



Eurozine Review

Gentle, seductive oppression

Multitudes allies cautiously with Google; *Gegenworte* goes online with science; *Lettera internazionale* criticizes a media that does not mediate; *Reset* wonders what the Pope is up to; *Osteuropa* says Orthodoxy isn't what the West thinks it is; *Merkur* doubts that morality goes without saying; *L'Homme* discusses patronyms and matronyms; *Varlik* summarizes Turkish literary trends; *FA-art* revisits Poland's postmodernism debate; and *Mute* sums up the first 5000 years of debt.

Multitudes 36 (2009)



Primary doorway to the Internet, so ubiquitous as to become almost invisible, Google's power is immense. The search engine, write [Ariel Kyrou](#) and [Yann Moulier Boutang](#), represents "gentle, seductive oppression, which we accept for our own convenience". It is worrying in its corporate ideology, a mix of arrogance and messianic faith, and frightening in its ceaseless expansion. Yet it can also be an ally — a dangerous ally, certainly, but tactically very interesting. For forces ignored by the mainstream media (such as the student movement in Europe), it can provide the chance for a less filtered access to the public.

Pierre Lévy, meanwhile, has much bigger ambitions. He is attempting to build a "universal system for encoding ideas and concepts, independent of natural languages". This, he hopes, will enable investigation of the relations between concepts, at various levels of complexity, and thus create a "web of concepts" above the current web of data. In the same way that standardized digital representations now enable mixing, sampling, synthesizing and manipulation of images and sound, Lévy's system would open up new worlds of artistic production in the realm of ideas — a suitable format just needs to be found.

More on Google: Michael Vicente asks whether Google's politics are libertarian or neo-liberal, and Bernard Girard takes it as a model of post-industrial organization, engaged in "immaterial production" on an unprecedented scale.

Eco-feminism: Discussions about environmentalism lead quickly to philosophical issues, whether of social justice, animal rights or, perhaps less obviously, feminism. Socially, writes Virginie Maris, women have often taken the lead in environmental protests, particularly in the global South. Morally, the exploitation of women by men parallels the exploitation of the environment by humans. Epistemologically, feminists and environmentalists challenge the claims to technocratic neutrality made by the male-dominated scientific establishment.

Also: Earlier this year, a general strike in the Caribbean archipelago of Guadeloupe brought France face-to-face with the impoverished conditions in its overseas territories. A broad coalition of unions were angry about unemployment, low pay and the high cost of living. But, finds [Anne Querrien](#), their demands are rooted in a deeper vision of an alternative society.

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Gegenworte 21 (2009)



As Internet technology brings forth new media with and in which academics publish their research, the signs of an upheaval are mounting. Yet the debate about academic publishing in the Internet age is in danger of ending up in "the *cul-de-sac* of false arguments", write the editors of *Gegenworte*. An issue of the journal on science and the www aims to dispel some preconceptions and find a way forward.

The Internet is having an effect on how texts are written: the "recycling" principle leads to repetition but also to an increase in "measurable output", writes Niels C. Taubert. Reception becomes fragmented as the search function on web browsers comes to dictate how a text is read; moreover, the introduction of online "editorial management systems" has resulted in a loss of confidence between the assessors and publishers of academic journals.

A two-tier system has opened up between so-called "golden road" and "green road" online publications, reports Taubert. The former denotes first-time publishers of original articles that still employ the same quality controls as classical, printed journals. Here, authors are increasingly expected to contribute towards publication costs. Green road publications publish articles after their original appearance in restricted-access journals. Although they increase authors' visibility, they lack prestige in the humanities and social sciences.

Academic blogs: Annette Leßmöllman thinks blogs represent a new possibility for academic writing. Regarded by the traditional sector as lacking editorial discipline, blogs are in fact "answerable to the community they cater to". "The role of the editor may indeed have disappeared, however the reader takes the place of the critic. This in turn alters the writing process of the blogger. The producers and the recipients of the blogosphere negotiate their quality standards among themselves."

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Lettera internazionale 100 (2009)



In the one hundredth (!) issue of *Lettera Internazionale*, sociologist Franco Ferrarotti criticizes "the media that does not mediate" for "providing the facts but not the anti-facts". Instead of facilitating "communication between history and modernity, between the authorities and the masses", the media "empties out content", encouraging us to remain docile spectators. As a result, we tend to be "frenetic and passive at the same time, loquacious with nothing to say". Theatre, on the other hand, is

more authentic; it is characterized by physical presence, the lack of which, in our time, is "seriously threatening", writes Ferrarotti.

Dario Fo on Berlusconi: Berlusconi's success is a good example of what can happen "when a leader steals the show", says [Dario Fo](#) in interview with Biancamaria Bruno. The rise of "the salesman in the double-breasted suit" serves as an example to participants of reality TV shows keen to "prepare themselves for their moment in the limelight". Berlusconi "is already a personality, he is already able to say: 'Yes, it's true, I'm smart, I'm shrewd [...] I can afford to buy whoever I want'. And they applaud down there."

According to Fo, Italy must wake from its slumber and revive long-forgotten values: "Berlusconi has done his job well, he has prepared the soil". The humanism created by the Italians "is no longer the spirit of participation; solidarity no longer exists either." Fo's own audience is never totally in his camp — his plays are watched by people who feel less strongly about the loss of liberal ideals, he says. "But the fact that they come is a good sign."

Theatre and engagement: Classicist and historian Luciano Canfora has great faith in theatre. It has always been more severely censored than any other art, he notes, quoting Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* before turning to Athens under Pericles. The Greeks recognized theatre as a powerful weapon, exercising censorship in the name of democracy. The conclusion: for anyone who shuns direct political activity, the best way to get involved is to become a playwright.

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Reset 113 (2009)



What is the Pope up to? In *Reset*, political scientist Francesco Margiotta Broglio and ecclesiastical historian Alberto Melloni discuss the question being widely asked since Benedict's strange comments about the supremacy of Christianity and his disreputable attitude in the Williamson case. These reveal not so much a leadership style or an ideological stance as an internal weakness, which takes a specific form: to adopt a position only to repeatedly explain that one has been misunderstood, until finally to emphasize something that, if anything, is self-evident: the Holy See remains true to the Second Vatican Council.

However, the real failure of the current pope is his denial of a changed and globalized world: while the majority of Catholics live outside Europe, the Pope holds on to a position as conservative as it is Rome- and Eurocentric.

Television and sexism: According to philosopher Marina Calloni, the alliance between women and television in Italy has come to an end. The best example are the so-called *veline*: women whose sole job is to serve as optical decoration in television programmes. These figures, who once had a social-critical function and were intended to caricature stereotypes about the female body, have today become the incarnation of the very same prejudices.

Although women are everywhere on Italian television, their presence stands in crass disproportion to what they represent. The situation is paradoxical: the increasing freedoms from which women benefit are diminished by the spread of sexist clichés. The conclusion can be drawn that women still cannot represent their own reality and that the connection between freedom and equality is still to be realized.

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Osteuropa 6/2009



In an issue of *Osteuropa* on religion and politics in eastern Europe, [Thomas Bremer](#) and [Jennifer Wasmuth](#) make a surprising observation about the Orthodox Church: that it is not as politically influential as the western media think. Images of political leaders at religious ceremonies prompt warnings about the "clericalization" of eastern European societies; yet is this just a Protestant reaction "to cult-like displays, a latent or manifest scepticism towards the primarily visual communication of religious content"?

After Orthodoxy, Catholicism is the second biggest religion in eastern central and eastern Europe and especially strong in Poland, Slovakia and Lithuania. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church fared differently from country to country during communism, write Bremer and Wasmuth. Today, too, the relationship between Church and State varies: the Catholic Church in Poland signed a concordat with the State in 1998, which many thought violated the secular constitution as well as the principle of religious equality. In Lithuania and Slovakia, contracts signed in 2000 gave the Catholic Church a legally secure position, though no such law exists in the Czech Republic, meaning questions about the restitution of Church property remain open.

Degrees of anti-westernism: Orthodoxy has its own problems with the West — though to varying degrees, writes Vasilios N. Makrides. Most official churches support the European Union, though resent that the construction of Europe is based on the western principle of secularization. A second strand of Orthodoxy rejects European integration altogether, on the grounds that eastern and western Europe represent two fundamentally different civilizations. A third and marginal strand sees the West as a serious danger to the Orthodox faith, conversion to which is supposedly the only way the West can escape its spiritual crisis.

Also: Despite offering civil society an organizational structure during communism, the Catholic Church in Poland was always careful not to be associated with the political opposition, writes Dieter Bingen.

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Merkur 7/2009



"Morality goes without saying", wrote German philosopher Friedrich Theodor Vischer in his novel *Auch Einer* in 1879 — a concept heavily criticized by Hannah Arendt, who after the Holocaust and the Gulag argued that "nobody in full possession of all their senses can continue to claim that morality goes without saying".

Vischer was not all that naive, [writes](#) legal philosopher and best-selling author [Bernhard Schlink](#) (*The Reader*) in *Merkur*: he was deeply influenced by Charles Darwin who argued: "Man has reasoning power in excess instead of

definite instincts." But how far does human morality go? Does it reach beyond its own tribe? We all know how to act morally, a capability that has evolved, as Schlink — with Darwin and Vischer — claims. Yet the "ultimate problem of morality is not how we act morally, but to whom our moral behaviour is answerable."

Schlink reaches pessimistic conclusions when it comes to morality and solidarity in a "world society":

"Today, the universal validity of morality seems to us to go without saying, yet the limit to which we are prepared to share and help, and beyond which we allow suffering and death, is as fixed as in Vischer's times. That shouldn't surprise us, Vischer teaches us in his novel. The evolutionary development of morality was due to the presence of a group clearly defined by coordinates and collaborations and emotionally tangible via gratifications and penalties. World society is not such a group. To struggle for the universal validity of morality in that society continues to be an absurd effort, which we nevertheless have to shoulder like Sisyphus the stone."

Also: Harry Nutt shows that nonchalance is the best and coolest non-virtue there is. And Ann Marie Rasmussen presents the newest findings on women's life in the Middle Ages: it wasn't all that bad!

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L'Homme 1/2009



"A name is one of the most expressive ways to show religious, social, ethnic, national or other kinds of affiliations — or if necessary to obscure them", write the editors of *L'Homme* in the current issue on "names".

Critique of legal norms, especially in the context of the second women's movement, as well as the transformation of family constellations since the 1960s, has led to various changes in naming legislation. The anthropologist Valérie Feschet analyses recent legal reforms in European countries and argues that they have led to a freer approach to naming — which ultimately leads to new identity concepts:

"With the recent reforms, gradually, all over Europe, the naming process allows people to move from the bottom to the top, and then back again. Onomastic identity is discussed and shaped according to the wishes of those who create it, but also according to the will of those who bear it. This identity is no longer assigned, as suggested by the words 'patronymic' and 'surname'. Children can now change their surnames and thus the identity previously assigned to them. Thus, the name to a larger degree than before represents the individual and his or her entire social and affective dimension. The trend is clearly towards 'identification' instead of 'classification' by name."

Programa Bolsa Família: The Brazilian poverty reduction programme *Fome Zero* puts a strong focus on women, granting family allowances to women rather than men, thus recognizing women as economic head of the family. Brazilian sociologist Walquiria Domingues Leao Rego shows how this programme is likely to produce wider political emancipatory effects for women in Brazil.

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Varlık 7/2009



For more than 75 years, *Varlık* has been working to bring new talent to Turkish literature. The latest issue is no exception and introduces a host of new names. Within the context of the Yasar Nabi Nayir Youth Awards, they ran a questionnaire among critics, editors, poets and writers to analyse the most prominent names and trends in Turkish literature in the last decade.

Language in motion: [Hasan Bülent Kahraman](#) points out that a transformation in language is underway and that we are drifting towards a universe of letters where the everyday influences and intervenes ever more. He also discusses to what extent Turkey can be considered "Mediterranean" — and what that could mean.

The replies illustrate that "poems tend to favour imagery, non-poetic sources are converted to poetry with success, that marginal lives are more pervasive in novels in contrast to the past, and social realities are expressed in a style that borders on magical realism."

Also: [Haydar Ergülen](#) is concerned that the EU might standardize culture; [Tozan Alkan](#) explains the "WordExpress" international translation project; and in the [Literary perspectives](#) series, [Daniela Strigl](#) finds a [contemporary Austrian scene](#) at the top of its game.

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FA-art 74 (4/2008)



Two studies of Polish literature written in the 1980s offer divergent views of language, writes Krzysztof Unilowski in *FA-art*. For Włodzimierz Bolecki, language sanctions "the experience of common ground", while for Tadeusz Komendant, it describes difference and the "positional aspect of truth". In the Polish public sphere of the 1990s, these two positions came to characterize the divide between "communist" and "liberal" factions. During that period, both Bolecki and Komendant participated in the controversy about postmodernism in Poland and its suitability for reflecting Polish historical experience.

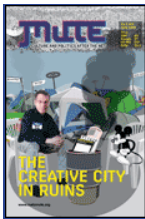
Between body and expression: [Monika Swierkosz](#) uses anthropological categories such as memory, desire, trauma and experience to interpret the recent novels of [Olga Tokarczuk](#). She spots a shift in the author's position

towards the connection between the physical body and expression. Tokarczuk's increasing interest in non-linguistic and non-verbal phenomena describes the slow and gradual liberation over the past twenty years from the law of the written word towards the material reality of discourse.

Also: Miroslaw Golunski sees Nietzschean overtones in the opening and ending sections of the historical novels of Teodor Parnicki (1908–1988), while Tomasz Markiewka reads Parnicki's oeuvre in the light of his correspondence with the hydraulic engineer Andrzej Madeyski between 1957–1988.

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Mute 12 (2009)



Anthropologist David Graeber argues that it is only with a general historical understanding of debt and its relationship to violence that we can begin to appreciate our emerging epoch. In *Mute*, he undertakes an analysis of 5000 years of economic history, starting in ancient Mesopotamia and ending in the present.

The current era, which Graeber describes as the "empire of debt", is characterized by the "financialization" of capital. Historically, "ages of virtual, credit money have also involved creating some sort of overarching institutions — Mesopotamian sacred kingship, Mosaic jubilees, Sharia or Canon Law — that place some sort of controls on the potentially catastrophic social consequences of debt." They involve institutions to protect debtors. But this time — at least so far — the movement has been the other way around: "starting with the 80s we have begun to see the creation of the first effective planetary administrative system, operating through the IMF, World Bank, corporations and other financial institutions, largely in order to protect the interests of creditors."

However, the fact that "this apparatus was very quickly thrown into crisis" — first by the moral critique of the global social movements and now by the global economic collapse — makes Graeber envision a different development:

"A movement towards virtual money is not in itself, necessarily, an insidious effect of capitalism. In fact, it might well mean exactly the opposite. For much of human history, systems of virtual money were designed and regulated to ensure that nothing like capitalism could ever emerge to begin with — at least not as it appears in its present form, with most of the world's population placed in a condition that would in many other periods of history be considered tantamount to slavery."

Film: Paul Helliwell takes a critical view of *Hunger*, Steve McQueen's controversial film about Irish republican hunger striker Bobby Sands. Earlier this year, a poll of critics in *Sight and Sound* hailed *Hunger* as the best movie of 2008. But Helliwell is not convinced: "McQueen has made a film on 'the troubles' that manages to eliminate the presence of the British Army, leaving only Margaret Thatcher's disembodied voice. What would disappear from a film about the Gulf War?"

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