

we should care about the freedom of ourselves and others, and promoting its unconstrained evolution.’ Here Wolfendale runs up hard against a core paradox of free will: we are not, it turns out, free to relinquish freedom. We *do* have a final goal, which is the infinite revision of goals. The problem with this position is the same one that befalls ethical theories focused on the maximisation of ‘utility’ (Wolfendale himself observes that his position is ‘surprisingly similar to utilitarianism’): it merely re-names, without reframing, the concept that in classical ethical theories is known as ‘the good’.

From a political perspective, I am not sure that this account of freedom gets Wolfendale to the place he wishes to go. For while his picture of the autonomous subject may provide a metaphysical basis for accelerationism, it is not clear that it supports a specifically *left* accelerationism. Wolfendale bolsters his socialist commitments with the claim that ‘our capacity for individual self-understanding and self-transformation is to some extent mediated by our capacity for collective self-understanding and self-transformation’. But, on his own account, there seems no reason why this is *necessarily* so. A right accelerationist might claim that collective interdependence is just another one of the natural obstacles that it is within our power to change.

In short, *The Revenge of Reason* has not assembled the resources it would need in order to convince its opponents, from those who think that AI can never be autonomous to those who believe that human autonomy is as illusory as that of an LLM. However, it will certainly disturb the complacent slumber of the post-accelerationist moment. Left analysis, having inherited an uneasy mixture of historicism and messianism, can tend towards a compatibilist conception of human freedom which will seem to some properly dialectical, to others a stubborn disavowal. This tension is encapsulated in Marx’s own assertion that although men ‘are free to make their own history’, they ‘do not make it as they please’: ‘The tradition of dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.’ Wolfendale asks us to follow the first half of Marx’s claim without indulging in retreat or caveat, asking what it means to be truly free to make our own histories and escape our nightmares. Most will feel at present that we are simply not free with respect to novel technologies: that we are at the mercy of forces of development which seem entirely inimical to the requirements of collective rehumanisation. Yet *The Revenge of Reason* reminds us that if we are to keep faith with an emancipatory politics, then we had better work out what degrees and kinds of freedom remain possible.

Georgie Newson

Expressive sex

Juliana Gleeson *Hermaphrodite Logic: A History of Intersex Liberation* (London: Verso 2025). 256pp. £16.99 pb., 978 1 83976 093 8

Juliana Gleeson’s *Hermaphrodite Logic* is a book about organising sex. Gleeson starts from the founding moments of ISNA (Intersex Society of North America) in the early 1990s, from their actions against the ongoing medical subjugation of intersex children. The surgical procedures many of the activists had themselves endured, as Gleeson relays in her intro, ‘while framed as emergency treatments to correct pressing congenital defects ... aimed to sooth cultural anxieties (on the part of both clinicians and parents). Rather than preventing harm, they caused lifelong numbness. Rather than improving aesthetics, they imposed scarring and permanently delimited any fu-

ture options.’ Gleeson introduces ISNA’s early members not least by the cool and punkish stances of these ‘hermaphrodites with attitude’. Organising, like sex, needs to take on a shared communal form to move out of the standards of administration and into the struggles of politics. Gleeson’s *Logic* is concerned with exactly those forms. Through narrating the history of intersex struggles she is also promoting something like a new genre of writing, an Intersex Realism, if you will.

Gleeson identifies herself as part of this struggle for shaping the sex of politics, as her own frequent use of catchphrases and tongue in cheek formulations – such as

‘sex is far more expressive than *self*-expressive’ – testifies. She is charting the history of ISNA, its dissolution, its oppositions to and collaborations with the medical system it battles, and finally the rise of more internationalist and anticolonial forms of intersex organising in the 2000s and their radical reformations of political struggles for the present. She is guiding her readers to the academic sources and discourses of intersex studies. But Gleeson’s main cause in conceiving *Hermaphrodite Logic* as a movement history of intersex people, instead of a reconceptualisation of sex through its inter-, is a performative one: If ‘sex is far more expressive than *self*-expressive’, the quest for the one true sex that everybody finds allegedly buried deep within themselves, and that only needs the administration of favourable conditions to come out in its fully externalised interior form, is called off. For good.

Gleeson’s *Hermaphrodite Logic* sharply opposes any politics of sex’s administration. And she, in all solidarity, even takes to task accomplices of the intersex struggle like Susan Stryker, for stabilising intersex as an instrumental category ‘to disrupt sex into its constituent elements beyond two-ness and wholeness’, for identifying intersex as the site of sex’s true self-expression. There is no politics of administration for Gleeson, because there is no true sex to be unearthed. Sex is not self-expressive of an individual interiority, but expressive of a shared struggle over lived lives. Sex is not lived alone. No sex is. But not every sex is rendered fictional in its cause. And thus, with its insistence on sex’s expressiveness *Hermaphrodite Logic* also counteracts the chimerisation of intersex, its political fictionalisation, even where it is, as in Stryker’s case, done to underscore its legitimacy. In her dedication to intersex terms of struggling for gender autonomy, Gleeson’s *Hermaphrodite Logic* forcefully dispenses with the fiction of cultural exemplariness, which makes her book methodologically exceptional, as the trope of exemplariness has served as a methodology for countless modern materialisms of deviance. Where exemplariness is often taken to demonstrate the common value of uncommon lives, or, as Gleeson would say, physiques, her narrative of intersex organising finds commonality within. The instrumental fictionalisation of intersex life for normsex’s animation comes to a halt, the appropriative inversion of the logic of pathologisation into one of exceptionalism is paused. For it is this exceptionalism and its rendering intersex life uncommon

which has been instrumental to its cultural and medical subjugation, its invention as a category of medical administration, a medical fiction waiting for intervention. It was the fabrication of intersex as a cultural emblem that allowed for the pathological derealisation of intersex lives, their eradication as mere fictions, as ‘socio-medical emergencies’ in need of being cut into a ‘true sex’.



These histories of hermaphroditic chimerisation were written before the intersex movement took its struggle to the streets, to medical congresses, to academic journals. In the late 1960s Peter Gorsen traced what he advanced as the politics of a ‘hermaphroditic eros’ in *Das Prinzip Obszön (The Obscene Principle)*; back into its historic unrealisation. He follows the changing entries that Diderot’s and d’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie* dedicated to the hermaphrodite, charting how they were revised throughout the eighteenth century, from introducing hermaphroditism as an embodied to fictionalising it as a chimerical form. In his 1978 book *On Hermaphroditism*, Michel Foucault documents what followed: The unrealisation of lives like that of Herculine Barbin, who did not survive the lawful enforcement of what was medically determined against her as her ‘true sex’ in the 1860s.

While both Foucault and Gorsen were clearly opposing the pathologisation and unrealisation of hermaphroditic life, they both necessarily understand the hermaphrodite as an exemplary figure within the cultural wars on sex; Gorsen autobiographically, Foucault archivally. Gleeson, beginning her history at the end of the twentieth century, pushes for both the deculturalisations and the depathologisation of intersex life, in understanding *Hermaphrodite Logic* as one of a common, international and political struggle against sexology's yet unbroken rule.

This medically more specialised, sexological, version of hermaphroditism's subjection instituted itself in the first decades of the twentieth century. Around 1920, the endocrinologist Franz Prange wrote two parallel dissertations, one on animal and human hermaphroditism at Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute of Sexual Science in Berlin Tiergarten. A few years earlier, the geneticist Richard Goldschmidt had proposed hermaphroditism's medical reformulation as intersexuality at the more Mendel-oriented Kaiser Wilhelm Society in Berlin Dahlem, to designate what could now more easily be divided into true and pseudo hermaphroditism, with true hermaphroditism being deemed impossible in humans. Gleeson nods to Foucault here and there, and introduces Goldschmidt for his fateful coinage of 'hormonally intersex', but ventures into the intersex movement's pre-history only where necessary to identify origins of the medical pathologisation more recent political struggles are set up against. And once more, this process is not least one of giving politics a form, that of language: in Gleeson's characterisation, the intersex movement's appropriations of the pathological language invented for their subjection starting with the term intersex itself, is exemplary in its sabotage-bend specialism.

Gleeson only dwells on fictionalisations of hermaphrodite logic where they are fictionalisations that originate within a hermaphrodite logic, where they are continuous with organising sex. The book's last chapter starts by following the *Sleeping Hermaphroditus* sculpture living in the Louvre, which graces the book's cover, and moves through different amodern versions of 'intersex physiques', towards two contemporary prose and poetry pieces unequivocally titled 'Intersex'. Both are from 2015:

one is authored by Juliana Huxtable and one by Aaron Apps. While both texts differ significantly in tone, genre and ends, what they share is that instead of understanding Hermaphroditus as a fictional figure within an all too real world, intersex lives figures as what is real, within a world made mythical by her and his own (un)making.

Ultimately, Gleeson's title, *Hermaphrodite Logic*, does not announce a critical idealism (in contemporary Marxism, Hegel's *Logic* never seems very far away) but an empiricist materialism (that is further enhanced by the stellar absence of references to Freud or psychoanalysis). This is less Hegel inverted; it is more Marx adapted. In *Hermaphrodite Logic* intersex organising sets the standard, and that standard is geared at depathologisation. Other recent books promoting such Intersex Marxism, like Hil Malatino's *Queer Embodiment* (2019) or Christopher Breu's *In Defense of Sex* (2024), secure their political argumentations by way of academic alignments with affect theory and psychoanalysis, respectively. Gleeson's academic references stem mostly from the sciences that made intersex a 'disorder' and whose undoing enables gender autonomy, which here, in dishonouring John Money's invention of the term, should figure as *sex autonomy*. Sexology is Gleeson's science of reference in *Hermaphrodite Logic*, and what the origins of intersex studies, here represented briefly by Prange and Goldschmidt shared, despite their considerable political differences, is what Gleeson centres as intersex organising's foundational contestation. In 1993 Bo Laurent, activist and founder of ISNA, in a crucial repartee with feminist biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling on the pages of *The Sciences* rejects, again, in all solidarity, the 'gonad-centrism' of her understanding of intersex. The hormonal pathologisation of intersex physique per se that this gonad-centrism allowed for opened intersex life up to what has since only been characterised as surgical and hormonal attempts at its elimination. Gleeson's book offers an introduction to intersex as a struggle, not intersex as a pathology and in that she devises an *exemplary* materialist methodology for redefining the discourses of every body's pathologisation as those of our organising against it.

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