



Eurozine Review

The Armageddon–obsessed superstructure

Mute puts the brake on the apocalyptic tendency; *Vikerkaar* rocks to the sound of China's ascent; *Wespennest* sees more than the tip of the literary iceberg; *Glänta* reaches for its gun; *Dialogi* asks where all the feminists went; *Samtiden* heals the feminist rift; *Arche* seeks a post–Soviet "genius urbis"; *NZ* explores municipal governance in a globalized world; and *New Humanist* says debunk the denialists, but beware of dogmatism.

Mute 15 (2010)



Marx's comment that history advances by the "bad side" has inspired an apocalyptic strand of anti–capitalism that "supposes history is necessarily on our side", writes Benjamin Noys in *Mute*. Obscured "tendency" — the Marxian concept that makes an appearance in volume three of *Capital* — becomes more real than actuality. Arguments that the crisis will deliver its own radical solution demonstrate "a traditional and teleological, if not providential, model of the dialectic between the forces and relations of production".

Noys takes issue with proponents of "accelerationism": Toni Negri, for example, who argued in the 1970s that the capitalist rupturing of Fordist structures in the factories was a desirable tendency that must be "pushed further into exodus". In Negri's subsequent thought, this tactic's failure led him to exchange an "encounter with the complexities of reality" for an "adventure of reason".

Accelerationism does have its uses, says Noys: it provides "a necessary sense that we must take risks with the method and cannot simply follow the contours of reality". Nevertheless, the tone that "welcomes apocalypse as the decisive moment" is "closely imbricated with the shift to a neoliberal financial and political regime and its crisis". Apocalyptic anti–capitalism "is a cultural and theoretical 'bubble' that has yet to burst".

Catastrophe cinema: End–of–the–world movies as Hollywood's response to our taste for apocalyptic imaginings brought on by financial crisis? Wrong, argues Evan Calder Williams: "In the era of severe and protracted global recession, we apparently go to the movies to see a hyperbolic equivalent of the everyday and its looming collapse. Or in other words, all critics become Marxists, if only for a day, straying onto the uncertain terrain of thinking the relation that links the defaulting base to the Armageddon–obsessed superstructure."

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Vikerkaar 4–5/2010



In the new issue of *Vikerkaar*, devoted to "ascendant powers", [Rein Müllerson asks](#) whether China will become the crouching tiger or remain the hidden dragon. Will authoritarian capitalism, Chinese style, co-exist peacefully with western liberal democracies — or will it begin to impose its values on its neighbours and force western democracies to invent a new model of capitalism in order to survive?

Rock 'n' roll: *Yaogun* — the Chinese version of rock 'n' roll — has evolved into a complex multilayered phenomenon during a time of rapid social and economic change, writes Katja Koort. *Yaogun* has undergone numerous changes of style since its traditional and rustic beginnings, corresponding to the gradual progress of urbanization and globalization, growing openness and economic self-confidence.

In recent decades, romantic-nationalist "oblique attacks" on the ruling ideology have turned into more blatant criticism. Yet the government has avoided harsh repressions, preferring to censor and obstruct performances. In modern China, writes Koort, "rock 'n' roll is probably the only area, along with the visual arts, where political and social criticism is allowed in a certain form and to a certain extent".

So why do the authorities not take greater steps to prevent the spread of dangerous ideas? "In modern China," writes Koort, "even party members no longer take the communist ideology very seriously. [...] The authority of the Communist Party is underpinned by the conviction held by most Chinese people that it guarantees social stability and holds the country together. By relaxing their ideological grip, the authorities create an illusion of free speech, ease tensions in domestic policy, and improve China's image abroad."

Brazil: Brazil's successful handling of the economic crisis disproves old prejudices about the rule of law and institutional efficiency in the country, writes Krista Lillemets.

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Wespennest 158 (2010)



Wespennest dedicates its current issue — entitled "[untitled]" — to "an archeology of the unpublished": "Can a magazine like *Wespennest* [...] perhaps outdo itself, open up the form of the magazine that little bit further, given that it is anyway much closer to production, to the unfinished, to the process of being fabricated, than a book," asks guest editor Michael Hammerschmid.

An essay on two failed magazine projects hints at an answer: Bertolt Brecht's and Walter Benjamin's *Krise und Kritik* (1930) and Maurice Blanchot's *Revue Internationale* (early 1960s) were two attempts to create common spaces of thinking and action in times of crisis and change, [writes Roman Schmidt](#).

Central to both projects — and their failure — were collective forms of the writing and editorial processes, in the case of *Revue Internationale* on a transnational scale:

"The first step in the common space of writing is the relinquishing of sovereignty and authority obtained in the national public sphere. Only then is 'total criticism' possible. Each writer is supposed to report on political and cultural processes in their country, and then leave the other co-publishers to write about it. Thus each is responsible for the texts of the others, texts that they themselves would never have written, but ones they must defend before their own respective public."

Ultimately, the prospective editors and authors were unwilling to subordinate their own authority to the collective. Yet Blanchot remained convinced of the concept as such: "The failure of our project did not show that it was a utopian one. What does not succeed remains necessary. That is still our concern."

Literary icebergs: "The published text is the tip of the iceberg: this sentence applies to every author. Yet it applies to varying extents". Leopold Federmair writes on Franz Kafka and Francis Ponge, among others, both of whom regarded publishing as secondary to their writing, and even hostile towards it.

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Glänta 1/2010



"It may be difficult to tell whether mankind has grown more virtuous or more evil through the years, smarter or more stupid. One thing is clear though: we have become better at killing each other." [Michael Azar](#) opens a themed *Glänta* issue on weapons with a fascinating survey of the development of arms, from spears and arrows to today's remote-controlled bombs. He describes how the English under Edward III revolutionized warfare by using longbows in the battle of Crécy in 1346. Dressed in suits of armour, the French were prepared for traditional hand-to-hand fighting, but were instead slaughtered from a distance. This was the starting point of a development that peaks in the drones over Pakistan and Afghanistan. "Not only have we become better at killing, we have also become better at doing it without putting our own lives at risk," writes Azar.

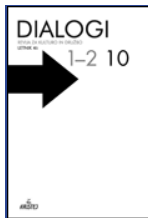
Cyborg soldiers: In post-humanist and feminist theory, the cyborg often stands for potential freedom from structures dominated by body- and gender-coded discourse. In [Cristina Masters'](#) critical [account](#), on the other hand, the cyborg soldier represents a desire for total masculinist control and domination. Machines, not human bodies, are now the subjects of the text.

"In signalling a desire for, and a figure of, total control, the cyborg soldier is eviscerating and erasing the messiness and excess that makes embodied experience potentially subversive." Masters instead calls for "a reengagement with the fleshy body" as the subject of politics, for taking up "the body as a critical site of 'embodiment in all its complexity and irreducibility'".

Also: [Edda Manga](#) criticizes Swedish policies on weapons export ("the peace movement turns into a war movement as Swedish idealism takes the form of 'humanitarian interventions'"); [Klas Gustavsson](#) investigates the mystery of the lost gun that killed Olof Palme ("We have to learn to live with the question marks"); and [Jonas Thente](#) writes a mini-encyclopaedia of digital weapons in computer games ("If you are hit by a swarm of bullets or a grenade [...] you have to wait a few seconds before the wounds have healed. Just like in a real war...").

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Dialogi 1–2/2010



Dialogi editor [Emica Antoncic](#) writes about feminism's fragmentation and lack of public presence in Slovenia. Anti-feminism is on the rise and has a powerful influence on the thinking of the female population itself. Contemporary feminism is incapable of shaping a movement that could systematically expose cases of hidden discrimination, argues Antoncic. This is clearly part of a wider phenomenon in which rightwing populism is becoming increasingly aggressive, while the political Left is completely absent and unwilling to engage in public debate.

"What were all those famous Slovenian women [...] thinking when, at a round table discussion on TV during last year's International Women's Day, they accepted the hosts' concept of women's issues as having to do with body and appearance. They answered silly questions such as 'How do you take care of your looks, what does your body mean to you, would you have plastic surgery?' without protest. In all these cases we see an acceptance by women of an established mentality without bothering to reflect on or challenge it."

Rockin' in Maribor 2012? Breda Kolar Sluga talks to Darko Golija, sculptor and professor at the Pedagogical Faculty in Maribor, about the European Capital of Culture project for Maribor in 2012. "Maribor needs a world-class elite, more contemporary art in the public space, more entrepreneurship, new facilities for the Art Gallery, a youth theatre, two more universities and several older ones, and last but not least, a good rock band."

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Samtiden 2/2010



"All women can do is to watch out for the rape-trap, utilize their own sexual capital with a feminist twist, and have as much fun as possible along the way. In other words, behave like a man."

Charlotte Myrbråten finds that feminism has worked itself into a cul-de-sac and that the feminist discourse has ended up with two opposing factions: a "new" and an "old" version, where the old strongly criticizes the new as highly sexualized, naive and self-centred.

There is no longer an obvious contradiction between stripping and liberation. Women's liberation acts only within the framework of the masculine. Women are more present on the job market and in education while popular culture gives the impression that all they want is to tear their clothes off and that beauty, lust and availability is what counts after all.

But feminism is not about beautification, says Myrbråten. It is about why some want to focus on their external beauty, or why some feel they have to. Old and new feminists have more in common than they think, but more tolerance and cooperation is required if the aim is to change society rather than just to change the debate.

Makeover: Agnes Ravatn has a dream. The dream to wake up one morning and, to her enormous surprise, find that she is finally naturally elegant, dignified and charismatic. So she has booked a makeover at a hairdresser's, to include makeup course, colour analysis and a shopping trip.

What follows is a nightmarish trip into the world of everyman–styling with a resultant: "I don't really look as if I am 'new', I look more like I'm suddenly old. With the black hair and flapping shawl I look like I'm on my way home to my pottery studio."

Also: Mustafa Can discusses the responsibility of the intellectual. Finding the present public debates bogged down with regurgitated citations of old philosophers, he describes how "in the poor, suppressed, illiterate environment where I grew up, our view of the researchers, writers, poets, journalists, artists, lawyers, doctors and philosophers was exactly that they were different to the rest of us". They "had an almost prophetic mission". But now, he feels, one knows what they are about to say, how they will say it and why, before they have even opened their mouths.

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Arche 3/2010



In *Arche*, [Rasa Balockaite](#), [Andrei Kazakievich](#) und [Alaksiej Lastouski](#) examine Soviet and post–Soviet street–naming in Minsk, Kiev and Vilnius as a means of mapping socio–cultural changes in the region. The Second World War (significantly, they avoid speaking of "The Great Patriotic War") was the dominant theme of Soviet memorial policy: victory in 1945 "was a monumental myth with whose help the cultural space of the Soviet Union was to be homogenized and the communist system legitimated".

From the mid–1960s, Minsk was transformed into one big war memorial, write the authors. Since 1990, only a few Soviet street names have been replaced and the overall proportion of Soviet–named streets in Minsk remains high: 15.4 per cent recall the Second World War and only 3.3 per cent commemorate pre–Soviet Belarusian history and culture.

Since Ukrainian independence, Soviet street names in Kiev have been targeted for renaming. While new names are often anti–Soviet or post–Soviet, this has not substantially modified the cityscape: many memorials for heroes of WWII have remained standing. In Vilnius, meanwhile, numerous streets had their

pre-Soviet names returned to them before independence. Today, there are practically no street names in the Lithuanian capital with Soviet associations.

Kurapaty: Between 1937 and 1941, up to 30 000 people were executed by the Soviet secret police in Kurapaty, a wooded area on the outskirts of Minsk with a strong symbolic significance for the Belarusian democratic movement. The Lukashenka regime has refused to recognize the Kurapaty as a site of a Soviet crime against humanity. Now, Volha Kukunya and Taciana Koscic, members of the state restoration institute Prayektrestauratsyja, discuss ways to make Kurapaty a national memorial.

Heritage: Tamara Habrus on the dereliction of cultural heritage sites in Belarus and the impact on tourism; and postcard images of Belarusian cities from the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

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Neprikosnovennij Zapas (NZ) 2/2010



In *NZ*, [Elena Trubina](#) considers four images of the city traditionally favoured by social scientists — bazaar, body, jungle and machine — in the light of contemporary Russian public discourse. The "bazaar", she writes, expresses the range of economic and social options offered by the city, yet also carries connotations of uncivilized or disorganized trading. Associated with the politically discredited Yeltsin years, the bazaar often becomes "an emblem of the alien and the unfamiliar".

The city as "body" draws analogies between social institutions, urban design, and the human anatomy. Historically, literal and figurative uses of the image have sometimes been merged and applied to support social selection, segregation or exclusion. But the image also points to the limitations of rational policy-making, expressing the organic character of environments where people function closely, and unpredictably, together.

The image of the "urban jungle" remains dominated by negative associations: the press refers to street kids as "Mowglis", while recently published photographs of the overgrown Ukrainian town of Pripyat were dubbed "Jungles of Chernobyl". The metaphor of the "machine", meanwhile, proved hugely popular in Soviet cinematography yet has lost its appeal as many Russian cities now indeed resemble "growth machines".

The polis: As nation-states seek new ways to address collective identity, and technological innovation offers new prospects for social interaction, Aleksandr Kustarev proposes that political power could revert to cities where, in classical antiquity, modern organizational models originated. Why should states and not cities be the sovereign geopolitical units of the global system?

Government: Vladimir Gelman offers a framework for the analysis of regional government in Russia, identifying three types of local regime: those supporting the status quo (characteristic of smaller towns); those encouraging growth and development (common in larger cities); and those with a progressive and ecological orientation. In Russian cities today elements of these regimes coexist in a curious and paradoxical mosaic.

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New Humanist 3/2010



Not only do denialists attack scholarly consensus using the simulacra of scholarship, they are often active in more than one field, [writes Keith Kahn–Harris](#) in *New Humanist*. One recent book shows that "a key group of figures in global warming denial earned their spurs in tobacco industry–funded attempts to discredit the links between smoking and cancer". Yet debunkers also run the risk of stifling debate. As sociologist Stanley Cohen puts it: "Global warming is not a phenomenon which has the same empirical validity as the Holocaust and it can't."

Debunking involves other problems, too. Howard Friel combed through the 3000 footnotes of "sceptical environmentalist" Bjørn Lomberg's book of the same name. He found not only that many failed to provide scientific proof for Lomberg's claims, but also that Lomberg systematically misrepresents studies that he cites in support. Yet Lomberg's book is lucid and readable, while Friel's *The Lomberg Deception* is detailed and technical. "However outrageous the claims that deniers make might be," writes Kahn–Harris, "they are dangerously persuasive in their accessibility."

Another problem: debunkers themselves are often naive — even fundamentalist. "You get the impression from reading the debunking literature that these people are not aware of the last 30 years in the social sciences," Stanley Cohen tells Kahn–Harris. "They see themselves as old–fashioned rationalists." Instead, when dealing with denialists, a path needs to be found "between a radical relativism that doesn't allow for any notion of truth and an old–fashioned commitment to the only truth".

Metaphysics: The immaterial mysteries of quantum physics confirm Jay Lakhani's belief in esoteric Hinduism. It is time to stop seeing consciousness as a secondary feature of matter, he argues: "Evolution and life itself are nothing but the struggle of consciousness to find greater and better expression in the material realm. In a single living cell this shows up as rudimentary cognition; in the human frame consciousness finds its greatest expression. Evolution is not random but directed."

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