



Eurozine Review

Every bastard a king

Mute navigates the mediarchipelago; *Osteuropa* locates Khodorkovsky's Rubicon; *Samtiden* warns a species headed for self-destruction; *Ny Tid* goes gender neutral; *Dilema veche* considers fast-food religion and other less fashionable phenomena; *Vikerkaar* recommends social democracy as antidote to Estonia-ization; *Arche* has seen Lukashenka's economic policy somewhere/ before; *Revista Crítica* uses biography for empowerment; and *Ord&Bild* measures the distance between us and the living.

Mute 14 (2009)



In *Mute*, [Daniel Miller](#) writes in dystopic-dyspeptic mode on the depletion of public space and the atomization of digital society: "Everyone at the centre of their own virtual universe. Every bastard a king." As the "ideological frenzy" of modernism gives way to "computerized content management systems", and as global megacities render the urban grid and its certainties obsolete, societies of discipline become societies

of control.

"Modernist culture [...] succumbs to a thousand niche-market cuts, whipped raw by Chris Anderson's 'long tail' and decomposed into tribes by Mark J. Penn's 'microtrends'. [...] The new media-architecture begins to manipulate smaller units. The birth, from the ruins, of the negative centre, issues the coup de grâce. The centre is robbed of its sovereignty."

Miller envisions a "mediarchipelago" of discrete worldview-confirming web communities, globalization as fracture: "The new architecture of power creeps into homes and offices, locking the door to connect to a server in Moscow, shattering the self through the proliferation of windows, and syncopating the rhythm of the public/private divide."

The hive: Gifford Hartman describes how boxed bees are imported from China, awoken out of their winter hibernation in the California summer, and set to work pollinating the world's largest almond plantations. Organisms become as pliable as the information flows that order the global trade, he writes. Yet human fate is also tied up with that of the bees quite literally, because bees pollinate our crops. A collapse in the bee population would be fatal for humans.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Mute* 14 (2009)

Osteuropa 1/2010



Osteuropa publishes the [correspondence](#) (English in [openDemocracy](#)) between Russian writer [Lyudmila Ulitskaya](#) and [Mikhail Khodorkovsky](#), former oligarch and Russia's most debated prisoner. "For some you're a fighter and an important political figure", Ulitskaya writes, "for others a monster".

"I think of myself as a Voltairean", Khodorkovsky replies, "a supporter of free thinking, of freedom of speech. Yeltsin was my ideal in this sense, as G. A. Yagodin was before him. Working with them did not inspire any feelings of inner protest in me. The destruction of [the independent TV channel] NTV became my 'Rubicon'."

But before that, objects Ulitskaya, "you had somehow managed to go on working closely with a government which was increasingly losing any sense of decency". Khodorkovsky's answer is frank: "I took a long time to understand the importance of human values. It was when I did, that I rebelled. This was in 2001 — the NTV affair and the uprising was 'on its knees'. But then the question arose at the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs: what comes first — property or freedom of speech? NTV's debts to Gazprom were real. At that point I came to the conclusion that the one can't exist without the other, and I gave NTV 200 million dollars. Which was then used in the charges against me."

"I am not a revolutionary. If NTV had been preserved, perhaps I would have paid less attention to the other events. In general, I would not have wanted to 'stand out', and I would have left 'politics' to more active 'comrades'. Just as I always had. But this time I couldn't do it. I felt as if I were being strangled."

The full [table of contents](#) of *Osteuropa* 1/2010

Samtiden 1/2010



In *Samtiden*, Danish writer Carsten Jensen cites his eleven year old daughter, who asks: "Will I have children? And what about grandchildren?" She is worried about the future of the earth, surrounded as she is by reports of a planet in crisis. She genuinely wonders if there is a future at all.

"We are not the first civilization to face the threat of collapse. It is possible that our predecessors in the art of self-destruction, highly developed civilizations such as the Mayas or the Cambodian Khmer, saw themselves as the only real humans, and therefore thought that the end of their way of life was the end of the world. The difference between them and us is just that this time, it is true."

Today, continues Jensen, there is a global middle class with a radical rhetoric

but a conservative lifestyle. "They are the self-nurturing children of the present with a strong and inconsequential empathy towards a whole range of global issues, who in their own lives oppose all and any change. [...] The question 'Will I have children?' has no meaning to them, since they have never seriously worried about the future."

Tepid calls for change are insufficient, writes Jensen. "In times of war, entire populations have been able to join forces and demonstrate unprecedented courage and discipline." This is what we need now. But by the time the consequences of global warming are strong enough to really frighten us, it will be too late, he fears.

Also: Sven Egil Omdal on the fall and possible rise of the news media. He suggests redirecting financial support directly to journalists rather than continuing to penalize advertisers and readers with increasing prices for decreasing quality. And Geir Gulliksen feels that calling himself a man is too limiting and looks for a reapplication of language that allows for a wider spectrum of maleness that includes female qualities.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Samtiden* 1/2010

Ny Tid 9/2010



On the occasion of International Women's Day, Helsinki-based Finno-Swedish weekly *Ny Tid* publishes an issue dedicated solely to gender equality. The most striking thing with this issue is not the articles as such, but the use of gender neutral personal pronouns throughout the magazine. Instead of "han" (Swedish for he) or "hon" (she), authors use the invented pronoun "hen".

Hence, as the acclaimed illustrator of children's books Linda Bondestam welcomes the interviewer Angela Oker-Blom into her home, the scene is described like this: "Everything in *hir* surroundings serves as material for the illustrated stories that *ze* fills with strange creatures born out of the magical encounter of the pen with the paper."

Rita Paqvalén sketches the history of this practice and explains its purpose. In the English language context, writer and activist Kate Bornstein -- who was born Albert and underwent a sex change operation in the 1980s -- has loudly propagated the use of the gender neutral pronoun "ze" and its possessive form "hir". In Swedish, the pronouns "hen" and "henom" were introduced in the 1990s, but are barely used outside queer-feminist publications such as the magazine *Ful*.

"Pronouns make gender, they freeze flexibility and diversity", says Paqvalén. "The sometimes playful but always fundamentally serious attempts to circumvent the use of gender specific pronouns can highlight language's limiting, performative and normative practices. Practices that sometimes don't fit and therefore hurt."

[More](#) about *Ny Tid*

Dilema veche 311-314 (2010)



Romanian yuppies, following western trends, have been turning to feng shui, yoga and New Age, reports *Dilema veche* (issue 315). These new forms of "religion with substitutes" (a pun on the coffee available during the Ceausescu period) ignore fundamental questions about the human condition and instead provide immediate recipes for wellbeing.

Published 2010-03-10
Original in English
© Eurozine