Kantian faculties in order to think through issues of difference and justice, in so doing illuminating his own notions of dissensus and the differend. Kant's Third Critique, judgement, is read in the light of Lyotard's concern for respecting the heterogeneity of phrase families. Lyotard sketches a Fourth Critique, or 'Critique of Political Reason' (p11), whereby the judge judges the legitimacy of a phrase's claims to validity but also attests to the coexistence of heterogeneous phrase families. Judging is a matter of steering between these phrase families, like a navigator through an archipelago.

Kant's notion of the sublime is instructive for Lyotard; the sublime opens up a gap in judgement analogous to the incommensurability between phrase families. We glimpse this sublime gap in unpredictable events such as the French Revolution. Enthusiasm is this strong sense of the sublime experienced in revolutionary events, a 'painful joy' (p31) brought about by the unpresentable, 'almost pure disorder' of the revolution, 'devoid of figure' but 'really big however in historical nature' (p33). It is an expression of the desire for movement towards civil peace, or even international peace. For example, in the aftermath of Auschwitz, its visibility as a revolutionary event meant that 'an abyss opened up when an object capable of validating the phrase of the Idea of human rights must be presented'; or during May '68 'an abyss opened up before the phrase of "democratic" illusion, which hid the heterogeneity between power and sovereignty' (p63). These abysses are the gaps between an Idea and whatever presents itself in order to realise the idea, a sublime space evocative of enthusiasm that forces us to judge without criteria. When judging there is no rule to follow, says Lyotard, but we must critically judge nonetheless, whilst respecting the differend (or, the incommensurability of heterogeneous phrase families). This is a political manoeuvre.

This is a fine translation by Georges Van Den Abbeele, and his preface is far more vital than most translators' prefaces, concerned as they so often are with expressing the difficulty of their own task. None of this from Van Den Abbeele, as he contextualises and frames the text well, concluding by demonstrating the continuing relevance of the provocative thought contained in this slim and handsome book: the increasing importance of just manoeuvres in an information saturated society.

David W. Hill