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Roxanne Panchasi, *Future Tense: The Culture of Anticipation in France between the Wars*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009. xi + 203 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$39.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-8014-4670-2.

Review by Michael Miller, University of Miami.

Roxanne Panchasi begins her study of meditations on the future in interwar France with the commonsensical idea that whereas historians since Pierre Nora have increasingly deployed historical memory as a means of writing about an historical present, what the French imagined about their future can equally disclose preoccupations with their own moment in time.[1] Investigating speculation about the future in the 1920s and 1930s thus affords an innovative opportunity to catch French reflective thinking, introspection, or effectively a French *mentalité* in the years between the wars. Panchasi pursues this approach over five topics. She begins with artificial limbs for war veterans and ties these in some imaginative ways to labor-saving devices in the home of the future or to futuristic furniture design as a common field of machine-like substitution for human limitations. In all three, the future looms as a technologically prosthetic one, where machines and artificial devices advance but replace human capabilities. This linkage of the future to the image of a prosthesis—as if mutilation or artificiality haunted the French throughout the postwar years—recurs in subsequent discussions, whether these be about border fortifications—“a prosthetic strategy” (p.104)—or adoption of international language—“Esperanto could be regarded as a kind of cultural prosthesis: artificial, inorganic, and mechanical” (p.159). Later chapters, thus, take up these themes of security and vulnerability in anticipating the next war, or on the threat of Esperanto to French as the language of the future. Another chapter examines expectations about the city of the future, starting from the provocative premise that rebuilding from the ruins of the war in the north inspired in the French a particular preoccupation with the design and look of cities constructed for the twentieth century, including city planning for the capital. A fifth chapter looks at travel writing from America, where crossing the Atlantic is nicely identified with the science fiction of time travel, the New World figuring as the futuristic harbinger for the planet that, by contrast, casts the Old World as the bastion of tradition, with all the defensiveness and premonitions of erasure implied in that stance.

There are some big gaps here. For many in the interwar years, the future was as much to the east, in revolutionary Russia, as it was to the west. There is no reference to the recent work of Victoria de Grazia[2] or Adam Tooze,[3] even though both have dwelled on how America loomed over the future prospects, real and imagined, for interwar Europe. There is no reference to my book on the interwar years, even though this discusses images of the next war.[4] There is much discussion on Esperanto, but not very much on the wider encounter with a world of English speakers—this, too, could have been garnered from a wider examination of travel literature. Since concerns for the future of true France and French culture are at the center of this work, it is surprising that nothing is introduced on refugees and foreigners, even though there is now a wide literature on their interwar presence in France. There is also a tendency to let opportunities slip by. The opening chapter on prosthesis and technology is full of possibilities, for instance to launch into a discussion of thought about robotics or artificial intelligence, but strangely Panchasi, who seems to be heading in this direction based on suggestive ideas she has uncovered, brings her discussion rapidly to a close. In her chapter on cities, Panchasi again begins with

good, strong ideas about the connection between the war and the future, but, then settles into one more debate about Le Corbusier, just as the chapter on travel fits into a well-worn literature of French attitudes about America. In some earlier moments of the study there is the prospect that Panchasi is going to complicate our thoughts about the interwar years but that too slides by. Jean Monnet, who would have a great deal to do with the future of France, was in America in these years, but he does not appear in this book. A variety of discussions--on international style in architecture; on the rising presence of the United States; on Esperanto as a language across borders--are all about globalization, but what the French thought about this and the future is not taken up. Panchasi does cite Paul Fussell, but in the context of history and memory.<sup>[5]</sup> Yet Fussell also identified the war as a break in modes of thinking, and it is curious that Panchasi has not chosen to apply this modal approach to her analysis of future writing, even though she clearly seems to be suggesting that the French after 1918 saw the future as a break with the past rather than an elaboration upon it.

What Panchasi does excel at is her ability to incorporate French future thinking into French construction of memory and nostalgia. Her title is aptly chosen, because this is a book all about tension with the future. She is perhaps too willing to settle for one more discussion of interwar insecurity, but Panchasi does succeed in showing how a particular view of Frenchness was identified with the richness of tradition that appeared threatened by the future. As she puts it very nicely at the very end of her study, "Nostalgia is generated in advance of loss as well as in its wake" (p.162). What started out, therefore, as an alternative to the history of memory finishes as a new take on it. The interwar years continue to attract historians' attention, and there is not much likelihood that this will change any time soon in the future.

#### NOTES

[1] Pierre Nora, ed., *Les lieux de mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984-1992).

[2] Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through 20th-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

[3] Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2006).

[5] Michael B. Miller, *Shanghai on the Métro: Spies, Intrigue, and the French between the Wars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

[6] Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).

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