‘discursive web’ meant to show ‘how culture is conceptualized by a wide range of agents: creators, performers, and critics, but also municipal bureaucrats, crown officials, and deputies in the newly created National Assembly’ (p. 18). In doing so, he illuminates material and symbolic strategies employed by cultural institutions to negotiate their survival through the Revolution and finds a ‘contestatory politics that grew out of previous cultural forms, reinvesting them with new significance, rather than inventing anew’ (p. 383). The institutional history recounted in the first four chapters traces the Opéra chronologically from 1789 to Thermidor. Drawing on governmental and administrative records, journalistic publications, and pamphlets, Darlow reveals that perceptions of the Opéra prior to the Revolution condemned it as a decadent, disordered institution. In the first years of the Revolution the Opéra is transferred to municipal supervision in the context of debates that highlight disagreement about the autonomy of culture and its function as a public service. Darlow shows the paradoxical nature of the January 1791 deregulation of the theatre. The so-called Le Chapelier Law offered liberation from repertorial privileges held by Ancien Régime theatres while simultaneously asserting their new obligation as institutions of public instruction. The Terror period reveals repression and censorship for the Opéra, as well as tumultuous managerial restructuring. Methodologically, the book’s initial section allows Darlow to demonstrate that institutional history is essential to dispelling misconceptions and commonplaces about Revolutionary culture, including the notion that theatre operated under complete freedom following deregulation, that the Terror period was unequivocally repressive, and that Ancien Régime repertory was by definition divorced from the politics of the moment. The second part of the study (which, arguably, might stand separately) offers painstaking analysis of box office receipts, the composition of the Opéra repertory, and frequency of its performances. Two chapters, focused on the 1789–90 season and divided by genre (tragedy and serious works followed by comic and mixed works), reveal a company caught in a policy of artistic circumspection. During the Terror, a patriotic repertory shows less the success of censorship and coercion than a series of confused attempts to address the moving target of Terror-era ideology. Well researched and finely written, Darlow’s study introduces a welcome complexity to our understanding of the arts during the French Revolution and demonstrates the value of institutional histories.

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The Romantic Machine: Utopian Science and Technology after Napoleon. By John Tresch. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012. xviii + 449 pp., ill. John Tresch, in this beautifully written and masterfully researched book, tackles the age-old gap between romanticism and science, and succeeds in bridging a divide that is so long-established that it has become the basic template for many researchers in the field. Tresch focuses on French scientists, artists, and thinkers active between 1815 and 1848 who had a penchant for both and who saw no problem in marrying them together — quite the contrary. Their activity ran counter to the institutional, though waning, scientific culture of the time, dominated under Bonaparte’s rule by Pierre-Simon Laplace, who promoted a mechanistic, essentially Newtonian approach to physics. While Laplacian physics was primarily concerned with fixed, absolute relations between separate phenomena, Tresch’s Romantic scientists, or scientific Romantics, under the more or less direct influence of the German idealists, but also of indigenous developments such as that he ingeniously refers to as Maine de Biran’s ‘physiospiritualism’, were interested in the transformative and dynamic qualities of these phenomena, the texture of the milieu in which they interacted, as well as in the specificity and even the personality of the tools used to study them. The book is divided into three main parts, the first of which centres on three key figures of the Parisian academic scene who contributed to giving science back its sense of unity — in material, geographical, and social terms:
André Ampère, who brought together light, heat, electricity, and magnetism in electromagnetism; Alexander von Humboldt, with his international community of experimenters who sought to understand the planet’s symphony-like activity through instruments that would extend the natural bodily organs; and François Arago, who endeavoured to diffuse scientific knowledge and promote the daguerreotype as a means of revealing the invisible forces at work in visual experience. The second part examines the ways in which artists and composers used the most advanced technology to produce startling impressions on the audience’s minds. And the third part gives an account of projects of sociopolitical and even religious reform, attributing a crucial role to engineering and industry. Tresch’s early nineteenth century is a world where the organic and the artificial merge, in a constant effort to relate to nature as a living whole. While the typically Romantic emphasis on diversity in unity is permanently reiterated, one may wonder where the lone, asocial Romantic hero has gone. Similarly, in view of Tresch’s considerations on the dryness of Laplacean physics and on the evolution of scientific research after 1848, one may argue that the line of the Romantic–scientific dichotomy, instead of being permanently blurred, has merely been shifted, and that there is still a domain where romanticism will forever fear to tread. Still, these are but trifles in the face of the major tour de force that this work represents. It is particularly suited to historians of science and to specialists or students in the philosophy, literature, culture, and art of the period, but it can equally be recommended to anyone interested in the complex relationship between mind, sense, and matter.

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The seventeen articles and essays contained in this handsome volume have been collected as a tribute to the editor-in-chief of L’Année balzacienne, whose twenty-seven numbers published since 1986 constitute their own monument to Michel Lichtlé’s erudition, good judgement, and generosity towards other scholars irrespective of their professional standing. The collection opens with ‘Pour Balzac’, Lichtlé’s introduction to the recent Le Monde–Classiques Garnier edition of La Comédie humaine, which, by virtue of its implied status as a plaidoyer, fits neatly with the volume’s overall theme. It ends with his first publication, his still widely cited 1971 article on Louis Lambert, and his informative reconstruction of the publishing history of Le Père Goriot, highlighting in particular the novel’s fate at the hands of the French educational system. The kernel is formed by a range of authoritative articles devoted, in various ways, to Balzac’s engagement with the law and, to a lesser extent, with contemporary political thought. They include Lichtlé’s finely researched piece on Balzac and the English Revolution. These studies will be familiar to seasoned Balzaciens, but they acquire new resonance when reread in close proximity to each other. Less familiar, probably, will be an examination of Balzac and the death penalty that first appeared in the proceedings of a German colloquium. The collection also includes two studies that were ‘forthcoming’ at the time of its compilation. The first is a magisterial demonstration that Balzac’s infamous corrections in proof betray a more complex (and problematic) activity than has usually been assumed; it is nicely observed in parenthesis that serial publication ran counter to his habit of treating the printed page as a preliminary manuscript. The second is an authoritative forty-five-page account of Balzac’s involvement with Le Siècle, the newspaper that published his article on the Peytel Affair, itself the subject of one of the pieces reprinted; this account follows on from Lichtlé’s earlier analysis of Balzac’s troubled relationship with the St Petersburg