



## Eurozine Review

### And ultimately to forget

*Merkur* wonders what the hell the Internet is good for; *Esprit* says it's not the economy, stupid; *Dilema veche* sees the intellectual baby thrown out with the bathwater; *Kritika & Kontext* proclaims Spinoza the first great thinker of secularism; *NZ* knows how to overcome fear; *Res Publica Nowa* finds history in the here and now; *Vikerkaar* considers forgetting; *Samtiden* watches Germany go back to the Prussian future; *Le Monde diplomatique* (Berlin) contemplates the strange formula "6-1+1"; *Roots* reviews Macedonian literature between tradition and innovation; *Ord&Bild* expands the Latin American library; and *Sodobnost* remarks that it's not just the West that's westernistic.

## Merkur 12/2009



From argument 1 — "What the hell is it good for?" — to argument 9 — new technologies reduce our ability to think, write and read — German writer and journalist [Kathrin Passig](#) compiles cultural criticism's most frequent objections to new technologies, which in recent years have been resurrected in connection with the Internet.

"It's an amazing invention", said US president Rutherford B. Hayes about the telephone in 1876, "but who would ever want to use one of them?" (argument 2), while British colonel Sir John Smyth strongly disapproved of the use of the musket in 1591: "The bow is a simple weapon, firearms are very complicated things that get out of order in many ways" (argument 6).

What is really remarkable, writes Passig, is how much critique of new inventions has to do with the critic's age, and how little with the thing itself: "The same people that greeted the Internet in the 1990s, ten years later reject its continuing development with exactly the same arguments that they poured scorn upon back then. At the age of 25 or 30, it is easy to appreciate and to use technologies if they give one an advantage in terms of status or knowledge. If, a few years later, it is one's own advantages that need to be defended against progress, then it's more difficult."

Passig's remedy against the trap of recycling worn-out arguments: unlearn. "The adult human being simply knows too many solutions for problems that no longer exist."

**Also:** Peter Baldwin says the real divide between Europe and America is much smaller than interested parties care to admit; and Heinz Theisen argues that integration depends more on politics of cultural coexistence than on dialogue.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Merkur* 12/2009

### Esprit 11/2009



Introducing an issue of *Esprit* devoted to the after-effects of the economic crisis, **Olivier Mongin** and **Marc-Olivier Padis** reassess the situation over a year after Lehman's failure in September 2008. "Crisis" is an ambiguous term, they write, that limits us to accepting that we have no other measurement than "the peaks and troughs of the stock market".

Yet the technological, migratory and geopolitical factors are ongoing, despite the banks' recovery. Clearly, economists are disinclined to encourage debate; for many, the utopia of perfect transparency of competition and market self-regulation is unchallengeable. But "it is not about who was right or wrong [...] but how to proceed".

The structural nature of the problem, and its inextricability from the social crisis of distribution of wealth, demands a political response as much as an economic one, continue Mongin and Padis. This crisis is no longer one among many, but a veritable crucible of global shifts with inevitable local and unexpected effects. However there has been much apathy outside the economic field. "It is the duty of a generalist journal, few as they are [...] to favour a wide-ranging debate that is not the sole preserve of experts in an age when hyper-specialization is a source of blindness."

**Crisis of the Left:** Michael Marian discusses the apparently paradoxical success, post-crisis, of centre-right parties. The Left seems "exhausted by its success, then discredited by its conformism", with no new solutions for the problems of poverty or the environment. The key to reanimating a Left still recovering from communism's collapse and the subsequent splintering into "Lafontaine-style statism" or "Blairite market-friendliness" could be ecological politics, which links "the new need for global regulation with individual responsibility" and represents a universal, and no longer merely national, aspiration.

So far the Right has had more success, by being politically nimbler as well as appealing to ageing populations' need for security. "The Left must demonstrate a broader understanding than its rivals", writes Marian, "combining individual enterprise with the concerns of both secular republicanism and multicultural tolerance, and articulate its own concrete utopia — otherwise it will forever remain on the defensive.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Esprit* 11/2009

### Dilema veche 299–303 (2009)



In *Dilema veche* (no 302), **Mircea Vasilescu** sees the gradual marginalization of Romanian intellectuals from the public sphere as a natural consequence of the refinement of civil society for which they themselves fought. In a more complex and active polity, politics is professionalized and intellectuals can focus on their particular specializations. While this

process has taken place in all post–communist countries, Romania differs in that an anti–intellectual discourse predominant in the early 1990s is reemerging. Intellectuals, writes Vasilescu, are criticized for the support lent by some of them to the current president, Traian Basescu, or for the revelations that a few were communist informers. This denies Romanian intellectuals their role as a moral compass.

In the same issue there is a report of a Paris colloquium on the public intellectual in Europe between 1989 and 2009. Alan Finkelkraut commented that, 20 years after the collapse of communism, the lesson of anti-totalitarianism seems to be getting lost, while Gabor Kardos spoke of a new type of totalitarianism replacing communism: global capitalism. For Kardos, "The alleged victory of the Western system over the Soviet version of the same global industrialization process reveals itself today as a universal failure of industrial society." Continuing the discussion in issue 303, [Christian Lequesne writes](#) that the recent open letter to President Obama, signed by Walesa, Havel and other luminaries, speaks of a fading relationship with a US no longer attuned to their "hawkish Atlanticism".

**Research:** Funding for academic research in Romania has dropped abruptly, having improved steadily in recent years. In issue 299, Calin Alexa of the National Institute for Physics comments: "For the moment, research is done with very low efficiency, since enormous amounts of time are spent on finding financial solutions and ensuring participation in international projects."

**Also:** Radu Cosasu tells an allegorical story of events in December 1989 in Romania. Revolutionaries in Bucharest asked the crowds to kneel in prayer if they were Christian or remain standing if they were communists. Confronted with this ominous choice, Cosasu decided to stand on one foot.

The full [tables of contents](#) of *Dilema veche* 299–301 (2009)

### Kritika & Kontext 38–39 (2009)



Introducing an issue of *Kritika & Kontext* devoted to Spinoza, [Béla Egyed notes](#) the renewed surge of interest in the seventeenth-century philosopher: in *Empire*, Hardt and Negri developed Spinoza's notion of the "constitutive power" of the imagination, while António Damásio has argued that there are significant affinities between Spinozan psychology and contemporary discoveries in neurophysiology. "Yet in spite of the great interest in him today", writes Eged, "Spinoza still has his critics, not only among Jewish thinkers like Levinas, but also among philosophers who share Spinoza's attacks on all revealed religions."

Religion is where *Kritika & Kontext* begins an [interview](#) with leading Spinoza experts. According to Yale philosopher [Steven B. Smith](#), "Spinoza's critique of scripture is exceptionally relevant today." Compared with the polemics of today's "new atheists", says Smith, "I cannot help but notice how generally impoverished the whole debate is today in comparison with the immense learning and erudition that Spinoza brought to the topic." And according to [Warren Montag](#), "There is perhaps nothing in Spinoza's work more relevant today than his critical examination of scripture".

"It is not the 'resurgence' of religion that confers such importance on Spinoza's project, for such a notion implies that 'religion' disappeared or was largely diminished in the face of the secular culture that issued from the European Enlightenment. In my view nothing could be more naive than to think we have finished with Christianity or even religion simply because our discourse does not contain references to the Bible as divine authority, God or Christ the King. On the

contrary, it is clear that the most malignant characteristics of two millennia of Christian missions and the holy wars, crusades and inquisitions they necessitate, persist in various perfectly secular, even 'scientific' forms."

**Also:** Syliaana Malinowski–Charles on emotions as the engine of Spinoza's ethics; Henri Laux on Spinoza's critical theism; and Stanley Rosen on Spinoza's moral religion.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Kritika & Kontext* 38–39 (2009)

### Neprikosnovennij Zapas (NZ) 5/2009



In *NZ*, Aleksandr Piatigorsky (who died in October) proposes a philosophical approach to the subject of fear. He writes that fear can be experienced collectively or individually, and some fears are linked to particular social groups. In 1930s Russia, for example, people of peasant origin feared hunger, while the intelligentsia were more anxious about arrest and labour camps. In anticipation of the Second World War, Soviet propaganda manipulated fear, much as publicity surrounding the war on terror has amplified anxiety over possible terrorist attacks.

According to Piatigorsky, we forget that objects of fear are phantoms created by a state of mind unmediated by reflection. Anxiety has become a psycho–sociological phenomenon, and fear has been subsumed into education and the daily values of communities. If we fail to reflect fully on "macro–fear", we are placing increasing and dangerous psychological pressure on our contemporaries, and making fear an intrinsic part of our culture, thinking and perception. Consciousness — and especially consciousness of the present, rather than an attempted grasp of the future — is our most powerful and effective weapon against being afraid.

**Life as art:** *NZ* editor Ilya Kalinin argues that because life in conditions of revolution and war involves the constant and extreme expenditure of mental and physical energy, it represents a form of heroic art. The Russian revolution and civil war interrupted the ordinary flow of existence, and narrowed private space by minimizing the range of objects in its orbit. In reaction, people came to focus on the tiny aspects of everyday routine (such as the preparation of the simplest meal) with the care and devotion of artists.

Personal records suggest that in situations where the degree of scarcity is unprecedented, daily want and desire are condensed, concentrated and often imaginatively sexualized. Lidia Ginzburg describes how during the siege of Leningrad the act of walking demanded a process of disassociation and disengaged observation, similar to performing a dance. Extremity (like art) revives a sharpness of perception that makes "stone seem stonier and sugar sweeter".

The full [table of contents](#) of *Neprikosnovennij Zapas (NZ) 5/2009*

### Res Publica Nowa 3/2009



"The symbols of history can have a greater impact than the continuities of fact and tradition", comment the editors of *Res Publica Nowa* in relation to the "inappropriate" and "insensitive" erection of a monument to Jozef Pilsudski in Lublin's Lithuania Square (in 1920, under Pilsudski's leadership, Lithuania was annexed to Poland).

As Marcin Moskalewicz writes, memory is mediated by historical interpretation, just as history is conditioned by different kinds of remembering. The notion of the "end of history" is a dangerous illusion: "Its direct result is the conviction of one's own uniqueness or, worse, perfection, as well as the idea that the past can be enclosed in a shell of knowledge and shelved in the archive." The practice of history develops a sensitivity to the present, according to Moskalewicz, so that personal experience of the here and now can become a lasting reference point for intellectual and emotional excursions into the past, as well as projects for the future.

Despite current interest in questions about the subsequent re-integration of German officials who committed atrocities with impunity in occupied countries, the coverage of events in Nazi occupied territories by the German school curriculum remains poor, says historian Klaus Ziemer in interview with Artur Cielinski. New evidence suggests that the level of genuine public support enjoyed by Hitler was far higher than previously thought, and further questions are being raised about support for the Holocaust outside Germany: in France, Lithuania and Latvia for example. As regards continuing discussions between Polish and German historians, Ziemer remarks that these have been exceptionally successful, and act as a model for contacts between other countries with difficult historical issues to debate.

**Also:** Timothy Snyder predicts that Auschwitz and the Gulag are only a hint of the true reckoning with the past still to come; Arne Ruth describes how national myths of neutrality in Sweden and Switzerland have given way to admissions of responsibility; Marek Seckar argues that anti-communism in the Czech Republic distracts from more pressing problems; and Przemyslaw Czaplinski explores the figure of the German in recent Polish literature.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Res Publica Nowa* 3/2009

### Vikerkaar 10–11/2009



*Vikerkaar* explores whether, in an age obsessed with memory, forgetfulness may sometimes be more beneficial. Jaanus Adamson discusses Freud's conception of remembering as the *via regia* to mental health, and his treatment of hysteria as unconscious remembering of trauma. Hysteria symptoms may, in a limited sense, be compared to monuments: they constitute compulsive repetition of the past, argues Adamson. "The compulsion to remember conceals a fear of history and also of the future, of what may happen if memory is left to its own devices — a fundamental fear that the only alternative to forgetting the past may be repeating it."

"When we are invited to remember events that involve incomprehensible suffering", writes Hent Kalmo, "it is difficult not to go along with the flow of

emotion and instead to ask: Why?" Under totalitarian regimes that selectively presented or concealed information, "calls for remembering [...] could indeed constitute acts of resistance. However, such calls may grow into a cult of memory, a ceremonial fixation with the past that will not let it slip away. In order to reconcile formerly hostile ethnic groups and to fuse them into one community, we may sometimes be obliged to forget — to investigate, examine and re-read, to record events so as to make it impossible to deny them, to give them 'mourning duties' [...] for a certain period of time, and ultimately to forget."

**The forgetting museum:** While it seems self-evident that commemoration averts recurrence of that which is being commemorated, [writes Adam Phillips](#), an obsession with memory blinds us to the abuses of memory and to the uses of forgetting.

**Also:** Eik Hermann explores a Pyrrhonic perspective — the precarious balance of Humpty Dumpty — between the ossified world of total determination and the chaos of total incoherence.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Vikerkaar* 10–11/2009

### Samtiden 4/2009



"I would have liked to have a chat with the manufacturer who, before the World Cup, predicted that the big summer hit among football supporters would be a Mohawk wig in the colours of the flag: black, red and yellow. The effect was immediate anyway — as if the Germans, with enthusiastic surprise, realized that they did not turn into nationalists, let alone National Socialists, by wearing German colours and waving the German flag."

Helge Jordheim analyses Germany since unification and finds that, since the fall of the Berlin Wall, there has been a continuous battle to define what the new Germany is and will be. "Throughout the entire post-war era, Germany has been a nation willingly stripped of national symbols. Only the flag survived as a required part of national self-representation, as a recognizable signal that the Germans belong to the global unity of nations — otherwise they would presumably have done away with that as well."

For Germany to become patriots of a united, sovereign state, writes Jordheim, they have to find an alternative to what has been the dominant national feeling since the war: guilt and shame. This seems to include the erasure of the traces of GDR. "After 1989, the GDR became a definitive sidetrack, a dead end in German history, which only resumed its course with the unification. The GDR is like a book which now has been closed and placed on a bookshelf to gather dust."

"What should be kept, what should be torn down, what should be reconstructed and what should be forgotten?" asks Jordheim. It seems as if the new Germany is to find itself through a reconstruction of the old, a recycled and purified Prussia. For example, by reconstructing the Baroque castle that was demolished in 1950 to make way for the *Palast der Republik*. "A new Germany will never just be new, but also old — ever older, it seems."

**Also:** Hanno Sandvik laments how Darwinists and social scientists constantly misunderstand each other in mistaken paranoia that their theories compete against, instead of complement, each other; and Arne Jon Isachsen advocates letting Africans take responsibility for the development and economic growth of their own continent.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Samtiden* 4/2009

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



In *Le Monde diplomatique* (Berlin), [Jean-Arnault Dérens](#) writes that "at the summit in Thessaloniki in June 2003, the European Union invented a new geographical term: 'the Western Balkans'".

The strange formula "6-1+1" constitutes the six Yugoslavian successor states minus Slovenia plus Albania, while Kosovo has since entered the stage as a seventh candidate. At the beginning of the millennium, cautious optimism about the prospects of democratization and reconstruction had spread throughout the region. "Some European politicians even went so far as to talk of 'the de-balkanization of the Balkans'", writes Dérens, and EU accession seemed a natural perspective.

At the end of the first decade of the millennium, the picture looks quite different. Due to the border dispute started by Slovenia, Croatia's accession talks were heavily delayed; the naming dispute between Greece and Macedonia has also delayed negotiations. In Croatia and Macedonia, nationalism and Euro-scepticism are on the rise. The recent abolition of EU visa requirements for Serbs, Montenegrins and Macedonians has alleviated this; but Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania and Kosovo are still exempt.

"Europe is not able to bring its position to bear in the face of the threat of new conflicts. The fact that the EU is not able to find a clear political line even over Kosovo shows that it has given up once and for all the pioneering role that it wanted to play in the 'good old days' of the beginning of the millennium."

**Minority vote:** Just before the first local elections in Kosovo since the declaration of independence in February 2008, [Frederik Steiner](#) visited two out of the three communities in Kosovo with a Serbian majority. After the elections, the Ahtisaari Plan will come into action, which allows for the decentralization of administrative structures and the establishment of new communities in order to strengthen the political voice of minorities. This could be the "beginning of a positive redefinition of the relations between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo", writes Steiner. What comes out of it remains to be seen: voter participation was only 45 per cent, and even less in the Serbian communities.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Le Monde diplomatique* (Berlin) 11/2009

### Roots 31-32 (2009)



Female Macedonian novelists are reversing the male dominance of the genre, writes Lidija Kapushevska–Drakulevska in *Roots*.

Three successful new novels illustrate this: Jagoda Mihajlovska–Georgieva's *Indigo Bombay*, whose narrative weaves together the destinies of a boy who sells his own kidney and of a western woman visiting India as a tourist; Kica Kolbe's *The Women of Gavril*, in which the youngest of three "cursed women", after a "long Jungian search for identity", relieves herself from the family curse and the burden of the past; and Olivera Nikolova's *White Smoke*, a crime novel about people trafficking which explores "otherness" as the lives of a Macedonian and an Albanian refugee from Bosnia intersect.

It is in poetry, however, that "some of the most interesting new work is being produced", writes Kapushevska–Drakulevska. "Many different models of the poetic discourse can be recognized, different poetic alphabets with different sensibilities, a completely individualized expression." Among the new Macedonian poets are Lidija Dimkovska, whose "poetry blends poetic expression with scientific language, an intellectual game of creation and meta-creation"; Vesna Acevska, whose collection *One Hundred Leaves* explores how poetic expression takes place in an established set of kinship relationships; and Vladimir Martinovski, who uses the Japanese *haibun* form to convey the beauty of trivial and minute everyday moments.

**Also:** Claus Leggewie argues 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.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Roots* 31–32 (2009)

#### Ord&Bild 4/2009



"Why should you provide a social angle and write about poverty just because you happen to be from Latin America?" asks Torbjörn Elensky, writer and guest editor of an *Ord&Bild* issue on Latin American literature. "Why should you be forced into Gabriel García Márquez-type exoticism, just because doing so means your books will sell better at the Frankfurt Book Fair?"

Elensky and *Ord&Bild* have set out to confound the most common expectations on literature from the region, formed by García Márquez's magical realism and Jorge Luis Borges' meta-literary short stories:

"The last ten years have been characterized by nothing less than parricide on, above all, Gabriel García Márquez. One of the leading figures in this renewal has been the Chilean writer Alberto Fuguet, who contrasted his own urban McOndo, with its fast food, drugs and big-city life, with García Márquez's old and rural Macondo, with its flying virgins."

Having published several successful novels of his own, Fuguet discovered the works of Columbian writer Andrés Caicedo, who took his own life in 1977, when only 25 years old. For Fuguet, Caicedo, is a much greater influence than García Márquez; he has even accused García Márquez of being responsible for Caicedo's death, killing the young writer's lust for life with his hegemonic style. It was only when Fuguet — twenty years later — published a compilation of Caicedo's unfinished works that the Columbian received the attention he deserved. In an intense and informative essay, young writer and journalist Diego Zúñiga shows how this book has changed both literature and literary history not only in Caicedo's (and García Márquez's) native Columbia, but on the whole continent.

**Also:** Essays on contemporary Latin American prose and Latino identity in the US, and translations of Latin American writers including Ricardo Piglia, Laura Restrepo, Antonio Ungar, Martín Gambarotta, Cíntia Moscovich, Wendy Guerra and Fernanda García Lao.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Ord&Bild* 4/2009

### Sodobnost 10/2009



In *Sodobnost*, Ales Debeljak argues that the division of the world into "the West and the Rest" is a misrepresentation purveyed by moralists on the Left and chauvinists on the Right. Cultural globalization is not the transplantation of western ideas and technologies across the planet, writes Debeljak, but the adaptation of these according to local requirements. Hybridity, the product of a *longe durée*, is at the heart of the contemporary western paradigm.

"Cultures, understood as systems of lived collective experiences, do not automatically become uniform when the economic circumstances of diverse life-worlds become similar. [...] The contemporary package of narratives and tools with which we manage contemporary human experience was indeed born in western Europe, but it is no longer the exclusive possession of its peoples."

Debeljak's coinage "westernistic civilization" conveys this sense of cultural borrowing and invites comparison to "Hellenistic civilization", which "emanated from classical Greek heritage, but territorially stretched across the entire world then known to man, reaching to Egypt and India, Tajikistan and Afghanistan. In the same way, the westernistic civilization that has arisen from modern western heritage comprises the entire known world today."

The full [table of contents](#) of *Sodobnost* 10/2009

The Eurozine review is published with the support of the Culture Programme of the European Union and Allianz Kulturstiftung.

Original in English  
© Eurozine