



## Eurozine Review

### The moderate use of pleasure

*Le Monde diplomatique* (Berlin) points to the blind spots of the G20; *The Hungarian Quarterly* says informants weren't to blame; *Merkur* is not embarrassed by heroism; *New Humanist* re-reads postmodern classics; *Samtiden* votes for a more representative parliament; *RiLi* critiques the green movement with Gorz; *Le Monde diplomatique* (Oslo) gathers critical voices on Israel; *A Prior* combats amnesia with the moving image; and *Esprit* unravels Enlightenment paradoxes.

### Le Monde diplomatique (Berlin) 9/2009



In *Le Monde diplomatique* (Berlin), Joseph E. Stiglitz urges the G20 to find global answers to the financial crisis, instead of sticking to strategies that fail completely to take account of developing nations.

"The US might well be in a position financially to save its banks and to stimulate its economy, but the developing nations are not. Lately however they have been an important motor for worldwide economic growth. For that reason, a global recovery without their participation is barely conceivable."

Yet at this week's Pittsburgh summit, the G20 will reconsider neither the IMF's counterproductive conditions for financial aid for developing countries, which slow down rather than accelerate their economies, nor WTO tolls that *de facto* discriminate against poorer countries. Stiglitz, who acts as chairman of the "Commission of Experts of the President of the UN General Assembly of Reforms of the International Monetary and Financial System", concludes:

"The structures of our global economic and finance system must be changed from the base up in order to distribute the fruits of our affluence more equally and to make the system as a whole more stable. This is not a task that can be completed overnight, but we must get to grips with it — and fast."

**The private is public:** Ulrike Hermann argues that in times of economic crisis, the private pension system is not "private" at all. As trust in the stock market falters, insurance companies increasingly invest — directly or indirectly — in the state:

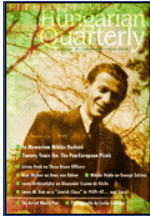
"Money is transferred from one pocket of the tax payer into another — and the only ones to profit are the insurance

companies that recoup their unnecessary services with expensive deposits."

**Education:** In Germany, private schools have remained unaffected by the crisis as wealthy parents do their best for their children's future. Yet according to educational scientists, writes Oliver Trenkamp, the performance of private school pupils is not significantly better.

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### The Hungarian Quarterly 195 (2009)



Two books dealing with the state security apparatus in communist Hungary emphasize the extent to which its members, from informants and their handlers up to high-ranking politicians in the Ministry of the Interior, were subordinate to the Communist Party hierarchy, [writes](#) historian and journalist [Sándor Révész](#). This radically calls into question the common treatment of "informants" as scapegoats and shifts the focus to Party officials, many of whom became respected politicians after 1989.

"The sources show clearly that a much wider circle of people than the network of agents were responsible for the disadvantages, and even vilification, suffered by thousands of people", writes Révész. "This makes it hardly surprising that researchers pushing for freedom of information on state surveillance find little support. The response to publications that do find their way to a wider readership is jittery, with researchers generally being accused of the very thing that is least true of them, i.e. that they are only interested in unmasking and pillorying those who were recruited into the informer network."

After 1956, writes Révész, the covertly totalitarian Kádár regime strove for omniscience as opposed to omnipotence, which in turn entailed a new form of policing. "If a legitimate, constitutional opposition is not allowed to exist, then every activity, person and group represents a threat to national security should it carry the seeds of dissidence." The lesson to be learned "is that no general conclusions can be drawn about the possibility of refusing to cooperate with the state security services".

**Also:** Photos documenting the *annus mirabilis* of 1989 from the Historical Photographic Collection of the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest.

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### Merkur 9–10/2009



The title of *Merkur's* annual special issue is provocative: *Heldengedenken* — literally meaning "remembrance of heroes", but also translatable as "commemoration of the war dead" — is a term linked to the ideology of National Socialism (Goebbels instated a *Heldengedenktag* or commemoration day still "observed" by the far-Right today). But any such associations are undermined by the sardonic subtitle, "On the

heroic phantasma". As the editorial makes clear, what the issue is "commemorating" is the death of heroes as such:

"The aversion to heroism is not a side effect but rather essential to post-heroic societies. [...] one is increasingly unable to tolerate heroes, because they radically call into question the principle of equality — a hero is precisely not a person like you and me. That's inexcusable, and so today [heroes] are no longer admired, but rather exposed and destroyed."

Norbert Bolz develops the idea: "We no longer have any genuine heroes — or rather, we no longer want any. Yet we still have the need for hero worship. While the charismatic eminence of the hero is an irritation for democracy, celebrities offer us mediocrity as product. Their skill consists in distinguishing themselves from those like them. [...] They aren't different to us, just a bit more: richer, more mobile. They are 'above' without us being 'beneath', and therefore they allow democratic admiration. We don't envy them, because in them we celebrate ourselves."

**Civil courage:** According to Jörg Lau, heroism has been replaced by "civil courage", a notion "closely linked to the fight against rightwing extremism" and inherently critical of the nationalist war ethos of earlier eras. But what if "civil courage" means defying not neo-Nazis but violent migrant youths, as was the case in a [much publicized incident](#) in 2007? "A German as victim of racism — obviously, that's confusing. And that is what explains attempts to re-interpret the event, until it fits into the pattern again."

"People must pull themselves together and step forward in order to break the spell", writes Lau. People who aren't embarrassed to 'act the hero'. The problem of the civil courage discourse is that it denigrates precisely this kind of interventional behaviour by automatically problematizing heroism."

The full [table of contents](#) of *Merkur* 9–10/2009

### New Humanist 5/2009



In the July issue of *New Humanist*, [Danny Postel](#) wrote [worriedly](#) about religious indoctrination and how to raise children as humanists. He went on a search for alternative reading for his children: "Not necessarily an anti-Bible, but a strong alternative or counterpart in a secular key".

Postel's article obviously struck a chord and has generated hundreds of comments on the *New Humanist* [website](#) and on [other blogs](#). In the new issue, philosopher [Roger Scruton](#) makes [a case](#) for teaching children faith:

"That children are drawn to magic, that they spontaneously animate their world with spirits and spells, that they find relief and excitement in stories in which the heroes can summon supernatural forces to their aid and vanquish untold enemies — these facts reflect layers of deep settlement in the human psyche. But they also remind us that, in the life of the child, belief and imagination are not to be clearly distinguished, and that both serve other functions than the pursuit of truth. It seems to me that humanists should wake up to this point, and be careful when they seek to deprive their children of

enchantment, or to replace their spontaneous fantasies with the cold hard facts of empirical science. It could well be that religion is a better discipline than pop science." (Postel answer [here](#).)

**Re-visiting postmodern thinking:** Reading Verso's new series of books entitled "Radical Thinkers", [Nina Power concludes](#) that there is a lot to salvage from the "weather-beaten" set of postmodern ideas.

Thinkers such as Frederic Jameson, Chantal Mouffe and Gillian Rose force you to "re-examine your presuppositions, to analyse the glib rejection of 'postmodernism' that characterizes so much of the contemporary Anglo-American humanities, and to think harder about the broader social forces that might be connecting such apparently disparate things as the rise of radical religion, the collapse of the banking system and the emergence of the English Defence League on the streets of British cities. Postmodernist thinkers did not always, or even often, get it right, but their attempt to dig beneath the surface and connect continues to be an inspiration to us all to think and think again."

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### Samtiden 3/2009



Before the recent parliamentary elections in Norway, Jon Rogstad and Ingrid Wergeland had a look at the nominations: "One can learn a lot about what the parties stand for by analysing how each party ranks their preferred candidates. Nowhere is the gap between ideals and reality greater than within the Socialist Left Party (SV)". Officially, the SV has a policy that states "Different people. Equal opportunities." But when faced with the white male vs. immigrant among their candidates, they bowed to tradition and nominated Heikki Holmås ahead of Akthar Chaudhry.

In general, Rogstad and Wergeland observe, each party ranked their immigrant candidates just low enough for none of them to get a seat if, as turned out, no party gained an overwhelming majority. "A more realistic reflection of the population would have given closer to twenty representatives of minority background."

This predictable result is caused by a differentiation between the individual and the system: why a candidate is not elected is down to personal abilities, while the problem of realistic representation is blamed on the system. It is thereby possible to "create a logical pattern which secures a legitimate status quo". Reluctant to accuse anyone of blatant racism, Rogstad and Wergeland warn that even if not intended, it can often be the direct result.

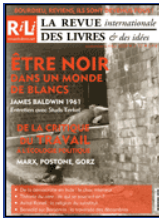
**Netizenship:** Arve Hjelseth debates whether or not the many arenas for online discussion really contribute to the democratization of society. "What Internet discussions to a great degree have done is to move relatively private or personal exchanges of opinion into the public space. This clearly means that the voice of the people is heard more clearly, and that voice is far removed from the debate that dominates in the established media. Online, people point a finger at those in power." Yet although politicians keep an eye on what moves in the minds of the people, the influence it has is still relatively insignificant,

concludes Hjelseth.

**Also:** Carsten Jensen describes his path from war correspondent to novelist and states that "life is a mess"; and Cathrine Grøndahl on the difference between the private and the personal in writing.

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### Revue Internationale des Livres et des Idées 13 (2009)



In his vision of "ecology as politics", André Gorz argued that advertising inflates our desires and robs us of any ability to live in equilibrium with nature. Advertising, he claimed, drives the growth essential to capitalism, which in turn requires the environmentally unsupportable exploitation of finite resources. In *RiLi*, Charlotte Nordmann argues a propos of Gorz that environmental solutions that do not address this destructive mechanism can only make matters worse — especially if, by relying on experts and regulations, they alienate people further from the natural environment.

For Gorz, the green movement requires a political critique. Or rather, it must return to its origins, as an attempt to find a place for humans in relation to nature and to each other, one that could restore to people control of their lives. This connects to another strand of Gorz's thought, an attack on the positioning of work at the centre of society in both socialism and capitalism.

**The end of work:** Marx is an unlikely ally in this argument, according to Anselm Jappe, following several writers who argue that Marx aimed not to glorify work, but to end it. This approach has recently been emphasized by Moishe Postone in the US and by Robert Kurz in Germany, and was anticipated as early as 1924 by an overlooked Russian writer, Isaac Roubine. Common to all is the argument that for Marx, overcoming capitalist exploitation of labour was a superficial victory; the ultimate end was to abolish work itself.

**Why do we undervalue care-work?** Long a concern of feminist writers, this question is now gaining attention in France, with the publication of translated works and dedicated journal issues (see *Esprit* 1/2006 and the forthcoming issue of *Multitudes*). Delphine Moreau summarizes some of the explanations offered. Care-work is simultaneously trivial and distasteful, something unfit for serious and polite discussion. It is regarded either as unskilled, or as dependent on skills innate to women, and thus simultaneously idealized and ignored. It may be demanded as a gift (from mothers, for example) and so left outside the market system. And it is made invisible, to avoid confronting supposedly autonomous, high-achieving individuals with the reality of their dependence. The result is a culture that has blinded itself to the most essential forms of labour.

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### Le Monde diplomatique (Oslo) 9/2009



This month, the UN published a critical report of its inquiry into Israel's possible war crimes in Gaza last winter. There have also been calls for boycotts to force Israel to comply with international law. But, as international advisor and researcher at Université Paris VII Willy Jackson argues in *Le Monde diplomatique* (Oslo), encouraging the public to collective action can have legal consequences. Jean-Claude Willem, mayor of Seclin, France discovered this when he urged the restaurants in town to not use Israeli products and was fined as a result.

The UN is entangled in a web of contradictions as well, writes Jackson. In spite of the effectiveness of economic sanctions once imposed against the South African apartheid regime, no such action has been taken against Israel. Jackson sees little hope for any immediate change in either Israeli policy or international policy toward Israel.

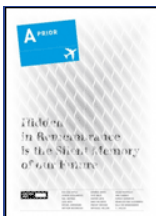
**Universal jurisdiction:** Sharon Weill supports his view. When a Spanish court attempted to open criminal investigation under international law into the killing of a Hamas leader in Gaza City, the Spanish government backed off under US and Israeli pressure. "If Israel is unable to investigate its own alleged war crimes, and the international courts have no jurisdiction", writes Weill, "then there is only one way of assuring legal accountability: through the application of universal jurisdiction, something all states are duty bound to do according to the Geneva convention of 1949."

**Zizek on Israel:** Slavoj Zizek adds his voice to the worried chorus. The policy of approving new houses for settlers in the occupied territories is effectively preventing the chance for a sustainable Palestinian state, he writes. It also makes the daily lives of the Palestinians untenable. Zizek quotes Saree Makdisis, who describes how the Israeli occupation, "though carried out by the army, is an 'occupation of bureaucracy': its main tool is application forms, deeds, proof of residency and other papers. It is this micro-control of everyday life that slowly but surely assures the expansion of Israel."

**Also:** Gabrielle Capla on how Unesco has lost its way under director-general Koïchiro Matsuura and no longer promotes peace through intellectual exchange; and an excerpt from the book *Planète ONU -- Les Nations unies face aux défis du XXIe siècle*, on the UN's challenges in the twenty-first century.

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### A Prior Magazine x3 (2009)



"The current interest in history is not something we can dismiss as one of those 'trends' that occur in contemporary art; it is a serious intellectual pursuit of diachronic value", writes Katerina Gregos in a long, introductory essay in *A Prior Magazine*. Gregos advocates "the importance of history as a tool for furthering knowledge and awareness, supporting the belief in the social use of history, as well as the important role it has to play in battling amnesia, selective memory, forgetfulness, and our culture's short attention span".

Gregos is the curator of *Contour 2009*, the fourth Biennial of Moving Image, currently running in Mechelen, Belgium, and the *A Prior* special issue works as a catalogue for this event. The artists represented, writes Gregos, "subject historical narratives to critical scrutiny; they negotiate history through film and video and the performance of social space; they dig up vintage cultural artefacts, probe the political legacy of historical discourses, examine the significance of forgotten moments [...] many of these artists question the role that memory plays in contemporary life, pinpointing how the past is 'manufactured' for consumption by the nostalgia industry, the media and political powers."

The artists vary in their means, but all use the past to make sense of the present; from Matthew Buckingham's and Andreas Bunte's 16 mm films to Nathaniel Mellors' video installations and Wendelien van Oldenborgh's slide shows.

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### Esprit 8–9/2009



In a double issue of *Esprit* on the history and legacy of the Enlightenment, [Marc–Olivier Padis](#) looks at the philosophes' overlooked concern with happiness. This was not the personal unbridled joy associated with the *Ancien Regime* that preceded the Enlightenment, he writes, nor the Romanticism that followed. Rather, it acquired a balance, in the words of the *Encyclopédie*, through "the exercise of reason, the practice of virtue, and the moderate use of pleasure". This was an equilibrium of continual, controlled movement, in which joy was just one, short–lived component.

**Enlightenment as paradox:** Calls to recreate the Enlightenment, writes Michaël F&ouml;ssel, form a paradoxical part of Europe's intellectual heritage. Yet should the Enlightenment be understood in historical context, as a movement against established authorities whose style can be re–used against new targets? Or should its values be taken as eternal, applicable without change to any historical period?

The battles in which the Enlightenment is now invoked take place, according to F&ouml;ssel, on the edges of the Enlightenment project, where it breaks down into internal contradictions. The debate on veiled women, for example, pits anti–clericalism against liberalism. In other arenas, such as human rights or scientific progress, once marginal ideas are used by those in power as well as by rebels, and have been subjected to new critiques. Perhaps the only way of re–creating the Enlightenment, F&ouml;ssel suggests, is to accept the greater complications of the present.

**"I love you":** The declaration of love, writes Pascal Bruckner, is a socially transmitted code taught to us in childhood by family and society, tested on pets and crushes, and venerated in theory long before being used in practice. Yet under the all too familiar words is a mesh of expectation and negotiation. "I love you" represents both a confession of vulnerability and, with the implied question "do you love me too?", an attempt to control the recipient. It synchronizes the lovers, forcing them into the same timetable of passion. Even as it claims endless scope, it opens an account in which credit and debit will be

tallied. A declaration of love is a self-sacrifice that expects to be repaid with interest.

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