



## Eurozine Review

### Scare–stories of moral decay

*New Humanist* doesn't think video games vitiate the brain; *Blätter* argues for the Fourth Way; *Dilema veche* finds almost no reason to be optimistic about Romania; *Gegenworte* stands up for the Academy; *Esprit* welcomes the return to a pre–modern concept of ownership; *Merkur* says the German forest isn't what it seems; *Critique & Humanism* moves beyond stereotypes in the trafficking debate; *Dialogi* objects to the Disneyfication of '89; *Kulturos barai* believes there's more mileage in the Baltic Way; *Host* remembers when the world wore shoes made in Zlín; and *dérive* discovers the historical hotbed of the risk–taking bourgeoisie.

## New Humanist 1/2010



350 million do it regularly. It offers levels of complexity and human interaction beyond any other art form. Yet, [laments Michael Bywater](#) in *New Humanist*, "video games aren't included in conventional definitions of culture".

"Grand Theft Auto IV, the most successful — and controversial — console game of all time, had a \$100 million budget, a production team of over 1500, and grossed \$310 million on its first day of release, some 50 per cent more than *Spiderman* — *The Movie* and around four times more than James Cameron's *Avatar* (on track to be the most successful movie of all time)."

Instead of treating gaming as a minority interest and inventing scare–stories of moral decay, writes Bywater, parents and pundits alike should accord this new medium the place it has already claimed in our culture: "Cultural commentators who sideline video games aren't doing their job and have no more reason on their side than the Victorian mamas who declared that novel–reading led to sexual incontinence and [...] to vitiation of the brain."

**Tzvetan Todorov and AC Grayling in conversation:** On the publication of his new book *In Defence of the Enlightenment*, [Tzvetan Todorov](#) tells British philosopher [AC Grayling](#) why the Enlightenment must be separated from scientism and cultural chauvinism: "To say that reason is only desiccating and too dry is a dangerous caricature. No less dangerous is to eliminate the place for arts, for myth, which is a different kind of knowledge of the world. We have to be cautious about both dangers, both reductions."

**Religion and modernity:** The "modernization theory" — the idea that the more society modernizes, the more secular it becomes — has been widely criticized for being unable to explain why, for example, the US is so religious,

despite being the epitome of modernity. Medical writer Tom Rees tries to update the modernization theory by adding new factors — above all "societal stress" and income inequality. So why *is* religion so strong in the US? "Well, largely because of the high levels of stress faced by its citizens", writes Rees, "compared with the relatively worry-free lives led by people living in the bosom of the European welfare state."

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### Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik 2/2010



Given the growing sense of social injustice combined with increasing political disaffection, four alternative political solutions present themselves, write Martin Allesspach, Alex Demirovic and Lothar Wentzel in *Blätter*: continue with the current neoliberal model; take a "third way" that combines a strong economy with a strong state, where green technology is an additional factor to growth; adopt the Green New Deal model, where the market, if held in check by the state, produces environmentally-friendly development; or explore a fourth option, a democratically-guided ecological restructuring of the economy.

Dismissing options one and two as implicated in the current problems, Demirovic et al. go on to attack the Green New Deal option for the fact that "social discrepancies play only a subordinate role and concepts for a democratization of economic processes are barely present". What use is clean energy technology when it is manufactured under "dirty" conditions? they ask, "when there are no wage agreements, when workers councils are blocked, when labour conditions are problematic and wage dumping occurs?"

Trade unions are well placed to guide a process of social-ecological restructuring. Under conditions of finance market driven capitalism, they have gained "bitter experience" of how economic power is arbitrarily exercised. "Increasingly, trade unions find themselves in the role of defenders of economic sense against short-term profit expectations. Implementing economic and ecological sustainability and re-connecting companies with their social duties is dependent to a great extent on the democratization of economic power."

**Banking regulation?** In Europe, governments want to centralize the banking supervisory bodies that have until now been operating at the national level, writes *Financial Times* journalist Lucas Zeise. Governments' delegation of regulatory responsibilities to the very same sector that caused the 2008 crash in the first place has deeply negative implications for democracy, says Zeise. "One can only applaud the Icelanders and their president. By refusing to take responsibility for the losses incurred by the banks and the speculators, the Icelandic people have probably found the sole effective lever for halting deregulation — and ultimately even reversing it."

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### Dilema veche 306–311 (2009–2010)



*Dilema veche* begins 2010 with gloomy predictions. According to Rupert Wolfe–Murray (issue 307),

"2010 will be another year of lost opportunity, another year in which we should (but won't) prepare for the coming crises. It will be a year in which untold billions of EU structural funds will not be invested in setting up the renewable energy systems that Romania so desperately needs to replace its ancient coal-fired generators: a year in which the over-staffed government agencies will argue continually with each other about whose responsibility it is to unlock the 32 billion euros that Romania has been allocated by the EU. It will be another lost year."

Marius Kivu discusses the deep inequalities between rural and urban Romania (issue 310). Rural populations — by no means a minority, whose cause is not advocated by human rights groups — are seeing their chances of a good life diminished by the day. Kivu notes that rural children, though they represent half of Romanian youth, are nine times less likely than their urban counterparts to go on to obtain a university degree. To blame, according to Kivu, is systemic discrimination caused by the lack of rural educational establishments and the "drain" of qualified teachers to the cities.

Nevertheless, there are good reasons to stay in Romania — or to return. Sebastian Burduja, President of the League of Romanian Students Abroad, believes he belongs to a generation with revolutionary potential (issue 311). "Currently, there are around 50 000 Romanian students in universities abroad. At least 100 of us will have the courage to return to Romania for the medium or long term, with a desire to act on the basis of new values, with integrity, competence and professionalism. It is said that power is not given, but taken. More likely is that power is negotiated in decisive moments in the history of a people. From thousands of miles away, it appears as though Romania is approaching such a moment."

**Also:** Radu Cosasu writes that Albert Camus was "neither communist nor anti-communist", a nuance difficult to digest for those "incapable of seeing the Left as anything but communist" (issue 310); and Sever Voinescu explains why such nuances are impossible for the moment in Romania: the country "never had an anti-communist Left; at most, and emerging just now, it has a Left that is indifferent to communism" (issue 310).

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**Gegenworte 22 (2009)**



"Are academies an outdated model or a project for the future?" asks *Gegenworte*, published by the Berlin–Brandenburg Academy of Science, in an issue on "the Academy". "In many cases, academies have become preservers of those academic and university disciplines that in recent years — enhanced by the necessity of self–promotion and focusing combined with acute shortages of money — can no longer be provided at the faculties", argues [Günter Stock](#) in a text on current changes in the German academic landscape.

Stock calls for the newly introduced German National Academy to fulfil its function as consultant for politics and society:

"If it is the case that science prepares and diagnoses social developments at an early stage, then it is right to expect that the National Academy of the Sciences sets its own agenda for advising politics and society - at a time when neither politics nor public opinion have noticed specific developments."

**Aimless genius:** [Carsten, Ferdinand](#) and [Tim Hucho](#) argue for the necessity of a three–pronged model for scientific institutions: universities, non–academic scientific societies and academies — and for the "aimlessness" of scientific research. The economic potential of Nobel Prize–winning discoveries was rarely known (or intended) by the sponsors or even by the scientists themselves: "What is the economic factor of the purely curiosity–driven experiments of a Mr Röntgen (Nobel prize 1901)? What industry funding did Lise Meitner raise in order to understand nuclear fission? [...] These men and women of genius conducted research in order to understand nature."

**Bologna:** [Volker Gerhardt](#) considers why academies still have a form that "allows for a combination of freethinking, interdisciplinary expertise and concentrated long–term research". "After '68 they were sheltered from the reforms. That's why they retained their freedom and independence, which universities have currently lost as a result of the Bologna process. While the academic world works in the grip of project fever, academies are largely independent of deadlines and evaluations."

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## Esprit 1/2010



Public disgust at antisocial behaviour by the rich often meets the response that they have the right to use their property as they choose. The accusation is timeless, the defence modern, explains Jean–Claude Monod: the assumption of ownership as an absolute right is largely a creation of the nineteenth century. Roman law separated *abusus*, the right to destroy property, from *usufructus*, the right to make use of it; medieval custom controlled property through tightly–negotiated networks of rights, where different groups held complementary claims to the same resource.

Now, however, we are gradually returning to systems of limited property rights, according to Monod. Environmentalism has introduced ideas of intergenerational equality, thus reintroducing the distinction between *usufructus* and *abusus*. Economics is attempting to quantify "externalities", the

social effects of activities that are overlooked in market prices, while in business, the model of the "Product Service System" sees manufacturers leasing rather than selling equipment. These are all moves in the right direction, writes Monod, but we must re-evaluate our concepts of property in order to build a world that is livable, breathable and shared.

**The great leveller:** The market is a fundamentally democratic institution, writes Laurence Fontaine. While science, business and government assign power according to status and ability, trade makes us equal, and always has. In Greece, the agora was both marketplace and political space, and medieval markets were partially exempt from the otherwise ubiquitous social stratification. In today's developing world, markets are an important venue where women can sidestep patriarchy. In opinion polls, the French have shown themselves enthusiastic for direct democracy; commerce, reconceived in this way, fits into that paradigm.

**Decadent Europe?** Christopher Caldwell's *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe* joins a cluster of books examining the situation of Muslims in Europe. Justin Vaïsse finds it marred by factual errors, by dubious interpretations of events (such as seeing the 2005 riots in the French suburbs as a result of Muslim fundamentalism), and by a generally skewed perspective. Yet his argument is self-serving. Caldwell, who like many of the writers on "Eurabia" is American, uses the figure of a "decadent Europe" blind to the supposed Muslim danger as a proxy for liberal viewpoints back home.

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## Merkur 2/2010



Continental shift, photosynthesis, soil erosion, sediment formation and the salinization of the oceans... in the natural sciences, transformation is more important than diversity, writes [Hansjörg Küster](#) in *Merkur*. Yet transformation should not be understood as a process culminating in the present; rather, what we see today is a freeze-frame of nature in a state of continuous development.

This insight challenges the way we understand "conservation", says Küster: conservation laws prevent people thinking about their landscapes, which are not always as natural as they seem. Three hundred years ago, large parts of Central Europe had considerably less woodland than today. In the late eighteenth century, forestry and livestock farming were separated and common land was privatized. "By 'shaping' nature, or by believing it was possible to do so, the concept of 'nature' became less clear, but at the same time became anchored in people's minds as an aesthetic category. People wanted to recreate an original state, to found idylls. At the same time, they wanted to win back the German state or create it anew."

At the end of the nineteenth century, with the Franco-Prussian wars won and the German *Reich* a reality, the rediscovery of Caspar David Friedrich signalled a longing for "untouched nature". But Friedrich's open pasture with the solitary oak was by no means a natural landscape, rather one that had arisen "in connection with forestry and cattle grazing". The conclusion? We need more research into how landscape can be managed and cared for, argues Küster, an approach to nature that is neither purely aesthetic nor scientific.

**Carl Schmitt:** Jan–Werner Müller reviews the new biography of Carl Schmitt by Reinhard Mehring: "Mehring does not perpetuate the myth of Schmitt's 'identity with the German destiny', nor does he interpret the career of [Hitler's] 'attorney general' as an allegory of German intellectuals' willingness to be seduced. Instead, he reads Schmitt's life as a story of disappointment, dating the beginning of the 'decline in his life and work' to 1932. Schmitt's National Socialism then appears more as self–deception and self–betrayal."

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### Critique & Humanism 30 (2009)



In a little over a decade, human trafficking has become a major issue on the international agenda. Nadège Ragaru looks at the process through which it became a "social problem". Human trafficking, she argues, has turned into an area where a variety of interest groups against trafficking try to establish their expertise, strengthen their legitimacy and get public or private funding. Today, the issue is seen as a human rights issue, a question of illegal migration or organized crime, and a form of slavery. This view is promoted by an ever increasing number of often competing factions (women's organizations, international actors, governments, NGOs) who offer their own often widely different readings of the origins of trafficking and ways to end it. This has often resulted in contradictory and short–lived anti–trafficking programmes that are part of the "problem" rather than its solution, concludes Ragaru.

**Prostitution migration:** The German discourse on trafficking presents the eastern European prostitute as an innocent victim lured into prostitution by the threats or false promises of ruthless men. Jenny Küinkel compares the representation of migrant sex workers as victims in the national discourse with their image as perpetrators in the local discourse. Omitting migrants' agency and an analysis of structural violence, the victim discourse serves to authorize raids in the sex industry, legitimizes precarious (migrant) work beyond the sex industry, and stabilizes the exclusive European migration regime. The local discourse, on the contrary, turns the victims into perpetrators. Küinkel argues for an approach that combines agency with an analysis of structural violence.

**Also:** Annette Treibel on migration as a tool for emancipation from traditional patriarchal forms of dependency; and Synnøve Bendixen on the daily experiences of young female Muslims in Berlin and how they apply techniques to resist, deconstruct and accommodate negative views of Muslims.

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### Dialogi 11–12/2009



"It is not easy for small nations", writes Primoz Jesenko; "they are positioned between two extremes, between the impression of inferiority and the exaggerated accentuation of their own importance. This is why Slovene creativity may appear as a disturbance in the system."

Slovene art fills the US curator with unease, writes Jesenko. Vito Taufer's stage production of *Alice in Wonderland* did not arouse the interest of the New York curator of the Performing Revolution festival because it was telling a story different from that of a culture in need of liberation. The Slovene crew felt it necessary to point out that the work marked the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, not of communism, as the US organizers had written in the press release. "Communism is not a notion which can easily be torn down, after which one could perhaps build a museum of contemporary arts in its place", muses Jesenko.

**Slovene feminism:** Renata Sribar invited a group of feminist authors to examine the state of Slovenian feminism today and find solutions to the current situation. While the movement that took shape in Slovenia in the 1980s and early 1990s has partially lost its power and influence, the new feminism either gets tangled in dilemmas that have already been solved or does not know how to express itself in a way that would make an impact. In the themed section, Valerija Vendramin focuses on the stigmatization of feminist theoreticians; Mirjana Ule looks at neo-feminism and the women's movement of the 1970s and 1980s; and Tatjana Greif describes how the gay and lesbian movements in Slovenia in the 1980s was groundbreaking for the whole of eastern Europe.

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### Kultūros barai 1/2010



Virgilijus Cepaitis, a former leader of the Lithuanian Sąjūdis movement, writes that the Baltic nations' peaceful overthrow of communism deserves more thorough study. Given the fact that Yugoslavia collapsed at the same time at the cost of hundreds of thousands of lives, political scientists and historians have yet to answer fully how it was possible to destroy one of the world's largest empires without violence.

**Journalism:** "Good journalism is good whether in print or online", writes [Heribert Prantl](#), political editor of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. It is not the Internet that is responsible for the "crisis of the press", but the subordination of journalism to the market. Increasing pressure to make a profit means that, for the first time since 1945, German journalism risks becoming trivialized.

**Literary perspectives:** Committed, critical writing in Denmark has long since left the domain of literature and turned to genres such as documentary film and journalism, writes [Andreas Harbsmeier](#). As it emerges from its sheltered existence in a reservation, recent Danish literature is collapsing the boundaries between the literary field and the broader public sphere.

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### Host 1/2010



In 2001, the 34-year-old first-time novelist Hana Andronikova published the immediately acclaimed *The Sound of the Sundial*. It tells the story of a mixed Czech-Jewish couple whose fates are caught up in the events of WWII. The novel is a worthy sibling of Simon Mawer's *The Glass Room* (2009), shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize. The lynchpin of both books is their *genius loci*. The role played by the Villa Tugendhat in Mawer's story is represented in Andronikova's novel by the town of Zlín. Known as an economic and architectural miracle of the first half of twentieth century Czechoslovakia, Zlín was dreamed-up, designed, and virtually ruled by the Bata family, famous for their successful worldwide shoe business.

During the communist era, Zlín was called Gottwaldov, with the oft-attached epithet "the town of work", and it continues to occupy a unique position in Czech cultural life. Zlín's creators designed it with broadminded cultural facilities that took on their own life, surviving the various regimes and creating an *imperium in imperio*.

*Host* features Zlín in several loosely connected articles, interviews and excerpts of poetry by four local poets. The texts reveal the roots of the specific nostalgia after the Bata era, when a utopian town sprang into existence with all its pros and cons (the pros being a secure modern life for all the workers, the cons being that corporate identity interfered even with the intimacy of family life).

With its two renowned publishing houses, broad literary scene and ambitious plans for converting the deteriorating factory complex into a cultural and educational centre, this artificial town signals that it still has a cultural potential other locations can only envy. Even if the "American dream" is irrevocably dead, as *Host* editor and Zlín native Martin Stöhr comments, referring to the decline of the shoe empire.

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### dérive 38 (2010)



Given the fierce and often emotional debates on the reconstruction of churches, palaces and entire urban districts, and the prevailing "architecture of the spectacle" *à la* Zaha Hadid, *dérive* asks: "What society do we actually live in?"

Sociologist Joachim Fischer understands architecture as a "symbolic medium of communication" and defines the current interest in reconstructing eighteenth and nineteenth century buildings as a "social movement" in the wake of the '89 revolution. Socialist architecture — Bauhaus built on a mass scale, according to Fischer — destroyed or neglected the historical, bourgeois medieval city-centres and had a "levelling effect". Contemporary reconstructions, in contrast, are the self-affirmation of "bourgeois society" after the experience of contingency and destruction in the twentieth century.

"The rediscovery of the occidental city takes place as part of a social revolution unlike any before it; it was not a classic case of a transformation from a pre-modern to a feudal society, but rather a new type of change in which modern [...] security societies turned into bourgeois risk societies — if the possibility of impoverishment, exclusion, private and public failure [...] are considered part of the bourgeois way of life. [...] And because this revolution takes place on the sites of the dilapidated old European buildings, abandoned to decay by a decidedly non-bourgeois social project, this basic revolutionary impulse leads to a comprehensive, exemplary rediscovery of the 'European city' as the historical hotbed of the risk-taking bourgeoisie."

**Parasitic strategies:** Why, asks Heike Delitz, have deconstruction and deformation become the distinctive design forms of recent architecture? "In fact, what deconstructivist architecture shows us could be connected to our desire for the *new*, for the *unforeseen* — insofar as our society differs from all others mainly by its search for the new, by its opening up to the unforeseeable as a main societal principle."

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