



Eurozine Review

Performative biographism

Passage finds contemporary Danish literature is all about me, me, me; *Vikerkaar* offers a perspective on contemporary European literature; *Mittelweg 36* asks who is authorized to speak about rape; *Revista Crítica* argues that trafficking laws omit the crucial factor of citizenship; *Gegenworte* observes art and science converge in the study of living systems; *Res Publica Nowa* takes a dispassionate approach to political debate; *Springerin* sees artists failing to respond to Right culture; and *Dilema veche* explains why in Romania only the mad refuse a bribe.

Passage 63 (2010)



In an issue looking back at Danish literature published in the last decade, Jon Helt Haarder notes that "one of the most striking trends in the literary landscape of the Noughties was Me". Helt Haarder coins a term for this: "performative biographism".

Writers, appearing with their real names, inserted themselves in their texts and thus in their own way shared the general interest of Generation Me in... itself. The most obvious of this tendency's formal features was the mix of fiction and autobiography; the common theme was identity, caught somewhere between essence and construction.

In fact, according to Helt Harder, this trend is not confined to Denmark. Breaking down the barriers between art and life was a project of the historical avant-garde; via the relational art practices of the 1990s it has now become a dominant tendency in Scandinavian literature. Alongside Danish writers such as Peter Høeg, Suzanne Brøgger, Jørgen Leth and Das Beckwerk, he cites Carina Rydberg (Sweden) and Karl Ove Knausgård (Norway) to illustrate his point.

In an article on the "Exhibitionistic erasures of the self", Stefan Iversen pursues a similar track, focusing on the aesthetic strategies of Jørgen Leth and clausbeck-nielsen.net, who have both "rewritten" their own already published works.

Also: The issue is full of highly readable texts and will be an important reference when "the canon machinery" (as the editors call it) finally writes the literary history of the period. Lars Handesten provides an overview of the decade's prose, Peter Stein Larsen of its poetry; Louise Mønster detects "splits,

cracks and slippages" in the short stories of Helle Helle, Pia Juul and Naja Marie Aidt; and Lars Bukdahl makes a case for the most overlooked works of Danish literature in recent years, scrutinizing the arguments of their most critical critics.

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Vikerkaar 7–8/2010



A new issue of *Vikerkaar* on contemporary European writing translates articles from the Eurozine series "[Literary Perspectives](#)". [Daniela Strigl demonstrates](#) that Austrian literature is anything but a "German appendix"; [Tymofiy Havryliv interprets](#) the autobiographical turn in Ukrainian fiction; [Margot Dijkgraaf contrasts](#) conservatism with renewal in the Dutch novel; [Almantas Samalavicius surveys](#) literary styles in post-communist Lithuania; [Jonas Thente detects](#) something dark in Swedish fiction's fascination with suburban manners; [Andreas Harbsmeier greets](#) the return of the committed writer in Denmark; and [Katharina Raabe enjoys](#) novels from Central Eastern Europe since '89. In addition: Ieva Kolmane reads Latvian literature in a time of crisis and Triinu Tamm finds French fiction thriving in the Noughties.

The series as a whole, [explains Carl Henrik Fredriksson](#), redresses the provincialism of much literary criticism today by "re-transnationalizing" it. Developing the discussion, *Vikerkaar* editors [Marek Tamm](#) and [Märt Väljataga](#) argue that while globalization and the growing diversity of literature have made it ever more difficult to identify transnational trends, the method of "distant reading" advocated by Franco Moretti, and Pascale Casanova's concept of a global "Republic of Letters", can allow certain generalizations. They find, for example, that postmodern experimentalism, meta-fiction and magical realism are more popular in eastern Europe, whereas the West prefers the egocentric poeticization of personal experience.

But there are also similarities between Eastern and Western concerns: "The subjects of memory and history are equally important -- in the East, mainly in connection with the communist heritage, in the West, in connection with Nazism or colonialism; playing with the border between fiction and documentary is a device that appeals to writers everywhere; and in both East and West there remains a longing for novels that talk about 'what's really going on'."

Despite the possibility of viewing national literatures in a broader context, literary criticism today tends to limit its horizon to a strictly local scene. "The poverty of criticism may have dire results both for original fiction and for translations", warn Tamm and Väljataga. Regardless of globalization and cultural exchange, "the perspectives of world literature have not become clearer. Their opening up and clarifying requires purposeful work".

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Mittelweg 36 4/2010



Sexual violence in the context of war has long been a core research field at the Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, publisher of *Mittelweg 36*. In an issue focusing on the topic, editor Gaby Zipfel writes:

The phenomenon of sexual violence is obviously subject to specific rules of communication which, depending on the various social and historical contexts, determine the specific symbolic interpretation to be elucidated. These communicative rules, practised in tacit agreement, need to be decoded in order to gain a more precise picture of who is authorized to speak about experiences of sexual violence and when.

Júlia Garraio discusses two German contemporary novels (Hans-Ulrich Treichel's *Der Verlorene* and Reinhard Jirgl's *Die Unvollendeten*) and shows how in post-war West Germany sexual violence against displaced persons was both politically exploited and privately concealed.

The phenomenon of sexual violence in 1945 was used to illustrate Asian barbarism and as a metaphor for the threat posed to Germany and its western culture by communism. While the rapes were stylized in the public discourse as the image of the collectively suffering nation, the real rape victims were stigmatized and tended to be discriminated against in state reparations.

Also: The explanatory and epistemological potential of the categories prejudice and *ressentiment*, stereotype and topos. Julijana Ranc tests each against empirical findings drawn from group discussions and interviews.

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Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais 87 (2009)



The efficiency of recent policies designed to combat and prevent the sexual trafficking of women is debatable, write Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Conceição Gomes and Madalena Duarte in *Revista Crítica*. Not only do policies display a lack of understanding of the specific features of the trafficking of women the objectives underlying them fail to meet the subjective needs and expectations of trafficked women.

An effective help to women who are victims of trafficking implies a struggle against our own prejudices and stereotypes. It implies the definition of a politics of help that does not exercise control over the choices of those women: that respects them in their human rights, in different cultural contexts, without resorting to a universalistic discourse that will prevent us from understanding the political, social and cultural relations behind their options once in the country of destination. A progressive attitude in this field can only be an attitude that strengthens the collective consciousness of these

women and allows them to leave the condition of sub-humanity in which they find themselves through the construction of their citizenship. This is the biggest challenge that sexual trafficking poses to law.

Gay parenting: An appeal upheld by the Portuguese courts denying a homosexual father access to his child revealed the ambiguous position of the Portuguese courts in such cases and the predominance of legal discrimination based on sexual orientation, write Cecília MacDowell Santos, Ana Cristina Santos, Madalena Duarte and Teresa Maneca Lima. The subsequent overturning of the judgement by the European Court of Human Rights shows how the mobilization of the transnational judiciary can contribute towards reconstructing human and sexual rights, they observe.

The growing social visibility of 'new forms of family' and in particular of families composed by persons of the same sex or parenthood by individuals who do not define themselves as heterosexual is a recent phenomenon that offers a challenge to law and justice. [...] However, although one should not forget the power of law and the courts of law to alter meanings and identities, it is the social and cultural changes that bring about the transformation of the ways in which the courts deal with the interrelations between sexuality and family law.

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Gegenworte 23 (2010)



Nietzschean subversions notwithstanding, Kant's admonishments about the use of metaphor in scientific discourse and his emphasis of the primacy of the concept and category set the standard for the separation of art and science in modernity. Now, according to the new issue of *Gegenworte*, there are signs if not of a full-blown return to a Renaissance unity of art and science, then at least of a growing interest in interdisciplinary approaches. [Ingeborg Reichle](#) and [Frank Rösl](#), for example, [suggest](#) that the humanities can inform a non-classical and non-reductionist approach to cancer-research and living systems as a whole:

System theory, non-linearity, dissipation and emergence are today research concepts with which one attempts to understand living cells as multi-layered adaptive networks as well as dynamically oscillating systems. The exceptionally varied nature of networks obliges us to think about how the world and nature shape themselves and which laws can be deduced from this. [...] It is possible to imagine the generation of new approaches to animated micro-biological processes through the construction of alternative scientific models, and also through the creation of new art forms. Because not only artists but also scientists work with images, symbols and metaphors, draw on their intuition and make use of coincidence.

The museum: Horst Bredekamp, professor of art history at the Humboldt University, talks to *Gegenworte* editor Wolfert von Rahden about concepts of the museum — from Leibniz's *Kuriositätenkabinett* as "the world in a

nutshell" to the Humboldt brothers' understanding of the collection between "world museum" and "art gallery". The museum rediscovers its purpose today as the guardian of unfashionable branches of knowledge, says Bredekamp:

Approaches and methods are often developed and applied that are increasingly being abolished at universities — for example in history departments the so-called 'auxiliary sciences'. A mad concept — why is numismatics an auxiliary science? Something like this is almost exclusively carried out at museums. Or in biology, where the effect of mediatization has been that students look at the computer screen rather than studying a species *in vivo*. Over the centuries, museums have preserved the abilities of morphology, and thus — be it in the art gallery, the antiques collection or the natural history museum — compensate for shortcomings that have arisen at the universities.

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Res Publica Nowa 9/2010



Emotions are an intrinsic part of human personality and deeply bound up with rationality, but what part should feelings play in public discourse? *Res Publica Nowa* focuses on the relationship between politics and emotions in an issue responding to the political climate in Poland after the Smolensk plane crash in April.

"Just as poetry is not judged by the sincerity of the author's intentions, so a political culture emanating from emotions such as love, compassion, mourning, fear or pity is worthless," argues [Wojciech Przybylski](#). "Nothing unites or silences political debate as effectively as a disaster of symbolic proportions". Just as the rage, compassion and patriotism provoked by 9/11 precluded debate on reform in the US, so the Smolensk plane crash has taken its toll on Polish political discourse. Nebulous religious and cultural issues are more keenly discussed than questions of the economy, international relations or education, while fear of debate has put an end to arguments on issues such as the tension between environmentalism and development or *in vitro* fertilization. Emotion, Przybylski concludes, belongs to a tradition of community ritual; discussion and debate to the domain of public planning, reform and development.

Rapprochement? Maciej Melon wonders if the rapprochement between Poland and Russia since the Smolensk crash is more about Russian national interest than a genuine desire for diplomatic entente. The closure of the Katyn issue has improved Russia's image and will make relations with the EU easier, while encouraging the creation of a political map in which Poland is a "neutral" country. Poland, meanwhile, is caught between gratitude and constant unease about being branded Russophobic.

Patriotism? The poet, dramatist and former resistance fighter Marian Pankowski has claimed to be unable to recall any "patriotism" while a prisoner in Auschwitz, instead saying that his own memory is overwhelmingly about "sex, cruelty and mercy — not patriotism". A daring thing to say, writes

Joanna Ostrowska in a review of Pankowski's writings on life in Nazi concentration camps, because it undermines the myth that all Polish prisoners were upright, loyal and played no part in Nazi abuses — a myth that inhibited discussion on Polish involvement in the Holocaust.

Also: Rafal Romanowski laments the failures of cultural policy in the city of Kraków over the past decade; and Mihaly Laki analyses Hungarian discourse on the social and economic crisis in the country.

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Springerin 3/2010



"Why does an artistic practice that subscribes to an underlying notion of democracy find it so difficult to address rightwing populist tendencies? What type of artistic methods might be conceived in order to get to grips with the persistent lurch to the right?" ask the *Springerin* editors in an issue entitled "Rightwing fringes".

Politics of affect: Lawrence Grossberg analyses the history of left and right countercultures, commenting that "since the end of the Second World War, politics has increasingly been played out at the level of the affective and the everyday, [...] the level at which the counterculture was established".

Today, with the Tea Party movement in the US and rightwing movements in Europe on the rise, the Right has successfully adopted a variety of countercultural strategies; yet the Left remains oblivious to the necessity of dealing with the collective fears and discontent these movements address.

A Right culture: Edit András shows how art is able to question the nationally imposed consensus on historical issues that are, as in Hungary, highly disputed among the different population groups. Yet critical practice among Hungarian artists is still scarce; in the light of the recent election results, András wonders how long artists will go on sitting on the fence of political debate:

A day after his inauguration, the new Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán was already talking about the need for a 'Right culture': 'For the modern Right, the traditional Hungarian Christian culture from before 1945 no longer suffices [...], we need a new, modern culture that contains the old [...]. The Hungarian Right culture must be stimulated by artworks, prizes and celebrations.

"With a new, centralized cultural policy controlled entirely by the conservatives, the question of nationalism now really is unavoidable," András concludes.

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Dilema veche 328–333 (2010)



In *Dilema veche*, Victoria Stoiciu argues that the type of austerity measures adopted in Romania (deep, across-the-board cuts in public sector salaries) make little economic sense but were the only alternative for a weak and inefficient state apparatus (issue 331). "Only a strong state is able to implement targeted, diverse and complex austerity measures," writes Stoiciu. "What we are witnessing is the weakness of a captive state, incapable of implementing anything but the most simplistic measures — those that do not require efforts of coordination, objectivity and analysis."

Corruption: One of the main reasons for state inefficiency is pervasive corruption. In a dossier entitled "The tradition of bribery" (issue 329), Radu Paraschivescu writes that bribes are such an accepted part of daily life in Romania that the few who refuse corruption appear mad: "We can almost no longer imagine our lives without this agent of whim-fulfilment. That is why the doctor who refuses a bribe seems either to be a pathetic marginal or an eccentric trying to impress."

Six years ago, Adina Popescu wrote a "bribe guide" advising how much money one should give to obtain various services and best practices for passing bribes. Leafing through the guide today, she finds that nothing has changed except the prices. Andrei Ciurcanu, meanwhile, describes how businesses regularly bribe officials to obtain state contracts and then recoup their "expenses" by overcharging the public. Corrupt politicians and businesses gain while the state is rendered unable to build roads or provide quality services to its taxpaying citizens.

Cult of officialdom: A veneration of the public official together with a "paper cult" means that the Romanian administration has resisted introducing technologies that would increase its efficiency, according to MP Varujan Pambuccian, a professor of mathematics and information science (issue 331). "The use of a technology depends on what a society encourages at a certain moment in time," he says. "The organization of our society around the concept of the bureaucrat (who is considered virtually sacred) delays the intelligent use of technologies that in other countries have become banal."

Justice reform: The EU monitoring on justice reform needs to be stepped up with a toughening of sanctions for non-compliance, argues Cristian Ghinea (issue 330). Responding to politicians who want to see an end to monitoring, Ghinea argues that the success achieved in the justice sector thus far is the result of external pressure.

Also: [Kenan Malik](#) argues that fear of causing offence strengthens the hand of religious bigots; and [Mikhail Khodorkovsky](#) corresponds with [Lyudmila Ulitskaya](#).

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