



## Eurozine Review

### Nuclear Bonapartism

*Wespennest* refuses to mellow with age; *Blätter* supports a "culture flat-rate" for the Internet; *New Humanist* rallies for the new atheists; *RiLi* dares to criticize the French nuclear state; *Le Monde diplomatique* (Oslo) says West Germans would rather have been reunited with Tuscany; *Kulturos barai* calls for a new resurgence, twenty years after '89; *Springerin* turns, turns, turns; *Host* portrays the typical Czech writer; and *Merkur* doesn't feel the need to be avant-garde.

### Wespennest 157 (2009)



On its fortieth anniversary, *Wespennest* brings out an issue entitled "Being old" — "not only as the description of a condition, but also as assurance of a turbulent, varied and not infrequently remarkable history," write editors [Walter Famler](#), [Erich Klein](#) and [Ilija Trojanow](#).

*Wespennest* talks to seven personalities who were already forty years old when the magazine was founded in 1969. Among them is [Kurt Rothschild](#): "If one wants to change the world one has to change the economy," says the 95 year-old political economist. A political activist while still a schoolboy, Rothschild studied in the "Red Vienna" of the Thirties, when socialists clashed with the Austrofascist regime. "Red Vienna was an alternative we wanted. Back then, a politics was realized that no Social Democrat today would dare even to begin to propound. Take inheritance tax, for example. It's absurd that the Social Democrats are doing away with it."

Having experienced the economic depression of the Twenties, the wartime economy, the so-called economic miracle and the breakdown of the planned economy, Rothschild still hopes, "that before the big catastrophe takes place a series of smaller catastrophes will occur, and that these smaller catastrophes generate a readiness to alter certain things. Every day of crisis is a day of learning, a window of opportunity, but this window will get smaller and smaller unless rapid and fundamental changes take place in the economy."

**Also:** Gert Hoffmann (92), former International Brigadier and Nazi resistor, asks: "Who respects a quadragenarian anyway?"; and Irmgard Heydorn (93), former resistance fighter, talks about her dream of a bright future in 1945: "My biggest illusion was to believe that it would be possible to build a new society, without acknowledging that there was nobody with whom to do so."

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## Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik 11/2009



The failure of copyright law to keep step with the virtualization of knowledge results in controversies like those around the Google Book Settlement and the "Heidelberg Appeal", writes *Blätter* editor [Daniel Leisegang](#). Since 2004, Google has digitized the contents of more than 7 million books, and plans to have 15 million digitizations saved on its server by 2015. "While the Internet company claims to be making information available to everyone, what Google is setting up has in reality long been a worldwide monopoly on information."

Despite this, EU media commissioner Viviane Reding advocates public-private deals between libraries and Google, like the one recently — and unexpectedly — struck with the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Alternative public structures must be created that counteract Google's monopoly, writes Leisegang. Furthermore, copyright law needs to be altered in accordance with the changing media landscape: "Attempts to resist this mostly result in repressive solutions, for example in criminalizing a whole generation of file-sharers." Yet if as much as possible is to be made free access, the question is who pays: Leisegang sees sense in suggestions for a "culture flat-rate" — a fee levied on top of Internet connection charges that could be distributed among artists and authors.

**Swine flu:** Since the "swine flu" pandemic broke, Glaxo-Smith-Kline's share value has increased by 10 per cent and quarterly profits have risen to 2.4 billion euros. The German government alone has ordered 50 million doses of the company's A/H1N1 vaccination at a cost of 700 million euros. Angela Spelsberg of Transparency International criticizes the fact that the European Medicines Agency, the authorization body for all pharmaceuticals used in the EU, is subordinate not to the Directorate General for Health and Consumers but the Directorate General for Economic and Financial Affairs. Despite the EMEA's work being two-thirds funded by the pharmaceuticals industry, external scientists may only check documents after authorization.

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## New Humanist 6/2009



Recently, the "new believers" have appeared to be winning back some of the territory captured by their opponents in the God Debate. In *New Humanist*, [Richard Norman](#) rallies for the "new atheists". "We need to take seriously the claim that scientific explanations are incomplete, and need to be supplemented by a different kind of explanation", writes Norman; nevertheless, "what we can properly insist is that any proposed alternative kind of explanation must still meet the same standards for what counts as a good explanation".

In *New Humanist* 4/2009, Terry Eagleton argued that, "Christianity was never meant to be an explanation of anything in the first place" (reviewed [here](#)). Karen Armstrong, in her recent book *The Case for God*, goes even further and argues that religion as traditionally understood and practised was not a matter

of belief at all — at any rate, writes Norman, "not belief in what she thinks is the purely modern sense of intellectual assent to factual statements".

"If talk of divine creation is just a metaphor for the awe–inspiring beauty and complexity of the natural world, it can hold that meaning for anyone", writes Norman. "So what is it that sets the religious apart? Isn't an identity based on metaphors and stories always going to be fragile and porous? I cannot see how, in the end, a distinctive religious identity can be possible unless it is based on the acceptance of at least some non–metaphorical factual beliefs — beliefs about the existence of a personal deity and about how his intentions and purposes explain our world. Those beliefs do, inescapably, need to be rationally defended. And they can't be. On that point, certainly, Dawkins is right."

**AIDS denial:** "Though there remain many debates in medical science about how HIV causes AIDS, there is no longer a debate about whether HIV causes AIDS", writes Seth Kalichman. "Unfortunately, outdated scientific literature is not purged when new knowledge emerges. AIDS deniers use this information to create the illusion of a live debate. Denialists select old findings that support their flawed logic because they have no evidence of their own."

**Also:** Raymond Tallis on "neuro–hype": "Neuro–jurisprudence, neuro–economics, neuro–aesthetics, neuro–theology are encroaching on what was previously the preserve of the humanities."

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### Revue Internationale des Livres et des Idées 14 (2009)



In an interview in *RiLi*, energy expert Bernard Laponche argues that France's dependency on nuclear power (70 per cent of its electricity supply) means that in France, criticism of it "is considered indecent, even unacceptable". Talking to Charlotte Nordmann, he notes that reactors continue to be produced "without any regard to the costs of the dangers [...] we invest massively in nuclear research, to the detriment of controlling our energy consumption, of the development of decentralized systems of energy production and usage, and of renewable energy sources."

Despite the unacknowledged risk of a "Chernobyl–sur–Seine", a "quasi–Napoleonic" state–centralism portrays the slightest criticism of nuclear policy as unpatriotic, says Laponche. The nuclear community consists of pro–nuclear scientists; a second category of people who are more sensitive to the risks but less informed on the energy issues, so that they assume nuclear power is indispensable; and a third category of genuinely dishonest people prepared to pretend that no dangers are involved, in order to sell their product. Shrouding the bad news in mystery has given way to naked dishonesty.

According to Laponche, the central pro–nuclear argument — the cheap production of electricity — is largely outweighed by the costs of investment in plants and public research. This too explains the relative lack of development in the nuclear field, where political will — and sometimes the arms race — has been the driving force, rather than market forces. "Nuclear power does not represent a great deal on the global level. If we decided to abandon it, it would be a problem, but certainly not a catastrophe."

**Also:** Giovanna Zapperi on "Visions of sex in Berlusconi's Italy"; Anna Coppel on "Drugs: an unidentified social object"; and a review of a new introduction to Adorno by Arno Münster.

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### Le Monde diplomatique (Oslo) 11/2009



Twenty years after German reunification, the nation is still experiencing an identity crisis, finds Bernard Umbrecht after speaking to numerous German intellectuals. Enzo Traverso, for example, considers the German past to be the main problem: "Germany is a big country with a big culture that has played a major role in history, but it lacks a positive myth and has always had a negative self-image." Especially in Berlin there is a "burning need to recall the Jewish past and simultaneously an equally determined desire to erase all traces of the GDR".

Everything that had been achieved in the GDR was brushed aside after 1989, says Christoph Hein. Referring to the "German-German pseudo-unification", he tells Umbrecht: "To people from the West, Germany ended at the Elbe, which in their opinion marked the border with Russia, not another part of Germany. West Germans would rather have been reunited with Tuscany or the Balearic Islands. Not with the GDR, their knowledge of which was negligible."

Social economist Edgar Most is still furious at Helmut Kohl's decision to set the exchange rate between West and East German marks at one-to-one, rising to one-to-two over 4000 marks: this "was an absurd decision that undermined the financial base of the entire region". There was never any discussion about whether to include parts of East Germany's infrastructure into the reunited Germany. As Ingo Schulze tells Umbrecht: "When we talk about the future today, we do so fearing the deterioration of the status quo. We have to relearn that we can influence things."

**Waiting in line:** [Jean-Arnault Dérens](#) on the sorry state of affairs among the new candidates for EU membership: Croatia should by now be part of the EU but Serbia may make it first. Macedonia is in dispute with Greece, Kosovo with Serbia, all of them are broke and seeking loans, and the poor and jobless young dream of going West.

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### Kultūros barai 10/2009



Looking back at the turbulent events in Lithuania twenty years ago, social theorist Ruta Bagdanaviciute notes that, back then, it was possible to "transgress practical, one-dimensional reality. It seemed as if visions could become reality; reality was actually equal to vision. This was the experience not just of a small number of people, but of many. The world looked at Lithuania — a geographically small country, but one that was big in spirit."

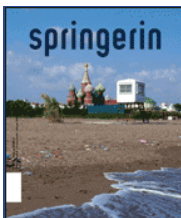
But the euphoria of 1989 has vanished. "Today, we have neither the power nor the imagination necessary to break away from everyday reality. It seems as if we are waiting for some global power — perhaps the EU? — to perform a local miracle." That will not happen, writes Bagdanaviciute, who appeals to Lithuanians to summon the courage for a *new* resurgence. "Perhaps Vilnius could be the starting point of a fundamental cultural change, a city that is soon to become a *former* European cultural capital? Perhaps it could become such a capital again, for at least ten years?"

**Dealing with history:** Every nation has issues they wish not to discuss. In Lithuania, one such issue is the "colonization" by the German occupying power between 1942 and 1944, writes German–Lithuanian writer Arthur Hermann. The colonization was supported by the Lithuanian self–government and forced many Poles and Russians to leave the country, to be replaced by ethnic Germans. After the war, these Germans went unpunished by the Allies. The colonizing generation is now dead and their descendants know little or nothing about what happened when their parents and grandparents, Lithuanian Germans, returned to their homeland for a short time during the War.

**Also:** Claus Leggewie notes that a pan–European memory cannot be reduced to the Holocaust and the Gulag alone (no matter how central these are) and must be able to compare memories without offsetting each against the other; and Zinovy Zinik undertakes an autobiographical exploration of "assumed identity" in twentieth–century Jewish experience.

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### Springerin 4/2009



"Retrospective discourse about the changes of '89 at the level *Realpolitik* has an endless reservoir of resources at its disposal. Proclamations of various cultural turns, on the other hand, are often little more than a rhetorical manoeuvre", write the editors of *Springerin*. "Good reason, then, to inspect these oft–invoked 'turns' more closely."

Talk about cultural turns may be inflationary, says Doris Bachmann–Medick in interview; nevertheless, the concept of the "cultural turn" remains useful. "Turns, reversals, the bundling of attention upon particular research focuses, systematic focusing, run through almost every discipline. The notion of the 'turn' allows for a restructuring of the field of cultural research in a different and more open way; it is a 'mapping' along concepts that have an expressly interdisciplinary, intercultural horizon."

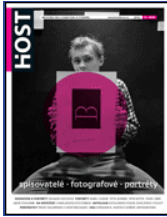
**Eternal return of racism:** In terms of one particular social symptom, the changes of '89 have brought little. Theorist and curator Suzana Milevska analyses the return of old–style anti–Roma racism in south eastern Europe: "Contemporary racism is often veiled, disguised in the appeal for new values (as in neoliberal development) or for roots and genuine values (nationalism). Both justify chauvinistic speech and the actions of national majorities."

**Proud to be flesh:** In interview, *Mute* editors Pauline van Mourik Broekmann and Josephine Berry Slater display trademark irony about the fifteenth anniversary of the pioneering UK magazine: "Like so many media projects of

our time, *Mute* is a bastard of many contradictory social, political, and economic trends. One of these trends is indeed the fictional 'entrepreneurship' of the Thatcher era. Seen from another perspective, our project could also be held up as an advert for the 'mixed economy' New Labour was always trying so hard to produce. [...] Of course, we reject any simplistic accusations that we are 'cooperating' by pointing out that we endeavour to put together our magazine in a critical dialectic with our subject matter and with our public."

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### Host 8/2009



"The portrait is a royal discipline among the visual arts and a permanent focus of interest simply because people remain insatiably curious to know what others' humanity looks like," writes Josef Moucha in *Host*. The issue features more than thirty portraits of Czech writers, taken by six different photographers over the last fifty years. They reveal the rich inner lives of their subjects, and also the torment the past regime caused some of them.

Apart from the snapshots and arranged photographs shot by Dagmar Hochová in the 1960s, most of the pictures portray composed personalities. If one were to distil from them the image of the typical Czech writer, it would be a laidback, bearded man of an uncertain age, or a delicate young woman with a shy smile: "Although the photos do not allow contact with the deceased, they bring the memories back to life and stimulate the imagination. [...] They evoke more than they show," writes Moucha.

**The Czech avant-garde:** Jindrich Toman, professor of Slavic languages of Czech origin, talks in interview about the origins of European avant-gardes and their residue in contemporary life and culture. The symbiosis of art genres typical of the Czech avant-garde in the 1920s and 1930s was probably a consequence of the middle-class' urge to define itself in all the aspects of social life, argues Toman. Originally intended as a permanent force of revolt against institutions, capitalism institutionalized the avant-garde long ago, so that nowadays it is hard to tell the difference between revolt and a new brand name.

**Also:** "Catalan poetry of the twentieth century", a mini-anthology edited and translated by Miloslav Ulicny.

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### Merkur 11/2009



The failure of historical avant-gardes to destroy the institution of art and to create an art capable of transforming society "does not signal the end of the development of art, nor does it mean that the avant-gardes had no impact", writes Peter Bürger in *Merkur*. "Their impact was in fact huge; however it lies, contrary to their original intention, exclusively in the realm of art."

Bürger proposes an art that is no longer "for art's sake", but that interprets the world; and an art-criticism that "gets away from abstract criteria and evaluates an individual artwork on the basis of its content". One should not claim for this art the mantle of the avant-garde: "That would only add to the number of competing avant-garde concepts. [...] Is it still necessary to assure oneself that one is advanced?"

"What one misses most in conventional contemporary literary criticism is an awareness that it is ultimately the form that makes the literary work as such," writes Bürger. Art criticism must not seek "artistic statements" but ask, "whether a necessary connection can be proved between the artistic process and the content of the work."

**Falling standards:** Art historian [Wolfgang Kemp](#) deplures falling editorial standards brought by the trend in academic publishing towards the conference reader and exhibition catalogue. Interdisciplinarity amounts to multidisciplinary, he writes, while collections lack a central tenet bringing the texts into dialogue. Editors are often afraid to make omissions: understandably so, since they are indebted to participants. Moreover, they often profile themselves at the expense of their contributors by including outdated work, alongside which they appear cutting edge.

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