



Eurozine Review

A kind of Tory communist

RiLi reads Hobsbawm and talks to Fraser; *Le Monde diplomatique* (Oslo) calls communists and liberals brothers in faith; *Arena* appeals for a more courageous Islam debate; *Reset* wants a rejuvenation of the Italian opposition; *Lettera internazionale* locates American frontier mentality today; *Sens Public* is still optimistic about Obama; *Mittelweg 36* seeks the Other of the creative city; *Kritika & Kontext* psychologizes evil; *Akadeemia* archives Estonian identity; and *Magyar Lettre* reads Romanian fiction freed from Cold War cartography.

Revue Internationale des Livres et des Idées 3–4/2009



Interviewed in *RiLi*, Nancy Fraser explains how the shift from redistribution to recognition undertaken by political movements during the 1990s forms part of the "post-socialist condition". The fall of the Soviet Union, she suggests, not only brought the end of communism, but also sucked the energy out of most movements with social-egalitarian aspirations. Currents of thought that had endured since the nineteenth century came to an end. A demoralized and disoriented Left lost its nerve and began to accommodate capitalism.

At least, that is how it looks from a national perspective, notes Fraser. In an era of globalization, the change could also be seen as one of "frame". Campaigners for redistribution were no longer constrained by the borders of the nation-state, and concentrated their efforts increasingly on inequalities between, rather than within, nations. Transnational activism is where Fraser now hopes challenges to the "post-socialist" common sense will emerge.

The tension in Hobsbawm: Eric Hobsbawm is among the best placed to put this change in context. Enzo Traverso reviews his book *The Age of Extremes*, a French edition of which has recently been published by *Le Monde diplomatique*. This is no impartial history, writes Traverso — how could it be, from a man who has been a communist since his teenage years? Political affiliation brings its problems. Traverso is worried by Hobsbawm's justifications for Stalin's atrocities, and his lack of sympathy for the events of May 1968. The historian's communism, he writes, "was never libertarian. He has always been a man of order, a kind of Tory communist".

Traverso also sees difficulties in the tension between Hobsbawm's sympathies and the demands of a general history. One side of him is a social historian, giving voice to the marginalized; the other, a great synthesizer, whose broad analysis reduces the population to an anonymous mass. If high politics dominates, so does Europe. Though perhaps excusable in an age of colonial

and economic domination, this leads Hobsbawm to underplay events elsewhere, objects Traverso. The Chinese revolution, Indian independence, or the Korean War are all sidelined, despite their huge impact.

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Le Monde diplomatique (Oslo) 4/2009



When a prophecy fails, believers do not reject their false faith. Instead, they tend to produce a whole host of reasons why the prophecy turned out to be wrong, and will spend an inordinate amount of time trying to convince others, writes Alain Garrigou in *Le Monde diplomatique*. "This paradoxical, if not irrational, behaviour can be explained as 'cognitive dissonance', an intellectual and moral discomfort so great reality has to yield to blind faith."

But this is not particular to religion, he continues: in politics the similarity is striking. Raymond Aron, in his book *Opium des intellectuels*, calls communism a "political ideology which in spite of its scientific appearance, was based in religious faith, totally impregnated in hopes of salvation. Its followers displayed a stubborn rejection of the most worn truths, such as the dictatorial nature of Stalinism or the poverty in Soviet society."

The "liberal faith" repeated the pattern. In 1929, "what was the reaction of the liberals to the collapse of the free market?" asks Garrigou. "They had the same attitudes as reality-denying sect-members, illustrated by the famous declaration by American president Herbert Hoover who, [...] in the midst of depression, announced that 'wealth is just around the corner'." This explains the conservative alliance between Christian fundamentalists and free marketeers that dominated the presidency of George W. Bush and that also served as a model for the alliance between traditional Catholics and the liberals surrounding Nicolas Sarkozy.

Rethinking communism: Being a communist is hard, said [Slavoj Zizek](#) in his opening address at the conference "On the Idea of Communism" in London in March. The conference assembled a number of renowned philosophers in an effort to re-think the possibilities and meanings of communism. But, asks Alexander Carnera, were not these "seminars" once held in the streets, in the factories, hidden in cellars? At the end of the day, "I didn't think I was any the wiser about why one chose to have a conference on communism."

Also: Rune Vitus Harritshøj on the chaos of the Argentinean public transport system since privatization; and [Jean-Claude Paye](#) on [a legal system gone delusional](#) in its war on terrorism.

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Arena 2/2009



Ever heard of an "halal hippie"? Coined by the Danish politician Naser Khader, the term is frequently used in Scandinavia to denote a person so tolerant of religious or cultural minorities that he disregards or defends customs and actions of, for example, Muslims even though they stand in conflict with his own fundamental values. In the debate about Islam, Islamism and integration, "halal hippie" has been used to point to the fact that it has become difficult to criticize Islamist norms and ideals without being branded as "Islamophobe".

[Pernilla Ouis](#), who knows the Swedish Muslim community from the inside (see this [interview](#)), writes that the debate confuses ideas with people and that the fear of being regarded as Islamophobic has resulted in representatives of the majority culture being dangerously over-cautious:

"By not daring to question Islamist ideology and religious puritanism we are letting down Muslims as human beings. In Sweden, this is currently the most significant form of religious discrimination."

In the same focus on Islamism in Europe, [Devrim Mavi](#) notes that the blame for the simplistic and superficial debate falls on the political Left and Right alike: "You can't be a feminist in Sweden and then put that ideology on hold when you talk about Hamas."

The death of the Israeli Left? Gideon Levy, journalist at the Israeli daily *Haaretz*, analyses the recent elections:

"The death struggle of the Israeli Left began in the year 2000, but it took until 2009 for the funeral to take place. For nine long years, the mutilated body of the Israeli Left crawled the streets, humiliated and dying. It was in July 2000 that prime minister Ehud Barak, the highest official of the Israeli Labour Party, returned from Camp David and began to spread the lie that the trilateral summit had shown that there was no Palestinian leadership to negotiate with. A lie that was immediately accepted by the entire Israeli society."

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Reset 111 (2009)



Italy's Democratic Party (DP), whose first leader Walter Veltroni resigned in February after heavy defeats in local elections, has already forfeited its initial capital of hope and credibility, comments *Reset*. For Michele Salvati, the group of political grandees at the head of the party are largely to blame for its downfall. While he recommends a rejuvenation of the party leadership, Salvatore Biasco calls for a re-orientation of policy towards the interests of upcoming generations, and to the question of social cohesion and the reinforcement of worldwide governance.

"The new principle of performance" propagated by the Berlusconi government, writes Nadia Urbaniti, "has for many become the magic word, since it appears to be a way of freeing Italian society from its chronic problems of corruption and injustice." Yet Urbaniti warns that, "the issue of performance is above all an ethical issue about who evaluates this performance and who is evaluated, and about the system of evaluation, who invented it and who puts it into

practice."

The new realism: New Italian literature has rediscovered reality. Authors Ericco Buonanno and Nicola Lagioia discuss why. "At the end of the 1990s, the epics of exoticism and escapism were extinguished and the bubble of speculation about the end of history burst. We have woken up to the fact that we live in a country that is simultaneously populated by personalities such as Veltroni, Ratzinger, Berlusconi, Toto Riina and Vanna Marchi. [...] It's like living in a Bosch nightmare plus advertising jingles."

Also: It was above all individual persons that caused the collapse of the financial system, writes Claudio Schioppa, naming three of them: Phil Gramm, former Republican senator and senior economic advisor to John McCain; Alan Greenspan, former chairman of the Federal Reserve; and Christopher Cox, former chairman of the US Securities and Exchange Commission. "The Republicans have paid for the crisis by losing the election, but their 'plan' remains intact..."

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Lettera internazionale 98 (2009)



In *Lettera internazionale*, Zygmunt Baumann cautions against seeing in Obama's victory an end of the split between *demos* and *ethnos*. Obama did not win *because* of his origins, but *despite* them. At the same time, the American president is not merely a representative of "liquid modernity", but — in a world in which nation–states are constantly transforming into an ensemble of ethnic, linguistic and religious diasporas — virtually its embodiment.

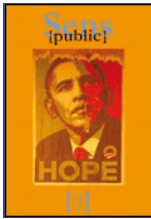
Dario Gentili, who at the beginning of his article recalls Obama's Berlin speech and his warnings about "new walls that divide us", draws on F.J. Turner (author of *The Significance of the Frontier in Western History*, 1893) to argue that the American definition of the border/frontier contains a sense of mobility and is geared towards conquest. "American energy," wrote Turner, "will continually strive towards an ever–widening area." Globalization seems to be the realization of this prophecy, while the newly erected walls — between state formations such as the EU and the south and east, or between rich districts and the rest of cities — are immobile borders to defend, rather than frontiers to expand.

A nation of well–informed idiots: Franco Ferrarotti looks back at his discussions with Marshall McLuhan, whose theses he tests against contemporary experiences of the mass media: "Television inaugurated an unprecedented season of warm, maternal emotions after the long Cartesian winter." Ferrarotti shares McLuhan's concept of the "integral human being", in whom reason, intelligence and emotion can combine — only that television did not fulfil the promises that it held and, for the time being, remains a technology without a purpose.

The written word: Jack Goody describes writing as the technology of the intellect; Paolo Fallai contemplates the insoluble connection between writing and memory; while according to Gino Roncaglias, the multimedial present has by no means weakened forms of written communication.

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Sens Public 9 (2009)



Obama's campaign positioned him as a candidate able to reconcile a divided nation, torn apart by the ideological conservatism of George Bush. Writing in an issue of the print edition of *Sens Public*, devoted to "the new America", [Neils Planel](#) discusses America's history of oscillation between divisive ideological crusades and movements of reconciliation. The New Deal brought the longest period of unity in the 1930s and 1940s, built around the acceptance that the state had a role in managing the economy. The civil rights movement destroyed this consensus; the end of segregation divided not just the country, but the Democratic Party itself.

Meanwhile on the economic front, another divisive force was growing: anti-state pro-market fanaticism, rooted in the individualist West Coast and justified by Chicago economists. This gained influence and power from the 1980s onwards, through Ronald Reagan's presidency and the libertarian actions of Alan Greenspan at the Federal Reserve. But the strands of Republican ideology — the religious values of "compassionate conservatism", the free-market idealism, and the military hawkishness — fell apart in the late Bush years. Now the Republicans need to rebuild their party, writes Planel, while Obama has the task of reuniting the Divided States.

Obama between Left and Right: [André Schiffrin](#) regrets that America's most brilliant left-leaning economists — Paul Krugman, James Galbraith and Joseph Stiglitz — are conspicuous by their absence from the Obama government. Military affairs are led by Secretary of Defence Robert Gates, a holdover from the Bush presidency, while there is no high-profile representative from the anti-war movement. All this is reminiscent of Bill Clinton's policy of "triangulation", positioning himself in opposition both to the Left and the Right.

Reviews: The second half of the issue reviews eight recent books on American politics, among them *Millennial Makeover*, Morley Winograd's and Michael D. Hais' look at the political impact of the first American Internet generation; Democrat strategist Joe Trippi's examination of how the Internet can foster political engagement; and *Newsweek* editor Fareed Zakaria's optimistic reworking of French historian Emmanuel Todd's predictions of the breakdown of the American order.

More about [Sens Public](#)

Mittelweg 36 2/2009



In *Mittelweg 36*, cultural sociologist Andreas Reckwitz critically revises Richard Florida's and Charles Landry's theories of the "creative city", challenging their neoliberal euphoria of "cultural planning" and the exploitation of the "cultural resources" of cities.

Reckwitz describes the development towards "creative cities" as "self-culturalization": "Cities — which means their dominant residents' milieus, their political authorities, their economic organizations and their medial orchestrators — increasingly perceive themselves in terms of 'culture', as a phenomenon of the 'cultural'."

Self-culturalization massively structures not only discourse and social practices, but also urban development and architecture. Contrary to the uniformity of the functional cities of modernity, creative cities strive for uniqueness and differentiation. But what is the Other of the creative city?

"Those for whom self-culturalization is beyond the possible: the urban wasteland, the shrinking cities, the industrial ruins and their residents, who in US jargon are 'white trash'; finally the invisible cities of the South, particularly in Africa and parts of Asia, which hardly ever make it on to the screens of the creative cities of Europe, America or East Asia."

Saving the books: In 1949 [Hannah Arendt](#) returned to Germany after twelve years of exile as Executive Secretary of "Jewish Cultural Reconstruction"; her aim was to convey dispossessed Jewish cultural property to Israel and the US. To work for this organization, writes Natan Sznajder, was an opportunity to put her theories into action; "to explore the space where Jews could publicly and culturally act as Jews in a larger political environment."

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Kritika & Kontext 37 (2009)



Work by psychologists on conformism and morality has been more interesting than that of philosophers and political scientists, writes [Egon Gal](#) in the introduction to an issue of *Kritika & Kontext* on the "banality of evil". One early proponent of the psychological approach was Solomon Asch, whose experiments in the 1950s on the effects of group pressure on individuals were a response to the question whether the Holocaust could have taken place in America. The results — described in a text republished in *Kritika & Kontext* — were disappointing.

In Philip Zimbardo's 1971 Stanford Prison experiment, college students were assigned to be "prisoners" or "guards" in a mock prison. The experiment had to be broken off after the study ran out of control. In an article first published in the *Greater Good*, Zimbardo and co-author Zeno Franco write that the experiments demonstrated that some people are on the right side of the line between good and evil "only because situations have never coerced or seduced them to cross over".

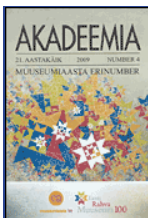
Inbuilt morality? Marc Hauser, in conversation with Martin Kanovsky, takes a different approach. Inspired by Noam Chomsky's theory of a universal grammar, he has tested whether human beings have an inbuilt sense of moral justice. He constructed several scenarios, each containing a moral dilemma, and published them on the Internet in 2003. They gathered 60 000 replies from respondents in 120 countries, ranging in age from 7 to 70. The conclusion: like language, morality is a product of innate mental structures.

Beyond nature and nurture: Egon Gal sidesteps the dichotomy, arguing instead for agency:

"According to Arendt, the main cause of evil is thoughtless conformism. However the moral instinct, like every other instinct, is essentially a thoughtless reaction to a situation. It is difficult to say, but it seems more probable to me that people do not commit evil actions because they do not think, but more because they think that what they are doing is right. They are convinced of this by the members of the group they want to belong to, and by those they regard as authorities — the various Tisos and Slotas."

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Akadeemia 4/2009



Akadeemia reflects on the history of the Estonian National Museum in Tartu, which is marking its centenary with the construction of a new main building.

Piret Ounapuu describes an early endeavour of the museum to save the disappearing national heritage. Researchers travelled the country acquiring artefacts and writing reports and diaries. Most were students without specialized education, for whom the trips were both an encounter with the past and an adventure. Sometimes, their enthusiasm was dampened by the gap between themselves and the rural population. Nevertheless, they watched from the outside, analysing and describing people's appearance, character, opinions and lifestyle. Apart from the acquisition of 20 000 objects and a wealth of ethnographic reports, the project had another positive outcome: it brought the museum nearer to the people, the collectors' endless explanations having had an effect.

A melodious folk: Janika Oras writes about sound recordings conducted for the Folklore Archives at the Literary Museum. The author searches for the official and not-so-official motivations for the collecting of recordings, which began in 1949. During the Stalinist period, folklorists were obliged to record and even create pro-Soviet folksongs, while a preference for older folklore was seen as sign of resistance. In the 1960s, however, the latter became an essential component of the alternative "cultural ecology" movement, whose aim was to strengthen Estonian and Finno-Ugric identity.

Also: Mariann Raisma on "The idea of the museum" in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Estonia. Museums, she writes, are institutions insofar as they reflect paradigm changes in authorities' handling of cultural heritage.

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Magyar Lettre Internationale 72 (2009)



Magyar Lettre devotes a new issue to writing from Romania, guest of honour at this year's Budapest Book Festival (23–26 April). The selection includes Christian Moraru's essay on novelist and poet Mircea Cartarescu, author of the *Orbitor* trilogy and a leading exponent of literary postmodernism during the 1980s. Moraru discusses how Cartarescu and his colleagues rejected the aesthetics of national "rootedness" prescribed in the party–line cultural weekly *Luceafarul* and, after '89, still advocated by the "motley collection of old–time apparatchiks, neo–communists, nationalists, and self proclaimed cultural conservatives clustered around a number of influential magazines, foundations and publishing houses."

Adding to the national obstacles facing a cosmopolitan literature such as Cartarescu's, writes Moraru, are western European expectations about eastern European writing. Lumped together in "a sort of Cold War cartography", it is assumed to be "determined completely by past and present history" and to "bear witness to communist–era pain". Cartarescu, writes Moraru, "implies that the fetish of this other [...] is no less damaging than the fetish of the national, self–reinforced domestically since the mid–1960s."

A Romanian classic: In an article first published in *Dilema veche*, the magazine's founder Andrei Plesu remembers the great Romanian playwright, humorist and journalist Ion Luca Caragiale (1852–1912). Considered the genius of Romanian comedy, a sort of local Molière, Caragiale was also deeply concerned with the malfunctioning of the early Romanian democracy; many of his observations still ring true today, writes Plesu.

Also: A short story by Krisztina Tóth, in which Greek immigrants to Hungary in the early 1950s fall foul of a cultural and culinary misunderstanding; an excerpt from László Bitó's novel *Káin intelme* (Cain's admonition), a reinterpretation of the biblical story about the dangers of uncritical belief; and György Dalos' article "What does it mean, disclosure?", first published in *Freitag* and Eurozine, about the Kundera allegations.

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