

barism on an immense scale, but was also derived, in part, from a form of civilisation. The guards who compelled inmates to play classical music are an alarming topos of the failure of civilised artistic products to have beneficial effects. Schama approached modern art head on, with interviews from some practitioners, such as Anselm Kiefer and Kara Walker, although to be honest they did not shed much light on what they were doing. Artists never do. Schama was present at an impressive staging of the production of three works of art by Cai Guo-Qiang, *Heaven Complex*, using gunpowder. Vital sparks. Much contemporary art is a protest against the remoteness and solipsism of abstract art, and we have witnessed a return to meaning and content.

Schama did not use the phrase ‘conceptual art’. He should have, since it is a very dominant presence confusing the contemporary art scene. Certainly it allows fifth-rate practitioners to get away with murder. Every so often a pile of rubbish in a gallery is removed by cleaning ladies, bless them. A recent case was in Bolzano in 2015 where the installation of party detritus titled ‘Dove andiamo a Ballare Questa Sera’ (Where shall we go dancing tonight’) was cleared away by cleaners and dumped into plastic sacks. The villains of the piece, the artists I mean, not the cleaners, were Sara Goldschmied and Eleanor Chiari.

The problem with conceptual art is that there is always a danger that the aesthetic response blunts the urgency of the message. Schama showed us Ai Weiwei’s gigantic inflatable sculpture of refugees in a boat: a protest against the displacement of populations. One wonders, though, whether it contributes much to our feelings of guilt and pity.

BERNARD RICHARDS

## This is an experiment

*Transgender Children and Young People: Born in Your Own Body*, ed. Heather Brunskell-Evans and Michele Moore. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2018. pp. xii+232.



The transgender child is a remarkable new identity, emerging since the turn of the century. The media focuses on photogenic boys-identifying-as-

girls. Jackie Green is the child of the chief executive of Mermaids, the British charity for trans children; Jazz Jennings is the star of an American reality television series. Less noticed is the spectacular growth in girls-identifying-as-boys; the number receiving NHS treatment has quadrupled in the last four years. The narrative repeated in the media, and increasingly taught in schools, is celebratory. Born in the wrong

body, these children can only realize their authentic gendered selves through medical intervention: hormone blockers at puberty, followed by cross-sex hormones and surgery.

Brunskell-Evans and Moore’s volume challenges this new orthodoxy, as signalled by its subtitle *Born in Your Own Body*. The contributors draw on varied academic disciplines, including medical history, social theory, and developmental psychology. There are also personal accounts by the father of a trans teenager, and by a woman who identified as a transman and then subsequently ‘detransitioned’.

The book scrutinizes the social origins of trans identification. For children given this identity before puberty, the moment of epiphany is the rejection of gendered clothes or toys, as when a boy wants to dress in pink and play with dolls. Longitudinal surveys demonstrate that children who adopt modes of play more typical of the opposite sex are very likely to become gay or lesbian by their late teens.<sup>1</sup> The current urge to ‘transition’ young children—to treat them as the opposite sex, starting them on the path to medical intervention—will inevitably draw in children who would otherwise develop into homosexual adults.

For teenagers who embrace a trans identity, their epiphany comes after consuming digital media, typically tumblr for girls and reddit for boys. The identity provides a diagnosis and a remedy for adolescent angst, which is affirmed by a supportive online community. Puberty is especially problematic for girls, who must navigate a teen culture saturated by pornography and selfies. This pressure is not new, of course; it used to manifest in cutting and anorexia. Now girls bind their breasts and take testosterone, following the path promoted by YouTube celebrities like Alex Bertie.

The book also traces the consequences of trans identification. The novel treatment, pioneered in the Netherlands in the 1990s, blocks sexual maturation by injecting pubescent children with a GnHR Agonist such as Lupron. Licensed for treating serious diseases such as prostate cancer, this drug is being used ‘off label’ in what is effectively a medical experiment (albeit one that does not assign randomly treatment or measure outcomes). When hormone blockers are followed by cross-sex hormones, the result is permanent sterility, which raises troubling questions of medical ethics.

There are also wider social ramifications of trans identities. Lesbian communities are most affected. There are fewer butch lesbians in the younger generation, because girls who are attracted to women and reject stereotypical femininity are now encouraged to become transmen. Conversely, lesbian spaces are entered by an increasing number of transwomen. They must be accepted as potential sexual partners by homosexual females according

to the new orthodoxy promulgated by university LGBTQ societies, on pain of being stigmatized as a ‘vagina fetishist’ or ‘TERF’ (trans-exclusionary radical feminist).<sup>2</sup>

Such a slim volume inevitably provides a selective account. One lacuna is detailed analysis of the landscape of online media. The contributors emphasize trans identity as a flight from the negative pressures of contemporary society, overlooking its positive attraction: it empowers youths to invert institutionalized hierarchies, for instance forcing parents and teachers to use certain pronouns and eschew mention of their lives before transition.

This book avowedly takes the position of devil’s advocate and makes no claim to provide a balanced overview. Heterodoxy requires courage, as shown by the experience of one of the editors. While at the University of Leicester, Brunskell-Evans was targeted by formal complaints. The Women’s Equality Party removed her from her position as spokeswoman for violence against women, while students at Kings College London prevented her from lecturing. It is essential, however, for such dissenting voices to be heard. ‘We have never before taught children they can decide their sex’, as Stephanie Davies-Arai observes (p. 18): “this is an experiment.”

<sup>1</sup> An example is: Gu Li, Karson T. F. Kung, and Melissa Hines, ‘Childhood Gender-Typed Behavior and Adolescent Sexual Orientation: A Longitudinal Population-Based Study’, *Developmental Psychology*, 2017, 53: 764–77.

<sup>2</sup> Ada Wells, formerly LGBT+ convener of the Edinburgh University Students’ Association, exemplifies this attitude.

MICHAEL BIGGS

## Seriousness of purpose

Whyte, W. (2017) *Unlocking the Church: The Lost Secrets of Victorian Sacred Space*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. xvi+241pp. ISBN 978-0-19-879615-2.



IN this entertaining and instructive book William Whyte tells us that by 1870 a third of all churches had effectively been rebuilt.

The Victorians have often received a bad press for their restoration of ancient parish churches, while in our own time congregations struggle to maintain the great Gothic piles they constructed. Whyte wants us first and foremost to understand the theological vision which inspired them in their architectural programme. He is not an uncritical admirer of their work but believes they

# OXFORD

## MAGAZINE

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No. 396 Second Week Trinity Term 2018

LAST week's meeting of Congregation was a low key, anti-climactic affair. There was a respectable turn out of, perhaps, 150 members. There were just six speakers. We dispersed well within the hour.

A good number of members of Council were present and the three who spoke were in detectably apologetic mode. They emphasised what the Vice-Chancellor has already made clear, namely that the University earnestly desires to maintain pension provision as closely as possible at its present level, but that this could be very costly for the University and that the options are tightly constrained by the USS rules to which we are signatories.

But they emphasised another point; that Council had failed to keep Congregation adequately informed over the last two terms about developments on pensions. With this failure in mind Geraldine Johnson, a Congregation-elected Council member, announced a new initiative designed to plug the internal communications gap. Council would in the near future be setting up an "online forum". No details of its modus operandi or indeed its exact purpose were given.

This new development is, of course, most welcome. It will hopefully begin to redress the effects of the recent communications failures, which contributed to, and perhaps largely explain, the culture shock of the unprecedented sequence of events that occurred late last term (*Oxford Magazine*, No 395, Noughth Week, TT 2018). Inadequate internal communication has been seen as a problem for our democratic self-governance for many years; how can Congregation interact with Council if it does not know in advance and in a timely—and accessible—fashion what Council is

## Big Changes

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of the consultation carried out last term, to which 125 individuals responded, alongside University and college bodies. Summaries of points raised at the three SP 'road shows' being held during Weeks 0-2 are promised.

We know from past experience that it is going to be extraordinarily difficult to arrive at a final document that serves any clear purpose—such as steering the University in new directions or anticipating how to deal with problems that could potentially arise in the next five years—let alone one that accommodates the inputs and often strongly-held views of all interested parties across the whole University. The precise manner in which Council and Wellington Square inform and engage staff will be all-important in achieving the best possible end result that we can all stand behind.

The following sample extract from the previous SP offers a sobering lesson as we consider the objectives of the new one. What in reality was being promised or planned and what if anything came out of it all?

*"We believe that the size of the student population should be determined by the University's capacity to provide a high-quality education to every student. The University will maintain its current policy of determining the number of students according to the quality of applicants and its ability*

deciding in its name? For the present the first task for the new forum would, ideally, be to make sure that communications will work to best effect as the University becomes increasingly engaged in completing the new five-year Strategic Plan (SP).

At the time of writing at the end of 1<sup>st</sup> Week the website informing staff about the SP planning process contains no more than the following items: links to the previous Strategic Plan document (2013-2018) and a 24-page summary of the results

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*...and much more*

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