



Eurozine Review

Advanced profligate capitalism

Merkur prefers parsimonious over profligate capitalism; *Dilema veche* stares into a widening gap; *Polar* articulates a materialist ecology; *Kulturos barai* talks to Biennale artist Zilvinas Kempinas; *NZ* warns of state memory-shapers; *Osteuropa* historicizes the conflict between state and individual; *Arche* reconstructs the short life of the Belarusian Democratic Republic; and *Host* says it's all in the handwriting.

Merkur 5/2009



"After the crisis, back to a Protestant ethic?" asks [Ralf Dahrendorf](#) (who turns eighty this month) in the current issue of *Merkur*. Rather not, is his answer, but he still urges us to change our mentalities in order to be able to cope with the current economic crisis.

The old Protestant virtues of labour and thrift, diligence and prudence, are, as Max Weber analysed, essential for a capitalist economy. Sometime in the late twentieth century, this ethos eroded and hedonism grew to be the predominant stimulus for production:

"Developed capitalism demands elements of the Protestant ethic at the workplace, and the exact opposite outside work, in the world of consumption. The economic system destroys the preconditions of its own mentality. [In the late eighties] capitalism, which had already mutated from parsimony to consumption, started its fatal move towards profligacy."

The current crisis is likely to leave most developed countries considerably poorer. This, Dahrendorf writes, could be the starting point for a change of mentality, namely a new relation to time:

"Characteristic of advanced profligate capitalism was the exceptional breathlessness of all actions. In the extreme case of derivatives traders, this meant that they had already passed on the virtual money before they could ask which real value it could possibly contain."

Dahrendorf suggests going back to medium-term thinking, deliberate planning, salaries based on long-term accomplishments and stakeholder instead of shareholder accountability -- to a "responsible capitalism".

Also to look out for: The Europe we know is primarily the invention of the Christian Democratic Parties post 1945. "Is this success story now at an end?"

asks Jan–Werner Müller. And Scottish writer Andrew O'Hagan laments the disappearance of the English working class.

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Dilema veche 264–267 (2009)



At the beginning of the 1990s, Romania was far from being an EU or Nato member state and its economy was undergoing a process of deindustrialization. Discussions concentrated on an "us" and "them" scenario, writes [Mircea Vasilescu](#) in *Dilema veche* in issue 267: Romanians were victims of a failing socialist regime though still proud of its industrial legacy, while the rich West aggravated the situation by refusing to invest in the country.

Now, almost twenty years later, Romania has reached its goal of becoming a full EU member state. Yet the "us" and "them" debate remains. Ordinary Romanians are supposedly kept in the dark about the realities of the economic crisis while politicians see the EU as a foreign body from which they can expect endless benefits.

Crisis? What crisis? Ionut Iamandi describes (in issue 266) how the financial crisis is viewed with a sort of fascination. "The media uses it as a news enhancer, politicians refer to it in search of justification, and businesses set up new departments to deal with it", writes Iamandi. Eastern European countries are dissociating themselves from western European policies and looking to China, former human rights pariah, as the saviour of the entire financial sector. Strangely, Christie's and Sotheby's have reported record profits. The crisis, Iamandi concludes, seems to simultaneously produce a surplus of jobseekers and a demand for expensive art.

Bridging the gap: Christian Ghinea has interviewed (in issue 265) Roxana Florescu, director of Pact, an NGO that encourages local communities to take greater interest in their immediate surroundings. Paradoxically, her work has led to a court case against a group of villagers who rebuilt a bridge destroyed by floods in 2008. They now face prosecution for building without the state's authorization, this after months of petitions to the state in order to have the bridge rebuilt.

Also: In issue 264, Andrei Plesu on the meaning in pursuing the meaning of life.

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Polar 6 (2009)



The social consequences of climate change — and of policies for climate control — are completely unknown, write the editors of *Polar* in the introduction to an issue on "Ecology and freedom". With climate change, it is not only nature that is at stake, but also freedom and individualism, justice and equality of opportunity. Climate policy, they argue, must continue the struggle for freedom and justice began during

modernity, instead of turning against it.

Climate change will cause a widening of existing justice discrepancies, not only between North and South, but also between generations, write [Claus Leggewie](#) and [Harald Welzer](#). The cultural sciences must develop prognoses about the perception of these consequences, as well as the preconditions for adapting to them. A similarly "materialist" argument is employed by [Jürgen Trittin](#), deputy chairman of the German Green Party. Answering critics from the Left who translate their scepticism of the concept of nature (reactionary) into a rejection of green politics, Trittin writes:

"A quick glance at the relevant statistics and reports on climate change, food production, resource shortages, water conflicts, air poisoning, mobility and energy make the necessity of the ecological reform of the global economy more than obvious. The concept of 'ecology' and 'sustainability' can manage without conservative fictions of nature. Anyone who rejects such ideological aspects need not renounce insights into the urgency of ecological politics."

The immediacy of the problem forces compromises, continues Trittin. "We must develop regionally and internationally negotiated economic models that combine people's right to exploit resources with conservation, international trade with the fight against poverty, in such a way that a sustainable and practicable world system develops."

Also: To treat non-human beings morally leads to absurdities, write [Émilie Hache](#) and [Bruno Latour](#). To be concerned with the environment is fine, but please: "in a strictly scientific and empirical fashion".

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Kultūros barai 4/2009



Zilvinas Kempinas counts among the up-and-coming young artists on the international scene and will represent Lithuania at this year's Venice Biennial, which opens 7 June. In a timely focus, *Kultūros barai* features an introduction to Kempinas' work by the director of the Viennese Kunsthalle Gerald Matt, along with a conversation between Matt and Kempinas.

Matt describes Kempinas' recent exhibition in Vienna as "a showcase of sensory abstraction that presents the mystery of fleeting phenomena and invisible forces, locating the artwork on the verge of its own disappearance: the rotation of wind, shadow as ornament, a play of reflected light. Spaces are transformed by lengths of shiny black magnetic tape that move in currents of air. [...] Fluttering black-and-white sets the museum's white cube in motion."

Kempinas: "Video tape has perfect sculptural qualities; it looks ephemeral but is actually a durable material, at once super light, micro thin and highly flexible. It is pure black, yet has a shiny surface that reflects light and becomes even more animated when set in motion. Videotape is inexpensive, replaceable and easily recognizable by everybody as a familiar commodity, yet at the same time it has the ability to be perceived as an abstract line. It has connections with the idea of time and memory, and I like the fact that it is a medium that is being pushed aside by new technologies."

European histories: In part of a series of articles on the topic of this year's [Eurozine conference](#) (which takes place between 8 and 11 May in Vilnius), [Tatiana Zhurzhenko interprets](#) the controversy around the statue of the Soviet soldier in Tallinn in 2007 as a striking demonstration that Russia remains both an external and an internal factor in the national narratives of the post-Soviet space. Before we talk about European solidarity, writes Zhurzhenko, we need to trace the emergent fault lines running through eastern European memory.

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Neprikosnovennij Zapas 64 (2009)



"Tell me what you remember and I'll give you the diagnosis you need", Alexander Kustarev declares in the new issue of *Neprikosnovennij Zapas*. Memory can serve to reassure and compensate for an unsatisfactory present, but in a public context its role is to reinforce identity. Societies appoint "memory formers" (as much as "opinion formers") to invoke a past that will define and vindicate the present. "Cultural politics is the master and manipulator of collective memory", Kustarev writes. "Public memory is largely imposed from outside."

In 2008 one of Russia's biggest TV channels, *Rossiya*, held a poll to select the three greatest Russians in history. The winners were the thirteenth-century prince Alexander Nevsky, the reformist prime-minister Pyotr Stolypin (assassinated in 1911), and the Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin. Yet in the public memory, Kustarev says, "Stalin, Alexander Nevsky and Stolypin are the same figure under different names" — a mythologized symbol of strong leadership that reflects the power and potential of Russia itself. The question is who selected them — the people who remember, or the state's current "memory formers"?

NKVD files: Svetlana Bykova looks at the testimony of surviving secret police files from the Stalinist era. Many relate to people who dared to look back at the years before Stalin came to power, and were arrested for keeping mementos, documents or pictures of the revolution. The 1990s opened up the possibility of at least partial study of OGPU and NKVD files, but today, Bykova writes, "these are once again effectively unattainable". Consequently no satisfactory methodology for the study of these unique historical resources has yet been established.

Also: Evgeny Dobrenko on notions of pleasure and abundance under Stalin and a cookery book that reads like a fantasy for Soviet housewives, listing unobtainable ingredients and impossible recipes, and eulogizing the health-giving qualities of sausage, pork, wine and cheese.

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Osteuropa 4/2009



The relationship between state and individual is among the most discussed subjects in Russian cultural and intellectual history, writes Nikolai Plotinov in *Osteuropa*. While the dominance of the state and the neglect of the individual in modern Russian history has been traced back to a Byzantine tradition or explained by the absence of an Enlightenment and hence the foundations of a modern state, more recent studies have argued that Russia's political development in the nineteenth century followed the European model, albeit with a time lag.

However, writes Plotinov, "it is more the manner of the reception itself that has had the decisive impact on the results of modernization — and the discourse about the 'state' and the 'individual'." While conservative Russian political philosophy of the nineteenth century, despite theories of the social contract or ideas of the common weal, saw the population as a *tabula rasa*, the *intelligenzija* has historically conceived of the individual as an exception, as an artistic genius or an outsider — and never as a legal subject.

Russia on the brink? State monopoly capitalism, writes Jens Siegert, comes closest to describing the Russian system of power, yet still does not describe it correctly. "It is not the state that has created a monopoly, but a small coterie that has appropriated the state and uses it as an instrument of their monopolizing efforts. The monopoly has two, mutually supportive goals: the maximization of profit and the maintenance of power."

However the global economic crisis has hit Russia hard. Putin and Medvedev are engaged in a hectic form of crisis management, which cannot disguise the fact that the regime is shying away from structural reforms. While the economic crisis alone will hardly lead to a collapse of power, writes Siegert, "the crisis could trigger off new power struggles among the elite, or rekindle old ones that were pushed into the background by the presidential elections and the war with Georgia".

Power and music: In the West, little attention was given to the current of politically independent art and music that developed after Stalin's death, writes Levon Hakobian. This was a musical avant-garde that was as alien to socialist realism as it was to New Music in the West.

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Arche 3/2009



Arche focuses on the political, cultural and military heritage of the Belarusian Democratic Republic (BNR, or Bielaruskaja Narodnaja Respublika). The issue, with over 600 pages, is likely to spark a debate in Belarus, say its editors.

Uladzimir Sakalouski describes the foundation of the BNR on 25 March 1918, after the invasion of Belarus by German forces following the collapse of the Treaty of Brest–Litovsk in February 1918. When Germany lost the war, the self-proclaimed government of the BNR was removed from Minsk and became an émigré entity. Based on unique documents from German,

Lithuanian, Belarusian and Polish archives, Sakalouski reconstructs German policy in occupied Belarus in 1918, the activity of BNR government in German exile, and the unsuccessful efforts of the young Belarusian state to be recognized by the great European powers between 1918 and 1925.

Immediately after the retreat of the German army, the BNR command moved to Hrodna, the centre of Belarusian nationalism in what was then the Republic of Lithuania. Andrej Carniakievic looks at various ways in which the young Belarusian movement represented itself in Hrodno until Polish occupation in 1920, in particular its education and publishing activity in the Belarusian language, political manoeuvring and the formation of Belarusian military units.

Also: Ales Paskievic explains the motivations that caused the prime minister of the BNR to emigrate to Soviet Minsk in 1927, where he was arrested and sent to Saratov and murdered in 1938; Claire Le Foll assesses the impact of the nationalities policy of the BNR on the crystallization of a Belarusian–Jewish identity; and Algimantas Kasparavicius reveals the "Secret Agreement between the Lithuanian Republic and the Belarusian Democratic Republic in 1923".

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Host 4/2009



"The handwriting defines the man," says Michal Cernik in *Host*. Cernik, who has analysed script for more than forty years, describes graphology as a field that combines empathy, intuition, psychological knowledge, and a hint of literary playfulness. "A graphologist reads a writer's story from the nervous nib the pen or pencil imprints into the script." Cernik — who is all for script analysis for job applicants — has scrutinized the scripts of three well-known writers: the Czech poets Pavel Petr and Jiri Veselsky, and French novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet.

The oldest Czech writer: Milos Kocka (aged 99) talks in interview about the Italian painter Caravaggio and Vincenz Priessnitz, the founder of alternative hydrotherapy practices — the two characters to which Kocka devoted his literary activities. Kocka's daughter's death from leukaemia, and the love she had for art, brought him to writing; his book *Blood on the Palette: Caravaggio — Novel of a Painter* represents twelve years of work. Later, Kocka underwent treatment for digestive and neural disorders at Grafenberg Spa (now Lazne Jesenik), where he became familiar with the hydrotherapy procedures that eventually cured him. Curious, Kocka wrote both the novel *Springs of Vital Water* (1987) and the biography *Vincenz Priessnitz* (2006) about the treatment's founder.

The post-9/11 novel: Depicting a new social situation requires disengagement from purely literary themes, as well as from the postmodernist juggle with reality and fiction, writes Michal Sykora in an essay on the novel post-9/11. Instead, what is required is a shift towards engagement and a willingness to address current problems. Books such as *The Plot Against America and Indignation* (Philip Roth), *Saturday* (Ian McEwan) and *Shalimar the Clown* (Salman Rushdie) are innovations that are setting the norm for the post-9/11 novel.

Also: From the Eurozine series [Literary Perspectives](#), Timofiy Havryliv writes that autobiographical fiction has reinvigorated the Ukrainian language, impoverished during the Soviet period, in brilliant ways. But is it equal to the task of representing recent historical experience?

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