



Eurozine Review

Neither man nor woman nor dog nor cat

Samtiden questions the concept of female literature; *Arche* takes stock after the elections in Belarus; *Springerin* unveils the veil; *Merkur* detects an urban moral disaster; *Res Publica Nowa* musters the phantoms of a non-existing metropolis; *FA-art* sees literature caught between commitment and autonomy; *Mittelweg 36* re-reads the "good German" W.G. Sebald; *Revolver Revue* points out the difference between the camera and the pen; *Revista Crítica* asks why young people have a problem with politics; and *Glänta* writes the encyclopaedia of the future.

Samtiden 3/2008



"By the end of the 1970s, the expression 'female literature' had established itself in Norway", writes Toril Moi in *Samtiden*.

"It was defined as literature by women, about women, and for women." Many women found the female in literature inspiring, but then Nathalie Sarraute snarled in an interview: "When I write I am neither man nor woman nor dog nor cat."

To her, the notion of female or male writing — *écriture féminine ou masculine* — was totally void of meaning.

Moi finds that today, more than twenty years later, the discussion has gone nowhere. Why did some exceptional female writers get so annoyed when they heard that the fact that they were women defined, or at least left traces in their writing? To writers that are women, it can be incredibly frustrating to always have to write as a woman, but it can be just as obstructing to write as if one is *not* a woman, when one is one. "To make women second rate citizens of the world of literature is to say that the female experience of the world carries less value than the male."

Diversity: "The insistence on diversity can be a burden for people [...] who have made an effort to slip quietly into [their new country's] working and everyday life", write Tordis Borchrevink and Grete Brochmann. The reaction to the appointment of Martinique-born Manuela Ramin-Osmundsen to the Norwegian government in 2007 was one of elation over the manifestation of Norway as a diverse society. But with her high education and integration into a Norwegian elite, Borchrevink and Brochmann wonder if she is left with being just a representative of skin colour. "People of non-European looks are defined as multicultural. But the question is if, in the effort to ensure diversity, we don't put too much emphasis on people's looks."

Also: Mustafa Can on life in exile: "To be in exile from one's home country is like being in a permanent separation from oneself. One is invisible, like air."

The full [table of contents](#) of *Samtiden* 3/2008

Arche 9/2008



The parliamentary elections in Belarus on 28 September were judged by the OSCE to have fallen short of democratic standards, despite minor improvements. The election took place in a strictly controlled environment with a barely visible campaign and not one of the sixty opposition candidates won a seat. Published shortly after the election, the current issue of *Arche* takes stock of the implications for western policy.

After the Russian invasion of Georgia, the Lukashenka regime sent signs to the European political community that it was ready to negotiate. The last political prisoners were released, including Lukashenka's competitor in the 2006 presidential election, Alexander Kazulin. [Vital Silicki](#) dismisses this gesture as an attempt to achieve guarantees of safety and to lure western investors.

Lukashenka, in "Titoist" fashion, is playing Russia off against the West, writes [Andrew Wilson](#). "The key question about the recent elections must be the following: are they just the latest recalibration of this balancing act, or do they mark a more fundamental shift in the nature of the regime?" After the Georgia conflict, notes Wilson, some EU politicians have declared that the overriding priority must be to "counteract Russian influence" in Belarus.

"However, the West will be accused of double standards if it accepts Lukashenka's overtures after so little has changed internally in Belarus", writes Wilson. Silicki and Dzianis Mieljancou agree: in the absence of clear and non-negotiable benchmarks, they write, the dialogue between the Belarusian regime and the western political community looks like political bargaining that depends on the geopolitical conjuncture.

Also: Tatiana Culickaja traces the reaction of the Belarusian official media to the Georgia conflict, which initially was critical of Russia, but became increasingly pro-Russian in the run up to the Russia-Belarus summit at the end of August.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Arche* 9/2008

Springerin 4/2008



Religion is on the rise, confirm the editors in the current issue of *Springerin*. However, the frontline is not only running between Islam and modernity, but between Islamic fundamentalism and Christian fundamentalism, flourishing in south and eastern Europe and Russia: "There is more to the resurgence of religious fundamentalism than merely media hype."

Dogma of visibility: In the West, writes Sven Lütticken, veiled women are perceived as a "radical challenge to the Western dogma of visibility." By wearing a veil, on the other hand, some women ostensibly distance themselves from the Western visual and economic dictate. But flying the flag of

Enlightenment, critics tend to back concealed fundamentalist tendencies: "The ostentatious goal of the 'salvation' of women from a patriarchal regime easily turns into the latest version of cultural colonialism, where Islam is presented as the dark Other of European civilization".

In fact, Lütticken continues, the performative spectacle of Western societies and veiling are no more than an abstract contradiction: "By being exploited, by religious fundamentalists and Western 'Enlightenment–Fundamentalists' alike, the veil denies its entanglement into the regime of staged abstractions. For both, it is an abstract negation, pure differentness."

Russian commodities: Russia, writes Ketj Chukhrov, "is on the forefront when it comes to accommodating the role of the Church to the State's interests". When Russian "democracy" disappeared with the 90s, mass culture — "cheap glamour" — went along with it. It was replaced by contemporary "oligarchism" which came with a strong interest in "contemporary art, orthodox religion and sports — 'expensive' glamour." Contemporary art provides the proof of Russia being a player among successful states — and religion serves as the lost ideology. Artists tend to embrace both. They incorporate the new situation in their works by expressing "the manifold interrelations of monetary, authoritarian, and religious aspects of contemporary Russia. A work of art is intended to be a commodity."

Also: Piotr Piotrowski on art censorship in Poland.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Springer* 4/2008

Merkur 11/2008



In *Merkur*, Roger Scruton bemoans the "moral disaster [...] of cities in which no one wishes to live, where public spaces are vandalized and private spaces boarded up". He lays the blame at the door of modern architecture à la Corbusier or Gropius. Yet there is hope: the "New Urbanism" of Luxemburg-born Léon Krier, a rebel "against the totalitarian mindset of the modernists". Krier's concept of the "Polypolis" is, "a network of genuine public spaces, in which the ideal and the fact of communal settlement are recorded in the lay of the street and the genial side-by-sideness of the buildings". His critics, though, "have widely dismissed Krier's project for urban renewal as impractical" and ignored his warnings: "When we despoil our cities, we despoil ourselves."

Memory: Reactions to great suffering, namely during WWII, vary considerably, writes Theodore Dalrymple. Some people, like his former teacher Gerta Vrbová, abandon their "forgetfulness" in old age: "I owe those who did not survive the Holocaust, as well as those who might benefit from my experience, an account of my observations." Others, like Dalrymple's mother, "wanted all that she had seen, and all that she suffered, to go with her to the grave, for she was of the pessimistic view that man never learns, at least from the experience of others."

Transition: No matter where you go, be it Romania, Bulgaria or Montenegro, Dubrovnik, Mostar or Sarajevo, travelling through south eastern Europe reveals only superficial alterations, writes Rasmus Althaus. "Transition in eastern Europe? Whoever tries to define change here ignores the continuity of

the disparate. Once one takes a step back, expands one's view, one sees that here only those things happen that have always happened. So-called transition is just a new chapter of constant convergence and divergence."

Also: [Kenan Malik](#) on multiculturalism as a new form of racism.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Merkur* 11/2008

***Res Publica Nowa* 3/2008**



"Cities have become a battleground where the need for constant development is wearing down the wish to preserve communal space — the symbolic glue that binds together the thousands of dwellers who live there as in a maze", write the editors of Polish journal *Res Publica Nowa* in the introduction to an issue on "Urban spaces".

Many of the articles address these tensions between public and private, past and present. "Whose city?" asks Arnold Baretzky as he tries to describe the complex process of developing a post-communist urbanity where symbolic and historical remains clash with the advertisements of the free market.

Czeslaw Bielecki compares Polish city planning to the Tower of Babel: no intention and no project. False hopes were invested in the free market and laissez-faire policies have resulted in pure chaos. What Poland needs, writes Bielecki, is a general development plan and strict rules and procedures controlled by the municipal offices.

In "The Warsaw non-uprising", Jaroslaw Trybus, whose "Polonia Hotel" won the Golden Lion at the 2008 Venice Biennale, musters the phantoms of a non-existing metropolis — with examples from the pre-war Warsaw EXPO plans — to demonstrate the potential of symbols and buildings never built.

Also: Marek S. Szczepanski and Weronika Slezak-Tazbir on the "urban perfumery" and the city as "scent space"; a psychoanalysis of Warsaw and its traumatic past by Andrzej Leder; and Malgorzata Büthner-Zawadzka in search of a female perspective on the city: the flaneuse.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Res Publica Nowa* 3/2008

***FA-art* 1/2008**



The periodical *Krytyka Polityczna* refers to the ethos of the Polish intelligentsia and the attitude towards societal involvement as the elements of a leftist tradition, writes Krzysztof Unilowski in *FA-art*. It stands behind the idea of "committed literature" and regards the autonomy of the arts as a bourgeois bias. At the same time, the magazine faces the dilemma of remaining independent from the media market and mass communication. As its patron it has taken one of the most prominent Polish critics and modern philosophers, Stanislaw Brzozowski. He considers artistic autonomy as a necessary condition for literature's social impact.

Recent comments by Stanislaw Sierakowski, the editor-in-chief of *Krytyka Polityczna*, reveal that the issue is not whether a work of art presents an idea of social involvement, but whether the art in question changes the established opinion of literature as a separate, individual sphere of social communications: it is impossible to relinquish autonomy altogether. Instead, it is essential to confirm such autonomy through a critical attitude towards the socially accepted literary norms, states Sierakowski.

Poetry "badly done": The most recent volume of Grzegorz Olszanski's *Film Chronicles*, lets us consider the Hölderlin formula regarding poetry as "the most innocent of all occupations" but "the most dangerous of possessions" from a new perspective, writes Justyna Baran.

The poems, entangled in a cinematographic context, have an unclear status in which all attempts at interpretation leads to an absurd, finds Baran. The dissimilarity of the styles create a climate and condition for the presentation of total helplessness of words. Helplessness with regard both to references as well as epistemology, disconnection from the meaning, entanglement not with reality, but with the actions leading to its recognition. The use of film nomenclature as a tool for the interpretation of these works allows us to glimpse in them the intention to bare the weakness of the intellectually stacked language.

The full [table of contents](#) of *FA-art 1/2008*

Mittelweg 36 5/2008



In his book, *The natural history of destruction*, W.G. Sebald describes the Allied "area bombing" of German cities in graphic, apocalyptic detail: fire storms, dismembered corpses, mummified infants, rats feeding on human fat, rotting flesh crawling with maggots... But, asks [Thomas Medicus](#) in the current issue of *Mittelweg 36*, what does all this have to do with history? "Instead of historicism [...] there enters the aesthetic of transcendence, the necrophilia of which leads to the belief that what we are dealing with is a thoroughly moral narrator. Mortification remains the condition of all perception."

At the very beginning of his book, Medicus notes, Sebald refers to the bombing as "an act of destruction until then unique in history". Thus Sebald avoids charges of historical revisionism; even after his death, he remains the "good German", especially in the Anglo-Saxon space. Sebald's Holocaust novel *Rings of Saturn* was published in the US in 1996, three years after *Schindler's list* and the opening of the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington — what Medicus calls the "Americanization of the Holocaust".

"Sebald too played his part in making intimate or democratizing representations of history, in which the victim occupies the central position. Without the triumphal procession of biographical recollection, neither his literary victim discourse nor its success would have been conceivable. From the de-historicization of the Holocaust to the 'genocide among genocides' — the well-meaning reception of *The Natural History of Destruction* also profited from this."

The sociology of uncertainty: Silke van Dyk and Stephan Lessenich review alternative sociological interpretations of uncertainty. Many sociologists maintain that as a result of the reorganization of social security systems, uncertainty has returned to society. Yet at the same time, perspectives that frame uncertainty as an ineluctable structural characteristic of modernity's welfare states have also gained in popularity. Uncertainty, it would seem, has returned to society without ever having left it.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Mittelweg* 36 5/2008

Revolver Revue 72 (2008)



In Czech journal *Revolver Revue*, filmmaker Martin Rysavy describes how he arrived at his approach to documentary:

"I filmed a giant salamander [...], a huge animal, a two-metre long creature. I made a number of detailed shots and a few of the whole animal. But later in the film I used only the details because I found them more mysterious. [...] As a result, however, the viewer could not tell how big the salamander was as there was no point of reference. [...] When I made other films later on I promised myself to remember this lesson and to use everything that enables me to see things more clearly and distinctly, even if it verges on tautology. [...] The phenomena of the world [...] do not need to be made more interesting."

Rysavy is also a writer, and for him the written word achieves things film cannot: "The camera captures what is going on at the moment. It constantly accumulates the present. Literature goes into the past. It processes a memory and what is in the human mind." Rysavy's book *Journeys to Siberia*, "a novel that pretends to be a travel book" is about to be published by *Revolver Revue* ([read an excerpt](#)).

Also: Petr Vanous profiles the Berlin-based artists Andreas Hofer, Thomas Zipp, Thomas Helbig, Thilo Heinzmann, Markus Selg, and André Butzer, all considered rising stars of the Euro-Atlantic fine arts scene.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Revolver Revue* 72 (2008)

Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais 81 (2008)



Young people's relation with the democratic system and conventional models for political participation is one of the basic concerns associated with the functioning and intergenerational sustainability of Western democracies. Often, responsibility has ultimately been laid on the shoulders of young people themselves. Their age, their "irresponsibility" or "immaturity" are arguments that have been used against them in an effort to take the edge off their engagement. In *Revista Crítica*, Nuno Miguel Augusto assesses the extent to which young Portuguese people reflect the current trends and what the main motives are for young people's seeming

disenchantment with politics.

Student movements: Colin Barker considers the rise and decline of student movements during the 1960s and 1970s. Drawing on materials on student movements from a number of countries in Europe and America, he assesses

their historical significance in the context of the larger "protest wave" which the student movements of the period intersected. Barker concludes by noting more recent developments, suggesting that the story of student movements still offers interesting new possibilities.

Under the Franco regime, the Spanish university student movement was a fundamental instrument in creating spaces of freedom. Miguel Gómez Oliver analyzes its organic development, its capacity for fostering the development of a culture of debate, and examines the role it played in the learning process of democratic practices.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais* 81 (2008)

Glänta 3/2008



The new *Glänta* issue forms an entire encyclopaedia of the future: definitions and elaborations of more than two hundred words that don't yet exist: Ascetics, Crazy Frog Disorder, Dream ache, Fritzling, Neuropolitics, Poezak, Yroni... Over one hundred contributors have invented words and concepts that — arguably — will be needed in the future. The result is a collective piece of literature, an imaginative image of the future, or a critical account of the present.

Unfortunately, most headwords and definitions in the encyclopaedia are untranslatable which means that we can only provide a small sample:

Claustrophilia: "Medical term denoting the hallucinogenic fear of meeting foreign thoughts, resulting in an urge in the affected to withdraw into closed and self-referential spaces that he or she *thinks* are open and contain the whole world."

Gamma male: "G. refers to all men that whisper, ponder, and do not feel comfortable in the garage."

Hiberalgia: "(noun) Nostalgic longing for cold winters passed."

The full [table of contents](#) of *Glänta* 3/2008

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