

The Age of Projects. Edited by Maximillian E. Novak. Toronto: University of Toronto Press in association with the UCLA Center for Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Studies and the William Anderson Clark Memorial Library. 2008. x + 404 p. £55 (hb). ISBN 978-0-8020-9873-3.

This rich collection, derived from a series of lectures given at the UCLA between 2003 and 2004, is concerned with what Daniel Defoe, in 1697, dubbed the 'Projecting Age'. In his words, projects were 'vast Undertaking[s]' of 'public Advantage' tending to 'Improvement of Trade, and Employment of the Poor, and the Circulation and Increase of the public Stock' (quoted, p.118). These projects demand our attention, Maximillian E. Novak suggests, because they represented 'the spirit of the age' (p.ix). That is, the long eighteenth century was permeated by 'the belief that society may be shaped one way or another by inventions or various schemes, from those that attempt to establish traditions to those that endeavour to change or even revolutionize the present' (p.x).

A brief Introduction is followed by fifteen essays divided into three groups: four on 'Retrieving the Past', five on 'Improving the Present' and six on 'Envisioning the Future'. One of the real strengths of the collection is its breadth, ranging from *Tristram Shandy* (discussed by Manuel Schonhorn) through colonial expeditions (Carole Fabricant) to the quest for immortality (David Haycock). It is difficult to do justice to such an encyclopaedic collection, and what follows relates only a few of the most notable underlying themes.

Readers interested in what Defoe called projects of 'public Advantage' may first like to consult Alison O'Byrne's elegant chapter on the construction of Westminster Bridge, which commenced in the 1730s. She demonstrates that projects such as this can tell us about much more than business transactions. Widely debated in prints and periodicals, the project became a public event that was 'composed legally, architecturally, and, ultimately, via paintings, engravings, and various descriptions, aesthetically in the public imagination' (p.244). Steven Pincus's key contribution suggests an ideological background for such projects. The 1688 Revolution, Pincus argues, was 'a revolution in political economy', after which a 'land-based Tory political economy' waned and a 'labour-centred' political economy 'gained dominance'. Its mainly Whig proponents saw wealth not as 'necessarily finite' but as 'created by human endeavour and thus potentially infinite'. This view, Pincus contends, was 'a necessary prerequisite to the Financial Revolution' (p.118, 130-31). So his argument poses a crucial question: how far does Whig political economy account for the ensuing 'Projecting Age'?

Some historians have suggested that the 'Projecting Age' and even modernity depended on just such an ideology, but some contributions to this volume help us develop more nuanced interpretations. Kimberley Latta stresses that Defoe adopted contending views of political economy (or wealth creation) to criticise dishonest projects while commending the productive role of credit and wit. So Defoe was not a straightforward Whig defender of commercial modernity. Like Defoe, the mineralogist Rudolph Raspe appears an unproblematic 'self-styled moderniser'. He never publicly acknowledged the authorship of his unscholarly novel *Munchausen* (1785), thus endorsing, seemingly single-mindedly, the idea that the 'science/art distinction' was 'a fact/fiction distinction' (p.361). Sarah Kareem cogently complicates this picture. Plying alchemy and perhaps even promoting frauds, Raspe's career simultaneously embodied 'arts' in the old Aristotelian sense: 'practical and self-interested' projects

oriented towards immediate 'result and reward' (p.362). Larry Stewart shows that even advocates of Newtonian philosophy were not simple harbingers of modernity. The definition and measurement of power remained so elusive that Victorian projectors who patented motion engines could fleece investors by using the concept of horsepower as 'a marketing device' (p.379). Underlying these contributions is a valuable insight: modernising ideologies emerged, if at all, from concrete practices and from perceptions of projects that were full of confusions, contradictions and ambiguities.

The collection's diversity has its price, however. Most chapters are not well connected, and the points suggested above are not clearly indicated. The problem is symptomatic of the volume's lack of focus. Its overarching theme, 'the belief that human thought and action could transform society' (p.7), is so broad that diverse subjects are uncritically treated as historical, literary or colonial 'projects'. This obscures what was unique about Defoe's 'Projecting Age'. Future research must surely focus on certain types of projects and develop more specific parameters of discussion. Projects and the scandal they provoked under Elizabeth and the early Stuarts (which the volume hardly mentions) might help contextualise their eighteenth-century counterparts. For example, if the building of Westminster Bridge was promoted for 'public Advantage' as Defoe put it, was the underlying conception of the public good the same as for its early Stuart counterpart? Many contributions acknowledge that promoters of new schemes were often criticised as 'projectors', fraudsters pretending to serve the public. Did the negative stereotype evolve over time? The 'Age of Projects' awaits more systematic treatments. Having said that, the volume's insightful forays remind us about the extent to which 'projects' attracted money, creativity and criticism in various aspects of social life during the long eighteenth century. In this regard the volume deserves serious consideration by readers across disciplines.

Koji Yamamoto
King's College London

Wife-Abuse in Eighteenth-Century France. By Mary Trouille. SVEC 2009:01. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation. 2009. xiv + 378 p. 12 illus. £65 (pb). ISBN 9780-7294-0955-1.

The theme of wife abuse in the eighteenth century has been garnering considerable attention in recent scholarship. Following Elizabeth Foyster's *Marital Violence: An English Family History, 1660-1857* (2005), Mary Trouille's extremely well-researched investigation into wife abuse in France leading up to the Revolution and including the 1803 reform of the 1792 Divorce Act provides a rich and compelling history of gender relations within marriage at a time when the definition of marriage was in full transition. The work includes analyses of historical court cases drawn from the *Causes célèbres* of Nicolas-Toussaint des Essarts (1773-1789) and of fictional narratives – all based on real cases – by the Marquis de Sade, Madame de Genlis and Rétif de la Bretonne. The trial analyses create a comprehensive picture of how French legal structures dealt with troubled marriages in the absence of divorce, and of how legislators came to adopt such liberal, although short-lived, divorce laws in 1792. In her trial accounts Trouille pays scrupulous attention to the different narrative voices at play and to the performative element of the lawyers' rhetorical tactics, which, she