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**Jan Goldstein**, *The Post-Revolutionary Self: Politics and Psyche in France, 1750-1850*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2005. 414 pp. \$45.00 (hb). ISBN 0674016807.

Review Essay by Peter McPhee, University of Melbourne.

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Jan Goldstein's thesis is that educated French people were taught to understand the self (*moi*) in radically different ways across the century after 1750 and that this transition was interdependent with the French Revolution and reactions to it. In brief, the dominant understanding of the self changed from 'sensationalist' assumptions of a 'blank slate subsequently inscribed by sensory bombardment' (p. 5) to a unitary self, 'a single tight-knit unit comprising the sum total of mental states and processes' (p. 7), the fusion of the three elements of consciousness: sensation, reason, and will.

This transition, to which the work of the philosopher and academic administrator Victor Cousin and his disciples was central, was fundamentally a response to the upheavals of the Revolution. In Goldstein's words,

'As observers sought to understand the agony of the French nation and to pin the blame for it on some plausible culprit, a group of thinkers, later to become influential, lighted upon the demoralizing effects of the long eighteenth-century reign of sensationalism and especially the pallid and passive self associated with it.' (p.11)

After the collapse of the corporative model of the Old Regime and the nightmare of the Terror, the Cousinian *moi* offered nothing less than a structuring principle that legitimized a new bourgeois order and offered a comforting rationale for the exclusion from full citizenship of workers, women, and the poor.

The thesis is refreshingly bold, and its demonstration based on a brilliant analysis of diverse types of evidence. It is a startling achievement, one of those rare books which challenge one to think about a familiar period in a disconcertingly different way.

This is a book of great riches. As a social historian, I was particularly drawn to three of its key passages, where Goldstein goes beyond the analysis of philosophical treatises and school manuals to examine the social behaviours consequent to cultural politics. These are the uses made of festivals during the French Revolution; the pedagogical activism of Cousin and his acolytes; and the mid-nineteenth-century political and social crisis. For these she uses, for example, the fascinating letters from central (secondary) school teachers under the Directory held in the Archives nationales (F17 1344), the forty volumes of correspondence to Cousin from his disciples, and a full set of philosophy exams written at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in 1820 (F17 4163).

French revolutionaries had earlier lived in a world in which all the markers of meaning were those of the pillars of power discredited after 1789. From the rituals of private life and the rhythms of agricultural work to the formal arrangements of authority, all bore the imprint of custom and privilege. Between 1789 and 1794, first the nobility, then the monarchy, and ultimately the Catholic Church lost their material and moral authority, creating a vacuum in the symbolic instruction of power which sensationalist assumptions rushed to fill. As Mirabeau wrote in 1791, 'In his capacity as a sensitive being, man is led much less by rigorous principles ... than by majestic objects, striking images, great spectacles, deep emotions. ... [Man] obeys his impressions rather than his reason' (p.75).

Historians of the Revolution have long understood the ways in which successive regimes, particularly that of the Terror, took the initiative in 'regenerating' society, not only through new institutional structures based on revolutionary principles, but through initiatives in education and public display, even in the ways people labelled their streets and communities. Most radical, of course, was the revolutionary calendar devised by Fabre d'Eglantine with its didactic as well as inspirational references to nature, work, and the virtues. Goldstein's achievement is to reveal the 'sensationalist' assumptions embedded in the project of 'the revolutionary schooling of imagination'. In the year III, the Abbé Grégoire spoke to the Convention of the 'language of signs':

'We all have senses, which are, so to speak, the doors of the soul. We are susceptible of receiving, by their mediation, deep impressions. ... The one who most prides himself on having only reason for a guide has perhaps followed its voice less often than he has yielded to the illusions of the imagination and the senses.'

Grégoire's proposal for a new 'system of topographical denominations for the public places, streets, embankments, etc. of every commune in the Republic' stemmed from these sensationalist assumptions (p. 84).

After Napoleon's coup d'état in 1799, the revolutionary festivals quickly fell from favour and were replaced with fewer, imperial commemorations. The 'sensationalist' project of creating a regenerated citizenry through edifying exhortation and practice gave way to a concern for stability and public order. Implicit in Goldstein's argument at this point is that public festivals disappeared with sensationalism in the counter-revolutionary backlash of the first three decades of the new century (see p. 100). This for me is the least convincing element of Goldstein's argument. Every successive regime continued to use deliberately an array of public festivals for much the same commemorative and celebratory purposes as had the Revolution and the Old Regime. Does this suggest that ruling élites continued to share deeply-engrained sensationalist assumptions about the capacity for edification, that the Cousinian reaction was never complete?

Michel Vovelle's magisterial survey of revolutionary festivals concluded, like that of Mona Ozouf, that their impact was transitory in terms of explicit purpose but durable in the new assumptions of popular initiative in their design[1]. Certainly, the Empire and the Restoration were careful to use festivals to mould public opinion and values. Important Napoleonic festivals such as 15 August (Bonaparte's saint's day) and 2 December were replaced by, for example, festivals commemorating the execution of Louis and Marie-Antoinette (21 January, 16 October), and the kings' saint's days (Louis, 25 August; Charles, 4 November).[2] Thereafter—and particularly at moments of crisis as in 1830-32 and 1848-51—political divisions were often played out at a local level.[3] This evidence also suggests that we need to understand the dynamics of cultural practice in this case as involving a dialogue between local constituencies and social elites in the same way as Goldstein goes on to demonstrate for the secondary school teachers and their relationship with their master, Cousin.

More convincing than Goldstein's treatment of festivals is her captivating analysis of the success of Cousin's academic activism. Apart from a brief period of reaction against all philosophy, deemed inherently 'dangerous' in the aftermath of Louis-Napoleon's coup d'état of December 1851, Cousinian psychology exercised an extraordinary dominance for a century after 1832. Central to its cultural power was its institutionalization in the lycée syllabus as a compulsory course of study, with the consequent creation of a small industry of manual-writing and teacher-training (ch. 5). Cousin was very close to François Guizot: indeed, Cousin may well have authored the primary school legislation of 1833, and Guizot personally defended him against charges of multiple office-holding and accumulation of salaries (pp. 192-3). Goldstein analyses brilliantly the content of the flourishing cottage industry in producing the psychology manuals. This hegemony went beyond the curriculum, for Goldstein has uncovered a tight network, dubbed 'the regiment' by Cousin himself, of former students intellectually and

emotionally loyal to the master. Cousin, who kept their letters, dominated his acolytes, arousing in them a powerful sense of mission—even advising them not to weaken their resolve by succumbing to the lure of marriage (pp. 202-18).

Inquisitive enthusiasts such as Caroline Angebert had already expressed their frustration in 1829 that women were apparently not suited to disciplined introspection (pp. 222-4). Even when women were granted access to the *lycées* early in the Third Republic, the school curriculum excluded philosophy on the basis that, as the parliamentary commission into the curriculum concluded, ‘all the philosophic knowledge taught usefully to girls is already included in moral instruction, in history, or in literary history’ (p. 322). The exclusion of young women from philosophy courses was unchallenged, along with the basic Cousinian curriculum, in reviews of lycée programmes into the 1920s (p. 325).

But nothing in Cousin’s philosophy necessarily excluded anyone from the capacity for reflection required to comprehend and disaggregate the elements of consciousness. The search for social and political stability after 1799, however, impelled Cousin and his peers to do so: workers and women in particular were seen not to have the capacity for advanced reflection. Their exclusion from the *lycées* was a *post facto* legitimization of a political decision about the bases of social order. Indeed, Goldstein’s ultimate explanation for the longevity of Cousinianism is that it was a powerful affirmation of the peculiar capacity of bourgeois men to reflect on and control a unitary self that equipped them to exercise the responsibility of leadership in every domain. As Cousin expressed it in the aftermath of the civil war of June 1848, an aristocracy of intelligence was needed to counterbalance the temptations of democracy: ultimately workers, like women, lacked the capacity for disciplined reflection (p. 179).

One of Cousin’s favourite disciples was Amédée Jacques, the bright son of a Parisian painter of miniatures, who had been promoted to teach philosophy at the prestigious Lycée Louis-le-Grand. In a 1846 philosophy manual, he came close to repudiating Cousin’s fundamental assumption of the bourgeois male’s advanced capacity for reflection on the *moi* by insisting that all humans were inherently capable of the requisite act of disciplined will. After the Revolution of 1848, Jacques’s anticlerical journal *La Liberté de penser* became increasingly left-wing at the same time as Cousin became more stridently conservative in the wake of the June Days. One element of the Falloux Law of March 1850 was to give clergy a prominent role in public primary and secondary education. Following two blistering attacks on church education early in 1851, Jacques was dismissed from Louis-le-Grand by a council including two archbishops, a bishop, two priests—and Victor Cousin himself. Louis-Napoléon’s coup d’état in December in 1851 forced him into exile, and he died in Buenos Aires in 1865 (pp. 199-202, 316-21).

This is a thoughtfully crafted and beautifully written book, and its production is of the highest quality. Only very occasionally are there passages which jar, such as the use of ‘psychologically attuned people’ (p. 10) to describe those in whom she is interested. Goldstein’s is a brilliant achievement: ambitious, formidably intelligent and genuinely original. It is a compelling thesis in cultural history, with some mostly successful and highly interesting forays into the social history of ideas. It is rare indeed to encounter an argument which presents a new insight into a century as deeply studied as that after 1750 and which suggests conclusions which go well beyond those chronological confines, such as the assumptions inculcated in young philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre in the 1920s.

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## NOTES

[1] Michel Vovelle, *Les métamorphoses de la fête en Provence, de 1750 à 1820*. (Paris: Flammarion, 1976); and Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988).

[2] Sheryl Kroen, *Politics and Theater: the Crisis of Legitimacy in Restoration France, 1815-1830* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

[3] On the period of the Second Republic, see, for example, Peter McPhee, *The Politics of Rural Life: Political Mobilization in the French Countryside 1846-1852* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), chs 6-7; and Matthew Truesdell, *Spectacular Politics: Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte and the Fête Impériale, 1849-1870* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

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See also the Review Essays on this book by Victoria Thompson, Lucien Jaume, and Peter McPhee, as well as Jan Goldstein's response to all four Review Essays.

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