



Eurozine Review

Transit gives Europe a wake-up call; *The Hungarian Quarterly* travels without a passport; *Passage* bears witness; *Wespennest* dares religion to argue with God; *Ord&Bild* is enchanted by materialism; *Esprit* takes the measure of our catastrophic times; *A Prior* explores sound in printed media; and *L'Espill* compiles the cream of Catalan thinking.

Transit 34 (2008)



Few contemporary politicians have done more to try to convince reluctant citizens of the need for European integration than former German foreign minister [Joschka Fischer](#). Since he left office in 2005, he has become even more outspoken. *Transit* prints his Jan Patočka Memorial Lecture on "Europe and the Middle East".

An arms race in the Middle East would affect European security to an unimaginable degree, says Fischer. By drawing on its positive experience in conflict resolution, Europe can play a major role in averting such a development. But does it have the instruments and institutions to do so? Given the urgency of the situation in Middle East, Europeans can't afford the luxury of being against Europe, warns Fischer:

"Of course, we politicians can say: 'We can't get this across to our citizens!' At present, this attitude is commonly found among all the governments in the EU, without exception, and it has nothing to do with party politics. And of course you, the people, can say: 'We don't want Turkish membership!' But then you have to be clear about the consequences. It will do no good to bury your heads in the sand..."

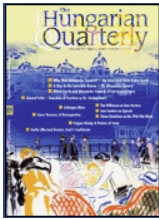
Free minds before free speech in China: The exponential, truly phenomenal growth of the Internet in China since the mid-1990s has attracted much attention internationally. But despite predictions to the contrary, the Internet has not brought about abrupt political change and is not likely to do so anytime soon. Its significance and implications for Chinese society lie elsewhere, writes [Martin Hala](#) in an [eye-opening essay](#): "Bulletin boards and blogs may not be changing Chinese politics, but by introducing entirely new forms of self-expression and social interaction, they are gradually transforming society from within."

Anna Politkovskaya: Last Friday, the Russian prosecutors announced that they had identified the "direct murderer" of Anna Politkovskaya. There

remains the question of who ordered the killing. In a homage to Politkovskaya, Martin Malek writes that the "beneficiaries from the murder are easily identified — Putin's Kremlin, the Russian military (especially in Chechnya) and [Chechnya's prime minister] Kadyrov. All of them can now manoeuvre with greater impunity than ever before."

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The Hungarian Quarterly 189 (2008)



In his novella *Sworn Statement* (newly published in English), Imre Kertész recalls how, in 1991, border police took him off the Budapest to Vienna train for holding too much foreign currency. Humiliated, Kertész turned the incident into an allegory about the relativity of freedom. Now, after Hungary and eight other EU member states joined the Schengen zone in December 2007, such incidents belong to the past — at least for those within the zone's charmed circle.

Gábor Miklósi, journalist at the weekly *Magyar Narancs*, remarks wryly that Hungarians who used to refuse to travel to Hungary's former territories in Slovakia as long as they needed a passport and a different currency now have nothing to stop them making the journey (common currency being just a matter of time). While the relaxation of border controls has benefited communities split after the Trianon treaty, it has not been without absurdities: some Austrian villages have put up "no entry" signs on roads leading from the border constructed with EU funds. And pity the Hungarian hanglider, who, Schengen or no Schengen, must still land before crossing into Slovak airspace...

Imre Kertész in interview: The Nobel laureate wrestles with the question of literary technique. "Just picture [...] what I was confronted with when writing *Fatelessness*. If I had painted a squalid world that disgusted people and made them loath to hear anything about it, then I would not have been doing my job well. It is up to me to generate the pleasure that will draw readers into the book. In spite of the fact that the topic is horrendous and the subject is not 'literary' at all."

Also to look out for: On the trail of two Hungarians in exile — Alexander Lenard, translator of Antal Szerb into German and *Winnie the Pooh* into Latin; and Edward Teller, "father" of the US hydrogen bomb.

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Passage 58 (2007)



Danish *Passage* focuses on the form and function of witness-bearing in literature and art; works that take traumatic experiences and events as their starting points. "There has been a particular tendency to wish to document, witness, and represent real-historical relations within literature, film, and art", write the editors. "This is particularly the case in relation to traumatic events such as Auschwitz, Gulag, the Chinese cultural revolution, Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda, 9/11, and Iraq, just to mention

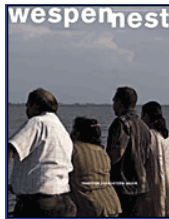
some of the most frequently recurring ones."

The last two decades' representations of the witness–phenomenon have often been recognized by the transformation of an historical trauma into a structural trauma, uncritically using, for instance, general linguistic theories to explain concrete suffering without much consideration for the actual event.

One central question in the present discussion is: Who has the right to be the subject? Who has the right to speak? Stefan Iversen formulates this as the paradox of talking about events and experiences that "must not be forgotten, but which cannot be said". And Mads Rosendahl Thomsen points out the problem of representing the unimaginable loss of human life "whose identities and destinies can not be given fair treatment through one individual account. [...] Respect for the individual is the ethical opposite of those who offered no thought to the individual". In this sense, bearing witness becomes the exhibit of the individual, whereas in war–memorials the overwhelming mass of victims is central to the aesthetic expression.

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Wespennest 150 (2008)



In his *Book of suffering*, thirteenth century Persian poet Faridoddin Attar described in 7539 verses a journey of the soul through the cosmos in its vain search for salvation, hope, or at least consolation. Navid Kermani, writing in *Wespennest*, claims that the yet older *Book of the journey to the sky* by an anonymous writer served not only as a source for Attar but also for Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and shows its impact on later works such as Milton's *Paradise Lost* and even Büchner's *Woyzeck*.

Attar's epos is exemplary, writes Kermani, of the discussion by Muslim thinkers, poets, mystics about a God whom they respect yet also blame. "Apart from the atheist denial of God and the justification of God in the many varieties of the theodicy, there is another, probably even older human reaction: that there is a God, but neither does he love us, nor is he just. That a meaning exists, but that it is sinister." This formerly so radical, loud, and widespread protest rarely arises within Islamic culture today.

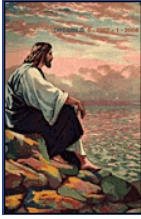
"A culture shows its strength when radical criticism isn't left to outsiders, but is done by the culture itself, with the support of its institutions. The king paying his mockers and fools, today's states their critics, or cities an advanced theatre. [...] The greatness of a culture shows when it tolerates outbursts against its biggest authorities, even outbursts against God."

Kermani's essay is part of the section "Translating tradition: Asia" edited by Ilija Trojanow and including Raoul Schrott on the oriental forerunners of Homer and Ranjit Hoskote on the Hindu epic the *Ramayana*.

Philosophy of the province: Slovene writer Drago Jancar does what his colleague Kermani recommends; he criticizes his own culture from the inside. In Jancar's eyes, the spirit of negation and self–sufficiency springs from idleness and ignorance, as the opposite to curiosity and knowledge.

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Ord&Bild 6/2007–1/2008



atheism.

Introducing the current issue of *Ord&Bild*, the editors comment on the system of literary production in Sweden and the importance of self-reflection, networking, and exchange of experience. It's not only exchange between journals that they call for, but between journals and readers; consequently, they invite their readers to respond to [Sven-Eric Liedman's opening article](#) and thus take part in a public debate on religion and

Having defined himself as a "Lutheran atheist", Liedman sets out to find a positive and "enchanted" form of atheism. Europe is the exception to the global de-secularization of politics; at the same time, theoretical interest in theological issues has been rising in Europe over the past fifteen years. The intention of intellectuals such as Agamben, Badiou, Derrida, Habermas, and Zizek, writes Liedman, "is not to fight religious belief but to understanding it and the power within."

Placing Habermas's "soft naturalism" against the "militant atheism" of Michel Onfray and Richard Dawkins, and borrowing Diderot's concept of *matérialisme enchanté*, Liedman warns against trivializing life's wonders, be they of a technical nature or beyond our present conception. "Imagining a Maker behind all of this, isn't that to make a simple explanation for something much bigger? [...] Doesn't this diminish and humanize the world?"

Islam in Europe: Columbian researcher Mara Viveros Vigoya analyzes the French debate over the veil. In the confrontation between proponents and opponents of the veil, both sides claim to defend equality. Some speak for women who are forced to wear the veil, others speak for women who go their own way. "It is not about different value-systems, but about differing views of the same values."

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Esprit 3–4/2008



From financial crises to pandemics, from terrorism to tsunamis: in its current issue, *Esprit* takes the measure of "Our catastrophic times". In a topical opening interview, prominent economist André Orléan explains why financial markets show recurrent "blindness to disaster". Orléan's "structural" outlook allows him to remark that, "what is at stake in a disaster is the collapse of those social differences which, in an enduring regime, secure the stability of the system." The sudden collective rush for liquidity at the core of financial crises denies the diversity of opinion-based, individual operator behaviour that keeps markets going on a daily basis.

The third age of security: Frédéric Gros contends that "a fresh concept of disaster is emerging today" — one through which "our contemporary sense of identity is being reshaped". The prevalence of the notion of "human security" in international resolutions highlights a shift away from spiritual ataraxia and state-guaranteed security towards a "security for individuals". Humanitarian and other disasters undermine security in an "absolute" sort of way; the

resulting distress calls for protective action from government — and can find strong resonance in the media.

From "hyper—" to "hypo-president": Outside the focus, Olivier Mongin casts an ironic glance at president Sarkozy's fall from media grace. Just when Sarkozy had secured support for his efforts to reach out beyond his rightwing majority, he is falling into disfavour as he realizes that he must take better care of that majority. In his self-styled bid to restore public trust in politics, writes Mongin, Sarkozy only manages to "undercut parliament and privatize political discourse".

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A Prior Magazine 16 (2008)



A Prior takes artistic collaboration one step further. The artists, Anouk De Clercq, Susan Philipsz, and Renzo Martens, derive particular energy from unsettling monographic structures and all use sound and — in the case of Philipsz — song as the basis for their work. *A Prior* "embraces artistic practice engaged with text, sound, song, and music, abstract narrative, design, and a high degree of site consciousness"

within the setting of a *printed* journal. "Presenting a song/book within a book/journal accentuates awareness of the page before our eyes and the (im)possibility of making that page sing."

The periphery of the periphery: [Anders Kreuger](#) details his research for an upcoming exhibition in Tallinn in the spring of 2008. He is focusing on contemporary art and culture of the "Finno-Ugrian world", peoples united by their language group across the Republics of Mordvinia, Udmurtia, Mari El, and Komi. When Kreuger suggested the topic to his colleagues in Estonia they were not immediately positive: Why spend time in remote places seen as the periphery of the periphery? By visiting those "unknown but not exotic" places, Kreuger hopes to "undo some of the repression and self-repression that has pushed these peoples underground, and also illuminate possible meanings of the Continental Unconscious."

More artistry: "The second self: a hostage to cultural memory" by Charles Green and Anthony Gardner about artistic collaboration in history; and a chapter from Jalal Toufic's book *Two or three things I'm dying to tell you*.

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L'Espill 26 (2007)



In an issue on contemporary Catalan thinking, *L'Espill* interviews the philosopher and former member of the European parliament Xavier Rubert de Ventós (b.1939). "Once I was surprised by people who became radical when they got old," comments Ventós, "But it's happening to me too."

"For years, I suffered the distress of moving around the world without papers because the Franco authorities had confiscated them. [...] Even today, I feel absurd gratitude towards the policeman who asks for my driving licence and then lets me go without penalty. I'm sure my allergy to the law comes from this [...] In short, the law doesn't soothe me as it should, so in this regard I don't see myself as a liberal."

What's more, the socialist Ventós makes no bones about his admiration for certain rightwing authors:

"Drieu La Rochelle and Céline accept their human condition without making excuses. I too am a man and don't like being one either. I feel strange about it, bad, uncomfortable, hung-up, perplexed. If my philosophy has been of any 'use' to me, it's been to situate my monstrous condition within an order of general discourse."

Also to look out for: Catalan thinkers and researchers reflect on topics including the Enlightenment and the meaning of contemporary philosophy; sustainability and the environment; immigration and national identity; and the natural history of genocide.

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