



Abstracts for Esprit 6/2009

Esprit

Editorial: Crisis? What crisis? Or: How do you move out when you're not really in yet?

Feature articles

Françoise Benhamou

French universities: From soul-searching to bleeding wound.

Through deliberate political provocation and an unwelcome surfeit of reforms, it has taken only a matter of weeks for the French government to crystallize a lingering restlessness in the country's faculties. The strikes of the past few months in French universities have certainly highlighted the structural problems that are specific to them, while shedding light on strategies for the future; still, those who led the protests are found wanting when it comes to finding a positive outcome.

Olivier Mongin

Ten architects in pursuit of a metropolis: Early lessons from the "Greater Paris" inquiry.

The mid-March unveiling of architects' projects for Greater Paris only confirmed our forebodings, i.e., the vital issue of power distribution in the area is to be left out. Only compounding this hindrance is an inability, from the very start, to specify the contours of the "metropolitan space" to which historical Paris is supposed to open up. How can an altogether fresh perspective on the Paris area develop, if the ongoing momentum already at work "on the ground" does not even get minimal attention?

Jean-Louis Violeau

What types of profile for Paris? A visit to the "Greater Paris" exhibition.

What have the shortlist of ten architect workshops got to show for itself as far as "Greater Paris" is concerned? Beyond the sweeping, grand statements the media have been all too keen to publicize, what is the architects' diagnosis regarding Paris and its area, including the feudal structures at work behind spatial patterns? Beyond the variety of approaches and a keenness to leave their own mark on the skyline, how do these projects speak to us in terms of mobility, landscape and collective life?

Vincent Amiel

From an instant to pose. Raymond Depardon's documentary movies.

Since the release of his major documentary series on French institutions (the police, hospitals, the judiciary, etc.) and up to his recent exploration of the farmers' world, Raymond Depardon has gradually altered his style while continuing to claim that his filming remains in direct contact with reality.

Whereas he used to step back in order better to capture the "instant" of truth, nowadays his is a more deliberately structured stance where his counterparts are invited to "strike a pose", as it were. In this process, he does not falsify their image; instead he calls for closer scrutiny of the representative powers of documentary film.

The miscalculations and unreason of economic man

Esprit

Introduction.

Jacques Donzelot

Credit as a moral relationship. On Laurence Fontaine's *l'Économie morale (Moral Economics)*.

This book, a history of credit in pre-industrial Europe, puts current debates over mercantile exchange in a fresh perspective. Far from a paean to any idealised "gift economics", the book shows how gift and credit are intertwined from the very start of mercantile Europe. As a result, the full complexity of the relationships involved in the credit system are exposed.

Michaël Foessel

What motivates us? On Jon Elster's *Désintéressement (disinterestedness)*.

Can anyone act in a purely disinterested way? This is a question for moralists and writers as much as economists. How should we understand any alleged construction of our every deed based on the self-interest motivation that dominates economics? And what counter-arguments are available?

Marc-Olivier Padis

The miscalculations of economic man. On Maya Beauvallet's *Stratégies absurdes (Absurd strategies)*.

This management-focused book exposes all the dead ends encountered by those corporate performance enhancement techniques based on incentives and motivation. The author's underlying question is none other than; why do we work? What kind of interest do we take in working? Does monetary compensation really manage to determine behaviour, or instead does it act as an incentive to overlook a wider spectrum of human motivations?

Olivier Mongin

Measuring? Foreseeing? Accounting? What value scale do figures speak to? On a book by Valérie Charolles.

The author does more than keep a diary of the 2008 pre-crisis period; she works all the way back to the very basics of economics. What type of statistical figure can we rely on? What exactly do they enable us to measure? How can they help us anticipate on the future? These questions have to do with practical economics (what is a balance sheet?) as much as the way we deal with figures on a day-to-day basis.

Dominique Méda

What type of progress are we to measure?

How did we ever come to measure our collective well-being against gross domestic product? We should look back on the notions of progress and individual success that presided over the birth of economics as a science. We should also recognize the challenges inherent to the development of alternative wealth indicators. Criticism of the shortcomings of current yardsticks is widely shared and alternative suggestions are emerging for improved indicators for growth and, more importantly, well-being.

Is Europe an adequate scale for crisis response?

Nicole Gnesotto

Is Europe a freak or a necessity?

Against an historical background calling for more political coordination and economic regulation, Europe is in a good position to make herself heard. And yet it is struggling to stand forth at a crucial moment, in the process losing any credit we thought she might have. How are we to understand this fresh European paradox?

Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa

Has Europe any relevance in the current crisis?

For all the talk over minimal coordination between national economic stimulus schemes, hardly anyone has stopped to wonder where European countries would stand if EU economic arrangements had not been there, and the euro first and foremost. The current global crisis comes as a test for the relevance of the EU and is a good opportunity to assess its weaknesses as well as its benefits.

Olivier Ferrand

Europe against Europe.

What is currently standing in the way of European integration is little else than... Europe herself! Though the methods that presided over the foundation period have been well tested, they have also favoured a de-politicisation of the European project which today's citizenry are finding unacceptable. This is why a political dimension must be restored to EU decision-making, which calls for enhanced powers for the European Parliament.

Bruno Le Maire

A defence of European political voluntarism.

An interview with The French State Minister for European affairs argues that EU would feel all the stronger again if France took a strong stance for a return to political voluntarism. He explains why he is confident in the driving role of a Franco-German alliance, providing examples of priority action for the EU.

Published 2009-06-08

Original in French

© Esprit