



## Eurozine Review

### Let the bastard speak

*Index on Censorship* deplores western triumphalism; *Magyar Lettre* feels the stirrings of neighbourly emotion; *Blätter* believes in the sapience of politicians; *Soundings* says inequality kills; *NZ* analyses memory politics in Central Asia; *Kulturos barai* disappears into the network; *Host* philosophizes with filmmaker Pavel Göbl; and *Ny Tid* defends a broad concept of cultural journals.

## Index on Censorship 3/2009



In *Index on Censorship*, former Solidarity activist and journalist [Konstanty Gebert](#) describes to [Irena Maryniak](#) how Polish Samizdat went legal from one day to the next: "It wasn't a question that often applied in other post-Soviet countries, and especially to the Soviet Union itself, of training journalists that they have a right to write what they think. We had dozens and dozens of very competent journalists who had been doing just that for the last eight years and publishing underground."

But to put together a newspaper, they needed colleagues with experience: "I remember Julek Rawicz, one of those extraordinary above-ground journalists, screaming at a staff meeting: 'Okay, okay, you've convinced me, communism is bad. Can somebody please write about the price of cheese? Let's give these people something they want to read about!'"

Nevertheless, explains Gebert, censorship in Poland wasn't formally abolished until 1990, and throughout the next decade polls showed that 40 to 60 per cent of Poles believed that some content should be banned. "It is an unnatural but positive development when democracy trains people to believe that, overall, it is better to let the bastard speak."

**Triumph of the West?** In an article first published in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Ingo Schulze deplores the treatment of the GDR in the German media today: "The West won because the East collapsed. Therefore, the East was wrong and the West right. Any ideas formerly tried out by the East are unacceptable in themselves because they derive 'from the communists', so nothing more need be said about them."

"Those who took to the streets of Leipzig on 9 October 1989 had no idea whether or when they would return home. After the Beijing massacre, there was no great likelihood that a peaceful revolution would succeed. Yet the West acts as if freedom were its gift to us — as if Helmut Kohl had driven through the Brandenburg Gate with a few jeeps and put the

Stasi to flight. My problem is not the disappearance of the East, but the disappearance of the West — of a West with a human face."

**Also:** Serbian novelist Vladimir Arsenijevic on how words carried no meaning under Milosevic and why being treated as a "persecuted writer" made him feel like a museum exhibit; and [Maria Eismont](#) on the high hopes for Russian journalism after 1991 and how far the media has contributed to the current crisis.

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### Magyar Lettre Internationale 74 (2009)



"What are the Czechs like?" exclaims [Zolt Csalog's](#) drunken narrator in the current issue of *Magyar Lettre Internationale*. "I don't wanna say nothin' bad 'bout nobody 'cause I'm not like that, but why beat about the bush, they're not like us. They're different!" Called up to take part in the suppression of the Prague Spring in '68, he recalls "seein' all them Czechoslovaks blubbering like babes. Even the border guard, he was *crying*, his tears rolling down his cheeks! [...] My dear Czechoslovak brother, I says to him, are those TEARS I see? Tut–tut! And you a SOLDIER!"

But watching the Velvet Revolution on TV, even the tough–talking Magyar felt the stirrings of neighbourly emotion: "When I see them champagne bottles, and them pullin' out the corks, and the champagne spirting all over, on their hair, down to the asphalt, a million people shouting on Wenceslas Square, the corks popping... oh, lordee lord, goddamn, they did it, WE DID IT! [...] Like the champagne from the bottles in Prague, that's how the tears came rolling from my eyes! I'm tellin' ya, if a Czechoslovak had been within reach, I'd've licked his ass clean!"

**The true creators of the new Europe:** Talk about the collapse of communism coming "out of the blue" only reveals the limited horizons of contemporaries, writes [Karl Schlögel](#). The fall of the Berlin Wall was preceded by a long phase of attrition caused by the "merchant ants" from the East, for whom Berlin became the point of transfer. Together with the budget airlines and bus companies, writes Schlögel, they are the true creators of the new Europe.

**More on '89:** [Martin Simecka](#) argues that the monumentality of the dissident generation stands in the way of an uncompromised interpretation of the communist past; [Adam Michnik](#) contends that the workers with whose help freedom was won in '89 have fallen victim to that very freedom; and [Katharina Raabe](#) writes that in the twenty years since the fall of communism, literature has been lifting the fog that had settled over the expanses of eastern central Europe (English translation coming soon in Eurozine).

**The geopolitics of memory:** The controversy around the statue of the Soviet soldier in Tallinn in April 2007 provided a striking demonstration that memory politics is less about the communist past than about future political and economic hegemony on the European continent, writes [Tatiana Zhurzhenko](#).

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## Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik 10/2009



*Blätter* publishes a chapter from Nicholas Stern's book *The Global Deal: Climate Change and the Creation of a New Era of Progress and Prosperity*, which in a strikingly optimistic tone explains how the planet can be saved by committing to low-carbon growth.

In the run-up to the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen this December ("the most important international conference since the end of WWII"), the former Chief Economist of the World Bank advocates a "global deal" to solve the biggest problems of our times: overcoming poverty in developing countries and combating climate change. Stern believes in "the common sapience and cooperative mind" of the political elites, and calls on the participants of the Copenhagen summit to seize the chance to act as a global community:

"In the negotiations over the details of a global deal, flexibility, imagination and creativity, combined with an attitude of internationalism and cooperation, can reach a solution. In every country, the public and the leadership must be convinced that low-carbon growth is possible and attractive and that a reversal of contemporary patterns can be achieved. Both must not only be developed conceptually, but also concretely demonstrated."

Stern takes the wind out of the sails of those who argue that combating the financial crisis is more important:

"We can and must bring the short-term crisis under control, promote in the mid-term solid economic growth and in the long-term protect the Earth from catastrophic climate change. All three tasks can be approached simultaneously, and all three are urgent. To attempt to play each off against the other like racehorses is as analytically unsatisfactory as it is dangerous for the economy and the environment."

**Africa's blogosphere:** Although only 11 per cent of African households are connected to the Internet, the African blogosphere is extremely lively, writes [Geraldine de Bastion](#). She shows how citizens' journalism in countries with fragile participatory structures has a huge potential to foster political debate and awareness about democratic freedoms.

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## Soundings 42 (2009)



Inequality can quite literally be lethal, writes Göran Therborn in *Soundings*. One study, of 18 000 Whitehall civil servants, has shown that the risk of early death closely followed the office hierarchy: "After age, smoking, blood pressure, cholesterol concentration and a few other such factors had been controlled for — coronary heart disease killed 50 per cent more of those at the bottom of the hierarchy than those at the top."

"Distanciation" — or income discrepancy — is another killer: "Within metropolitan Glasgow the gap between males in Calton and in Lenzie is 28 years, larger than that between the UK and Africa in the 1970s. Glaswegians from Calton have a shorter life expectancy than Australian Aborigines." Yet inequality is not inevitable, and can be corrected by redistribution and recompensation, argues Therborn. Denmark and Sweden are the least income unequal countries of the world, yet exports make up a large part of both countries GDP (at 40 per cent, Swedish exports more than double those of the UK).

"Relatively egalitarian welfare states should not be seen as utopias or protected enclaves, but as highly competitive participants in the world market. In other words, even within the parameters of global capitalism there are many degrees of freedom for radical social alternatives."

**The denial of dependency:** Tim Dartington explores the idea that health and welfare systems can be run on the basis of a "denial of dependency". This policy madness is closely connected to current concepts of the individual, and relationships between them: even in the public sphere, relationships are reduced to transactional encounters between customers and suppliers.

"Though we may at times deny our dependence, the entrepreneurial culture promoted by the government only suits a small minority of people — or a small part in each of most of us. The majority of us remain risk averse, having neither the stomach nor the skill to make the best of every opportunity according to a resourceful evaluative maximising model, beloved of neoliberal economic theory."

**Also:** Jane Wills points to how multinational companies abdicate responsibility for their workers through systems of subcontracted employment; Julia Buxton describes how drug policy remains impervious to research; and Bryan Gould constructs a politics of the Left.

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### Neprikosnovennij Zapas 66 (2009)



In an issue of *NZ* on Central Asia, Sergei Abashin takes a tour of the Tashkent Museum for the Commemoration of Victims of Repressions, which opened in August 2008. In 1991, public enthusiasm for independence in Uzbekistan and elsewhere in the region was muted, but since then debate over the Soviet legacy has grown increasingly impassioned. Today, leaders of the Central Asian states are seeking to impose an

interpretation of history that will legitimize their position.

The main theme of this exhibition, Abashin writes, is the suffering experienced by local communities under imperial Russian and Soviet domination, and the recovery of an ancient, indigenous cultural tradition. Museums such as this play an important role in the politics of memory and the promotion of a position rejecting the Soviet past and distancing Central Asia from Russia.

**Ethnogenesis:** The formation of new states has been accompanied by the creation of national myths, with a narrative that affirms distinctive and "great" ancestry. Viktor Shnirelman outlines some popular theories of ethnogenesis, particularly the notion that Turkmens, Tadjiks, Kazakhs and Uzbeks are descended from Iranian-speaking "Aryan" tribes that arrived in the region in the early Iron Age. Theories on how Aryans merged with existing communities vary, but the idea of "biological continuity", and "racial" or "blood" kinship with Aryans is much in vogue. The Aryan image "is associated with the modern western world", Shnirelman writes, and allows Central Asians to "identify themselves with modern civilization".

**Anti-terror:** In Uzbekistan the authorities have used the terrorist threat to exercise additional control over the population and stifle dissenting voices, writes Adeeb Khalid. Islamic terrorists are active in the country, but "if they were not there, the Uzbek authorities would have had to invent them". As part of anti-terror policy, mosques have been closed and independently minded Muslims arrested. The state appoints and sacks imams, controls Islamic education, supplies texts that are read in mosques, and censors religious literature. Uncooperative religious leaders have disappeared or been arrested, torture is rife, and courts function in a way reminiscent of the Stalinist 1930s.

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### Kulturos barai 9/2009



In *Kulturos barai*, Kazys Varnelis, director of the Network Architecture Lab at Columbia University, undertakes a philosophy of network culture. As digital computing matures and meshes with increasingly mobile networking technology, society is undergoing a cultural shift. While postmodernism brought "a final unmooring of the self from any ground as well as the undoing of any coherent temporal

sequence", in network culture "these shards of the subject take flight, disappearing into the network itself".

"Affirming one's own identity today means affirming the identity of others in a relentless potlatch. Blogs operate similarly. If they appear to be the public expression of an individual voice, in practice many blogs consist of material poached from other blogs coupled with pointers to others in the same network. [...] With social bookmarking services such as del.icio.us or the social music platform last.fm, even the commentary that accompanies blog posts can disappear and the user's public face turns into a pure collection of links. Engaging in telepresence by sending SMS messages to friends or calling family on a mobile phone has the same effect: the networked subject is constituted by networks both far and near, large and small. Like the artist, the networked self is an aggregator of information flows, a collection of links to others,

a switching machine."

**Nostalgia:** Vilnius is often seen as a mysterious, magic and strange city, one that inspires myths and poetry, writes [Tomas Venclova](#) (in [Polish](#) and [Lithuanian](#)). On one hand, its closeness to nature makes Vilnius a pastoral city: a wild, picturesque nature enters the Baroque forms of its centre. On the other hand, its multicultural, polyglot character brings Vilnius close to Prague, Trieste or Sarajevo. When walls have been demolished and trespassed, writes Venclova, a certain type of inhabitant, one who belongs to several cultures at once, has the chance to resurface.

**Also:** [Zinovy Zinik's](#) autobiographical [exploration](#) of "assumed identity" in twentieth-century Jewish experience; [Rasa Balockaite](#) on the "pornographication of politics" - is a public sphere possible in a culture that denies privacy? And [Algis Mickunas](#) considers the ancient question of intellectual responsibility.

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### Host 7/2009



In *Host*, Martin Stöhr interviews film director Pavel Göbl, whose first novel, *Tichy společník* (Silent Partner) won this year's Magnesia Litera award (for the discovery of the year). The jury remarked that the village in Göbl's story "is a place where the past is a natural part of a present". Göbl describes it as a metaphor for human consciousness; in everyone, he says, the past should be a part of the present, otherwise a person disintegrates into a mosaic of momentary desires and observes life as "flat and two-dimensional".

**Anti-Semitism:** [Avraham B. Yehoshua](#) tries to answer whether anti-Semitism stems from a single root, and whether one may even raise such a question about a phenomenon that has persisted for so long and that has received so many explanations. In seeking to identify and understand the hatred of Israel and its people, he states, "I actually rely on a traditional Jewish notion that intuitively accepts the premise that there is indeed one, eternal, fixed root, without being able to explain it."

**Also:** Ales Novak's translation and introduction to the poetry of sculptor Hans Arp; and Lenka Uchytílová portrays Italian writer Marise Madieri through her magnum opus *Verde Aqua*.

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### Ny Tid 40/2009



Swedish state support for cultural publications was established in the 1970s and has resulted in one of the most interesting and diverse magazine landscapes in Europe. The government now wants to replace the wide definition of the type of journals eligible for support with a narrower concept, favouring publications that focus on "cultural debate, analysis and presentation *within the different fields of the fine arts*".

Helsinki-based *Ny Tid* enters the debate on the scope of cultural journals, which has received considerable media attention in Sweden. "To spell it out", writes editor-in-chief Nora Hämäläinen, "the Swedish government wants to cut support to publications that deal with social analysis and debate. But magazines such as *Bang*, *Arena*, *Ord&Bild* and *Glänta* are, like *Ny Tid*, inconceivable without a mix between culture and opinion. This proposal shows that those making it have no clue whatsoever about cultural journals."

Hämäläinen thinks that the Swedish journals need not worry about the proposal, since it is "so stupid that it simply cannot pass". Yet the misconception on which it is based raises questions that are relevant far beyond the Swedish context: "One seems to think that the world can be neatly divided into clearly demarcated sections, that all have their specific scenes and audiences. But this is not the way a lively, comprehensive and enlightening cultural debate works."

More about *Ny Tid*

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