



Eurozine Review

Mittelweg brings to light correspondence between Hannah Arendt and a young '68er; *Arena* looks behind the scenes of the US elections; *Osteuropa*, *Index on Censorship*, *Blätter*, *Arche*, and *New Humanist* provide different angles on Russia; *Vikerkaar* watches as politics and religion mix in Europe's most secular country; *Kulturos barai* sees desperation turn to exile; *Edinburgh Review* features new Australian writing; and *Mute* shows invisibles.

Mittelweg 36 1/2008



The first-ever publication in *Mittelweg 36* of correspondence between theology student Hans-Jürgen Benedict and Hannah Arendt, dating back to 1967–68, represents something of a sensation. In it, the young student's passionate empathy and burning convictions meet the objective yet vehement argumentation of the philosopher. The correspondence offers a precise insight into Arendt's evaluation of the student movement, which, according to Wolfgang Kraushaar's commentary, was "multivalent". Arendt appeared to be "torn between the progressive impulses and the off-putting tendencies of the '68 rebellion", he writes.

The future of war: In an article on the "asymmetry of imperial war", [Dierk Walter](#) contributes to the discussion on [the future of war](#). Surveying five centuries and continents, he addresses questions about who wages war and with what means, with what knowledge, with what status, and with what goal. Walter concludes that "the dominant historical reality is war waged in ways determined by asymmetries": "Asymmetrical war is not primarily between strong and weak, but between opponents who have a different nature, a different internal structure, and who use very different methods to attain their objectives."

Corruption as metaphor: Expression of social under-development? Inevitable consequence of bureaucracy? Side effect of transition? A comparative study of European perceptions of corruption observes that in Romania, public discourse on corruption functions as a metaphor for interpreting post-socialist transformation. Applying the "Romanian model" to Germany, Dirk Tänzler calls into question prevalent explanations that frame corruption as a deviation from modernization's purported best practices. Tänzler argues that corruption in a modern, western society such as Germany must instead be understood as an unintended effect of neoliberal reforms.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Mittelweg 36 1/2008*

Arena 1/2008



The 2008 US elections are the most exciting in a long time. As most of the media focuses on the presidential candidates and their animated campaigns, Swedish *Arena* takes a step back and looks at the myths, social structures, and electoral patterns shaping US politics.

Ronald Reagan's ability to get working men to vote for policies that were clearly not in their interests casts a long shadow over US politics post 9/11. In the US presidential race, winning the masculinity battle will be crucial, writes [Katrine Kielos](#): "If progressive forces in the USA are to break the shift in voter behaviour achieved by Reagan, they must contemplate how their own political alternative could have let down the American working-class man so badly."

Liberal pundits John B. Judis and Ruy Teixeira seem to agree. No Democrat will reach the White House without significant levels of male, white working-class support. However, the basis for the new and stable Democratic majority that they predict will dominate US politics over the next decade will be made up of other groups: women, professionals, and minorities.

Swedish "quality" journalism: Björn af Kleen accuses the Swedish quality press of lacking substance. Instead of blaming it all on narrow-minded economists and a new ideology of maximizing profit spreading throughout the publishing business, he holds the journalists themselves just as culpable. Quoting Mats Svegfors, conservative politician and former editor-in-chief of *Svenska Dagbladet*, Björn af Kleen paints a pretty dark picture of the fourth estate in Sweden: "I don't exactly tremble with fear before meeting Swedish journalists. The imbalance between, on the one hand, structural social upheaval with huge implications for the welfare state and, on the other, journalists' knowledge and their ability to describe this change is simply enormous."

Also to look out for: *Arena* editor Devrim Mavi criticizes the Swedish Left Party for keeping silent about its history of supporting communist governments. And architects Joanna Zawieja and Jerker Söderling talk in interview about how controversial housing policies in Stockholm lead to segregation and gentrification.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Arena* 1/2008

Osteuropa 1/2008



Far from having "restored Russia's greatness", the Putin regime has ushered in a new stage of social decay, writes sociologist [Lev Gudkov](#) in *Osteuropa*. After the brief hope brought by perestroika, deep disappointment has set in, leading to resentment, social passivity, and alienation from the state. Over the past decade, writes Gudkov, the elites as well as the populace have lacked a readiness to participate in the creation of democratic institutions:

"Today, instead of genuine political and social goals there are 'national programmes' announced by the authorities. Be they for increasing agricultural productivity or for turning Russia into a world leader in nanotechnology: the spirit of these projects is Soviet. For that reason, society does not take them particularly seriously, since they fail to touch upon the fundamental issues of the social order."

Nevertheless, the destruction of the foundation of common action is the opposite of totalitarian regimes' attempt to mobilize the masses through an appeal to a "new society". Post-totalitarian regimes, writes Gudkov, simulate a return to tradition while promoting mass consumption and constant distraction. Indifference towards authoritarianism means that elections in Russia have become an act of mass obedience on the part of a society unable to imagine anything better.

Populism: Dieter Siegert connects populism in eastern central Europe with the socio-economic gulf between the winners and losers of transition and suggests that these countries are setting a trend for developments in western Europe too.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Osteuropa* 1/2008

Index on Censorship 1/2008



"How free is the Russian media?" asks the current issue of *Index on Censorship*. [Maria Eismont](#), director of the Russian Independent Media Programme at the New Eurasia Foundation, [has mixed answers](#). While some independent newspapers were repressed in advance of the elections, it is the opposition parties that the Kremlin sees as its main adversaries. Why has the independent press escaped relatively unscathed? Because business imperatives do the censors' work for them:

"Just as Russia's economic growth has obviated talk of democracy, the media's financial successes leave no place for ethical debate. Many media assistance theories were based on the prediction that financial sustainability of media companies would eventually lead to editorial independence. But reality has proved this rarely to be the case: success in business leads on to a more business-oriented approach."

Yet Eismont cites counter-examples. When the owner of a local paper in Khanti-Mansiysk pulled a story about embezzlement of public funds in November 2006, the editor and staff resigned and started up a new newspaper. Published under the title *My town without censorship*, it now nets over 10 000 dollars a month.

Rebranding Russia: [Irena Maryniak](#) reports on the grand narrative of national strength, integrity, and independence purveyed by the national media. Part of this campaign is to portray the Stalinist repressions as an ideological error rather than as despotism:

"The logic behind this thinking runs something like this: The populace, people *en masse*, are the objects of history. They express and serve the historical purpose. Good rulers (Peter the Great, Stalin, Putin) hold the levers and take responsibility for driving history forward. They may make mistakes occasionally, but at least they are great men."

Also to look out for: Alexei Simonov, director of the Glasnost Defense Foundation, [tells](#) of the state's failure to investigate the death of journalists; Fatima Tlisova, journalist in the North Caucasus, [recounts](#) the tactics used to intimidate her; and Sergei Bachinin [describes](#) how the regional press in Russia has to fight to maintain its independence.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Index on Censorship* 1/2008

Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik 3/2008



The Russian governing elite strives to assert the superiority of orthodox Russian culture over the West, yet lacks the sense of political reality to implement its vision, [writes Vladislav Inozemsev](#), editor of *Svobodnaia Mysl* magazine and the Russian edition of *Le Monde diplomatique*. Nevertheless, one thing can be said: the Russian elite possesses a unique ability to turn officially sanctioned resources to personal gain.

Corruption in the country has quintupled the economic cycle within five years.

Castles built on sand, says Inozemsev. Borrowing has increased from 31 to 418 billion dollars since 2003 while monopolies create high production costs that undermine Russia's competitiveness. Higher energy prices mean higher state income, yet expenditure is aimed only at areas that preserve the status quo. While fifteen per cent of the male labour force is employed in nationalized sectors of the economy, the prison population numbers 780 000. Healthcare and education go by the board.

As a result of this speculative economy, the population is getting used to idleness, writes Inozemsev. The proportion of those with genuinely useful occupations is sinking as fast as the needs of the "elite" are growing. "Should economic problems one day increase, it will likely prove extremely difficult to dampen the appetite of these supposed elites."

"The managed transition from Putin to Medvedev withholds from the population a necessary insight: that the principles of the Putin regime are fundamentally unsustainable, since they incorporate the symbiosis of a nostalgic view of the past with purely cyclical, but by no means legitimate, economic successes."

Also to look out for: Heiner Flassbeck analyzes the dangers of an imminent global financial crisis for Europe; Ulrich Menzel uncovers the secret of China, the "continent of the twenty-first century"; and Albert Scharenberg outlines the history and present of the American liberal tradition.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* 3/2008

Arche 12/2007



On the basis of the elections to the Duma, Russia can be described as a specimen state with "managed democracy", according to Paval Usau in Belarusian journal *Arche*. Democratic institutions and controlled opposition only serve to secure the stability of the totalitarian system. Given that 70 out of the 99 governors in the Duma belong to the ruling party, that system is unlikely to change in the near future.

Kathryn Stoner–Weiss of the Center on Democracy, Development, and The Rule of Law concurs. "One of the key mistakes made in dealing with Russia in the last five years in particular is the continued treatment of it as a fully developed democracy and economy — it is most certainly not that. Its transition is not over. External levers are surely weaker than they were in Georgia, Ukraine or Serbia, but they are not completely absent."

Also: Ales Biely on "The long death of Slavic Lithuania", which continues the debate started in Valer Bulhakau's provocative book *The history of Belarusian nationalism*.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Arche* 12/2007

New Humanist 2/2008



The Russian Orthodox Church is now richer and more powerful in Russia than for almost a century, writes Michael Binyon in *New Humanist*. During the Brezhnev era, the Orthodox Church became the focus of a resurgent nationalism; in recent times, the Patriarch's influence over Putin has ensured the passage of laws that bolster the position of the Orthodox Church at the expense of other denominations. Abroad, meanwhile, the Orthodox Church sees its role as the mouthpiece of the Kremlin:

"It is influential in the World Council of Churches, it has forged good relations with the Anglican communion (though notably not with Rome) and it is working hard to unite the Russian diaspora in loyalty to Moscow."

India: Today's generation of middle class Indians are discarding the secular–humanist version of Hinduism that appealed to an earlier generation of elites and shedding their reticence about appearing in religious rituals, [writes Meera Nanda](#). Yet growing religiosity can only partly be explained as a response to consumerist guilt. More significantly:

"The same innovations in religious ritual and dogmas that are enabling the 'Great Indian Middle Class' to adjust to global capitalism are also deepening a sense of Hindu chauvinism, and widening the chasm between Hindus and non–Hindu minorities. The banal, everyday Hindu religiosity is simultaneously breeding a banal, everyday kind of Hindu ultra–nationalism. This kind of nationalism is not openly proclaimed in fatwas, nor does it appear on the election manifestos of political parties. Its power lies in structuring the common sense of ordinary people."

Also to look out for: Stephen Howe investigates what can be learned about extremism from the memoirs of former Islamist radicals; Nina Power finds in Iran a tension between secular instincts and an unwillingness to confront the

religious authorities; and [Laurie Taylor](#) talks to [Richard Sennett](#) about his new book *The Craftsman*.

The full [table of contents](#) of *New Humanist* 2/2008

Vikerkaar 1–2/2008



As a post–communist Lutheran country, Estonia is one of the most secular societies in Europe. This, however, does not mean that recent cultural buzzwords such as "post–secularism" or "neo–atheism" do not apply to the Estonian debate. Attempts at reintroducing religious education in schools and the fact that Christian symbols and rituals have become part of public affairs are passionately debated in newspapers and blogs. An unholy alliance is currently forming between former communist neoliberals and representatives of conservative circles connected to the Church — to the bewilderment of the wider public and much to the concern of more liberal clerics.

This is the context in which *Vikerkaar* editor [Märt Väljataga](#) reviews Marcel Gauchet's book *La religion et la démocratie*, recently published in Estonian translation. Väljataga discusses the role of religion throughout history and tests the theory that modernization goes hand in hand with secularization against Estonian society. It proves rather useful — at least until now. The question is, however, whether the current developments really have to do with Estonian society becoming more religious or whether it is not rather a more profane matter of political power and influence.

More on religion: This double issue on religion also includes articles on the relation between violence and the sacred, on fictional versions of the gospel narratives, and on the quest for the historical Jesus and the relevance of new historical findings to issues of religious faith.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Vikerkaar* 1–2/2008

Kultūros barai 2/2008



Since the last enlargement, the European Union has had to grapple with the legacy of the Soviet Union and its former satellites. The new EU members have been given the opportunity to create, step by step, a life within the Western domain. But for many people, from the Danube to the Gulf of Finland, desperation has turned to exile. They have lost their patience with the slow development and have instead jumped at the chance to move west as a means of escape, writes Kristupas Sepkus. (For more on the problem of Lithuanians leaving their country for countries in the West, see the [Eurozine Review 19 February](#).)

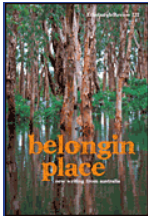
Controlling democracy: Vytautas Rubavichius writes that some political scientists and analysts refuse to admit that a system of controlled democracy is being installed in Lithuania. They claim that this is what is being done in Russia, not Lithuania. But Rubavichius warns that there are various types of controlled democracy: Russia has an authoritarian system, whereas the Lithuanian system has no centralized power.

Democratic illiberalism: Unlike the extremist parties of the 1930s, new populist movements worldwide do not aim to abolish democracy: quite the opposite, they thrive on democratic support. What we are witnessing today, writes Ivan Krastev, is a conflict between elites that are becoming increasingly suspicious of democracy and angry publics that are becoming increasingly illiberal.

Also: Almis Grybauskas on Charter 77 and what it means to the Czech Republic today; Algirdas Grigaravicius on the development of a nationalist ideology in Lithuania until 1926; Elona Lubyte on how the cultural elite have become beggars; and André Schiffrin's essay on monopoly in the publishing business.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Kulturos barai* 2/2008

Edinburgh Review 122 (2008)



Ray Lawrence's film *Jindabyne* addresses sexual politics and latent racism embedded in contemporary Australian culture, writes Will Brady. Lawrence's film is based on a short story by Raymond Carver, and starts with four men on a fishing trip finding the corpse of a young woman. The men's decision not to report it until they have finished their trip has implications.

Two questions are asked: Would they have acted differently had it been the body of a boy? And would it have made a difference had she been white?

"Lawrence [has] endeavoured to make *Jindabyne* not only a film about male insensitivity and female empathy, but also an exploration of what these sexual politics might tell us about Australia's current social climate." writes Brady. "The latent desire to remain a white liberal state, unchallenged by ethnic minority discontent, is evidenced by increasingly stringent control of its indigenous population."

Disappearing languages: In "An Island Home", Kim Scott writes about an ongoing project of collecting and writing down the stories of the Noongar people of Western Australia. It follows up work done by an American linguist, Gerhardt Laves, who transcribed the stories of a number of Noongar men eighty years earlier. Descendants of the original "informants" were tracked down, and a reference group was set up. Scott outlines the various problems encountered due to internal disagreements and working in a language that does not exist in written form. Nevertheless: "Noongar language offers a profound relationship with our natural environment and human history, and insights into another way of being." writes Scott. This is "an investment in ourselves."

Further reading: Martin Harrison looks at the influence of pop culture on Australian poetry; Mark O'Connor assesses Australia's commitment to the environment; and Ruby Langford Ginibi recalls her childhood.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Edinburgh Review* 122 (2008)

Mute 7 (2008)



"We are standing on the brink of an immense revelation. The revelation of people to states. [...] Joining up data, and hence governance, is the name of the game." Josephine Berry Slater's editorial introduction sets the agenda for the new issue of the UK journal *Mute*. The focus is on "the exposure of subjects not just to state surveillance and databasing, but to sovereign state power enacted either through the ordinary rule of law or through its suspension in the state of emergency."

In an article on emergency legislation passed by the Australian government in 2007, Elizabeth Povinelli discusses how, on the pretext of clamping down on child abuse in aboriginal communities, police, doctors, and the army took over aboriginal land. This action, suggests Povinelli, should be seen against the background of "the collapse of the multicultural compromise in the wake of 9/11" and "the extension of the neoliberal state into every aspect of social life".

Joined up care: Damion Abbott discusses the private finance initiative (PFI) programme to introduce a centralized healthcare database in the UK, otherwise known as "The Spine". Abbott, a sufferer of Krohn's disease, asks what data transparency means for the recipients of joined-up care:

"The NHS will become less a provider of services to the public and more a purchaser of them on the public's behalf. Suddenly, the spinal metaphor becomes less something that makes the medical process directly and instantaneously accessible to me, but more of an obfuscatory mechanism, a middle man for a market that I will not have any direct control over."

Also to look out for: Pil and Galia Kollektiv ask what becomes of critical irony in the viral world of web 2.0: "The difference in our relationship to such 'texts' and to more traditional media is between reading 'with' or 'against' the grain and not seeing any grain."

The full [table of contents](#) of *Mute* 7 (2008)

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