Eurozine Review
Putting the aesthetics back into politics

In Free Speech Debate, Ian McEwan says freedom of speech is religion's protector; New Humanist explains why actor David Oyelowo left British TV to play Martin Luther King in "Selma"; in New Eastern Europe, Andrew Wilson insists that Russia's propaganda is only skin deep; Ord&Bild discerns continuities between Greece's military junta and today's troika; L'Espill says we are all Greece; Merkur reconsiders the little literary magazine's capacity to bring aesthetic and political objectives under the same roof; Revista Critica views the Mediterranean from the perspective of a universe of borders; Passage hears an echo on the literary telephone line; and Vikerkaar remembers moments of reprieve at the theatre in Tartu.

Free Speech Debate, February 2015

"Free speech is not religion's enemy, it is its protector." So says English novelist Ian McEwan, writing in Free Speech Debate (UK). "The freedom that allows the editors and journalists of Charlie Hebdo their satire is exactly the same freedom that allows Muslims in France to worship and express their views openly. The devout cannot have it both ways. Free speech is hard, it's noisy and bruising sometimes, but the only alternative when so many worldviews must cohabit is intimidation, violence and bitter conflict between communities."

It is precisely because free speech is not religion's enemy but its protector that "there are mosques by the score in Paris, London and New York. In Riyadh, where it is absent, no churches are permitted. Importing a bible now carries the death penalty."

More on Free Speech Debate

New Humanist 1/2015

In an extended editorial in New Humanist (UK), Daniel Trilling focuses on the aftermath of the Paris terrorist attacks in January 2015. In the shows of unity among citizens on the streets of France on the Sunday following the attacks, Trilling recognizes the potential for beginning "a conversation about how to bridge our differences, rather than paper over the cracks" — the latter being the preserve of (extreme) rightwing movements such as Pegida in Germany, the French Front National, UKIP or Greece's Golden Dawn.

An article from www.eurozine.com
If it’s not Jane Austen or Dickens: Reni Eddo–Lodge recounts British actor David Oyelowo’s experience of pitching a historical drama with a black character to a British executive. Oyelowo, writes Eddo–Lodge, summed it up like this: "They said if it's not Jane Austen or Dickens, the audience doesn't understand. I thought, 'OK — you are stopping people having a context for the country they live in and you are marginalizing me. I can't live with that. So I've got to get out.'"

Oyelowo went on to play Martin Luther King in Selma. "Black talent grows in Britain", concludes Eddo–Lodge, "but is not allowed to flourish". Moreover, "there's a danger of the US struggle against racism being globalized into a narrative of the struggle against racism everywhere. We have to be honest with ourselves. Our histories are similar, but they are not the same."

Racism and justice: Lara Pawson examines the recent deaths of black men at the hands of law enforcement officers on both sides of the Atlantic: Eric Garner last summer in New York, and deportee Jimmy Mubenga in 2010 at London's Heathrow airport. "I can't breathe", both men were heard saying minutes before their death. "These three words seem to capture the reality of racism and justice in the US and the UK", writes Pawson. With no successful charges having been brought against the officers at whose hands Mubenga and Garner died, she is forced to entertain "the possibility that the deportee in Britain today, like the unarmed black male citizen of the United States, is so deprived of rights that acts committed against them are no longer crimes".

The divided self: Paul Mason traces the effects of technology on human character, contrasting Virginia Woolf’s stream of consciousness with "a public, multi–identity lifestyle" lived out today both on– and offline “on a scale not only unimaginable in Woolf’s time but impossible one generation ago.”

The full table of contents of New Humanist 1/2015

New Eastern Europe 2/2015

The assassination of Russian opposition politician Boris Nemtsov on 27 February happened five days before the latest issue of New Eastern Europe (Poland) came out. As the debate about the role that Russian propaganda might have played in preparing the way for such a political assassination rages on, Andrew Wilson's analysis of what he calls "Russia's 'nudge' propaganda" is particularly timely.

Wilson distinguishes between the Kremlin's machinations at home and those aimed at influencing the political climate in Europe:

"For more than a decade now, domestic Russian politics has been dominated by actors, proxies, cynics and fakes. If the Kremlin needs sympathisers, it invents or pays them. In the EU the forces exist anyway; the Kremlin has not created them, but has proved adept at 'nudging', that is slightly pushing them in the required direction."

As such, "Russia's view of Europe sees only a dysfunctional EU and sick nation–states being overthrown from below. Hence, once again, an eclectic approach masks propaganda that can only be skin deep. Russia's claim to be a conservative power is hollow; it is not a nineteenth–century power in the sense
of the Tsar standing firm with his fellow autocrats against all threats from below. Modern Russia stands for the opposite — the Kremlin hides behind the Russia Today logo of ‘Question more’ to promote any minority force that challenges existing power structures.”

**Much-needed modernization:** Mykola Riabchuk interprets "the ongoing Russian–Ukrainian war, euphemistically defined as a 'crisis'”, as "the beginning rather than the end of a painful and painstaking process of emancipation of both nations from a pre–modern 'imagined community' of eastern Slavs (the medieval Slavia Orthodoxa), reinvigorated and over– politicized today in a highly ambiguous concept of Russkiy mir."

"Thus", he concludes, "the promotion of overarching civic identities in [Russia, Ukraine and Belarus] should be an urgent task for reformers, as it is the only way to facilitate much–needed modernization. This, however, requires a full understanding of how local pre–modern identities — a kind of Orthodox–Slavonic ‘ummah’ — have been historically constructed, and what discourses support them today."

**Also:** While the main focus of the international community naturally remains on Donbas, Piotr Andrusieczko and Roman Osharov each present complex pictures in their reports of life on the ground on the Crimean peninsula.

The full table of contents of New Eastern Europe 2/2015

**Ord&Bild 5/2014**

The new editors of *Ord&Bild* (Sweden) — Ann Ighe and Patricia Lorenzoni — dedicate their first issue to crisis–ridden Greece. In short texts between articles, Greek people respond to the editors' requests to talk about what it means to live in today's Greece. The stories serve as a startling introduction to the reality behind daily news headlines.

"At work, everything is falling apart”, says a single, state–employed woman of 38. "The goal is that nothing should work, so that people will end up calling for the more efficient private sector to take over”.

**Junta, troika:** Kajsa Ekis Ekman, author of a book on the eurocrisis as seen from Athens, rereads a 1969 reportage from Greece by Swedish writer Sun Axelsson. Ekman reflects on the similarities between a military regime and a regime of technocrats: "The strike bans and strict labour laws that the junta introduced had the exact same effect as the restrictions on the right to strike and the brutal wage cuts that the troika is demanding today."

**Extractivism above all:** In a report from the Greek village Ierissos, Anna Bredström covers the relentless fight of environmentally conscious locals against the state and the mining company Hellas Gold. In 2012 and 2013, things came to a head concerning the company's gold–mining activities in Chalkidiki. Bredström writes:

"With a prime minister whose explicit ambition is to defend foreign investment at any price, it makes very little difference that the contracts are written in a way that any possible profits from the mine will scarcely benefit the Greeks;
for the government, it's all about showcasing a business−friendly Greece”.

Michele Lapini's photos of local resistance at the Skouries mine and Evie Papada's analysis of extractivism's impact on the area complete the story: "It's not the first time that financial crisis has been used as an excuse for exploitation of the environment and violation of basic rights", Papada writes.

Also: The first chapter of Aris Fioretos' new novel Mary, set during the Greek student revolt of 1973 and due out in Swedish in autumn 2015 (and in German next year).

The full table of contents of Ord&Bild 5/2014

L'Espill 48 (2014–15)

The editors of L'Espill (Valencia) condemn the conditions imposed on Greece in return for financial bailout, undermining living standards to the point where as much as half the population has "entered a spiral of impoverishment and collapsing expectations". They compare this situation to that created in Germany in the 1920s, following the Treaty of Versailles, "To condemn a country of the European periphery to the sad destiny of a failed state is an error of major dimensions", created by "the unilateral dogmatism of politicians who think only in provincial terms, of internal politics".

Having slammed the role of Spanish ministers in seconding current eurozone policies, the editors consider all of our futures to be threatened by "the imbalance between north and south, the dogma of failed prescriptions for austerity, and the time that has been lost in not carrying out real reforms that could have brought rigour and efficiency while safeguarding social cohesion."

Overshoot: A dossier considers whether industrial civilization really is heading toward "collapse", and how to achieve the transition to a post−carbon society. The idea of "overshoot", that industrial development is exceeding the resources of a finite planet, writes Ernest Garcia, has been in circulation ever since the 1972 Limits to Growth report from the Club of Rome. A mass of evidence has been collected on different aspects — climate change, droughts, resource depletion — but very little has been done in response.

For the moment, overshoot remains a hypothesis: conclusive evidence will not arrive for another ten or 20 years. However, Garcia will have no truck with pundits who continue to dismiss overshoot as an "irrational conviction", implying that such a collapse is impossible. This position, says Garcia, is tantamount to "a particularly pernicious variant of the fetishistic idea that some institutions are 'too big to fail'."

Wait and see? The most common attitude, says Antonio Turiel, is simply "wait and see". The problem is that collapse is never a matter of a single moment but "a process, that is not always easy to recognize until it's too late". Indeed, if the hypothesis has any validity, collapse is already underway. This means there will be no single "eco−apocalypse", as often portrayed, but simply that "things get worse and worse [...] until one day we look at the world and we don't recognize it."
Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker recently completed a three-volume *Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, prompting Carlos Spoerhase to reflect in *Merkur* (Germany) on the fortunes of little literary magazines.

For as long as it flourished in a "sociotope of small publishers and galleries, independent book shops and literary cafés, clubs and cabarets", writes Spoerhase, the magazine of modernity constituted "an important element of the microsociology of aesthetic innovation". Today, he discerns instead "the decoupling of aesthetic and intellectual concerns".

Of course, a literary event such as the publication in instalments of James Joyces' *Ulysses*, between 1918 and 1920, in *The Little Review* is unlikely ever to reoccur. But neither, argues Spoerhase, are the "isms" present in the same way as, for example, American liberalism was in underpinning the literary tradition that T.S. Eliot or Lionel Trilling once forged:

"These 'isms' were able to bring aesthetic and political objectives under the same roof, since they were founded upon a firm belief rooted in the history of ideas, a belief that is in the synchronicity of cultural and societal progress. This synchronicity provided writers and intellectuals with the moral imperative to dovetail aesthetic judgements of taste with the cultivation of political judgement. It would be difficult today to uphold any such approach."

That said, predictions of the literary blog succeeding the printed little magazine have so far proven hollow. "On the contrary", concludes Spoerhase. "Should one look at the recent founding of magazines such as *BLOCK*, one sees here too an aesthetic sensibility for the specific paper materiality of magazine culture. It's no surprise either that the contemporary art magazine co–published with *n+1* is called *Paper Monument*. Today, he who ties great hopes to little magazines doesn't seem to want to go without the handy paper version."

(For more on *n+1* and other US little magazines, see Roman Schmidt's recent conversation with David Marcus, a new editor at *Dissent*.)

**Eurasian despotism:** *Merkur* goes some way toward redressing the absence in German translation of any of John Keane's works — the most recent being *Democracy and Media Decadence*. In an article entitled "The new despotism: Presages of the end of democracy", the political scientist sternly warns of the dangers posed by the dictatorial regimes of Eurasia, the "new geopolitical centre of our planet".

**From the desk of the graphic designer:** This year's redesign by Erik Stein sees a change of paper, font and layout, giving the journal a fresh new contemporary look and feel.

The full table of contents of *Merkur* 3/2015
The Mediterranean was once a space par excellence for political action and reflection, notes Italian sociologist Iside Gjergji in Revista Crítica (Portugal). The debate around its history, culture and anthropology was a popular one. Now migrant destinies and border practices dominate the "Mare nostrum postcard image".

"The Mediterranean has been transformed into a permanent frontier, mobile and haunting, that hinders encounters and divides persons, especially the poor and the rich, those who have everything and those who have nothing but themselves, the 'white' and the 'coloured', Europe and Africa."

Gjergji concludes that it is "the universe of borders which provides the best angle for viewing the contemporary Mediterranean in all its complexity".

From the centre to the periphery: With the end of the Cold War, conflict prevention and resolution as practiced by western powers took on the form of a mission civilisatrice. The same goes for peace−building processes, writes peace and conflict studies scholar Daniela Nascimento.

However, these "peace−building missions, as important as they may be, don't represent only conflict management. They are above all the reflection of a particular model of internal government exported from the centre to the periphery of the international system and that is based on the principle of liberal democracy." Despite raising awareness of the multiplicity and complexity of the underlying causes of conflicts, these strategies have rapidly become dominant, crystallizing into an agenda that favours civil and political rights and institutions, and neglects social, economic and cultural guarantees.

The full table of contents of Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais 105 (2014)

Passage 72 (2014)

"Mr Watson, come here. I want to see you." These two sentences, spoken by Alexander Graham Bell to his assistant on 10 March 1876, are said to be the first words transmitted by means of telecommunication. Ever since its invention, the telephone has brought anxiety upon and stimulated the cultural world in equal measure.

Passage (Denmark) subjects this ambivalence to further scrutiny. Jan T. Schlosser and Ole Nyegaard discuss the arrival of the household telephone as reflected upon in Walter Benjamin's Berlin Childhood and Proust's In Search of Lost Time. Voice becomes dissociated from the speaker.

An excerpt from Infinite Jest (translated by Claus Bech) provides insight into the stresses and strains of video phone calls, not to mention a dose of the uncompromising media critique that David Foster Wallace laid out in his sprawling magnum opus. Further, Martin Gerster Johansen and Søren Langager Høgh survey the telephone's impact on almost 140 years of Danish literature and culture, tracing its transformation from a subject of either
"jubilation or fear" to a neutral means of communication. As the technology develops, the dimensions of narrative space shift.

**Internalizing technology:** Tore Rye Andersen notes that whereas an author like Thomas Pynchon portrays the telephone network as a physical entity outside of the individual, Jennifer Egan portrays it as an integral cyborg-like part of our identity — in works such as *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010). Moreover, Andersen draws attention to the non-fictional implications that the internalization of technology has for privacy:

"Edward Snowden's disclosure of the extent of the NSA's surveillance of our cell phone's metadata (and Angela Merkel's) clearly shows that the massive freedom smartphones give us also makes massive surveillance possible."

Doubtless, Bell's commandeering voice continues to echo in the twenty-first century.

The full table of contents of *Passage 72* (2014)

**Vikerkaar 1–2/2015**

The latest issue of *Vikerkaar* (Estonia) focuses on concepts of game, and play. Anu Allas searches for reasons as to why the concept of game — or Spiel, as it came to be called — became so prominent in Tartu's theatrical landscape during the 1960s.

"The development of theatre in Tartu is peculiar", notes Allas, "primarily due to its context, the fact that it was born in the Soviet Union and was engaged in complex negotiations concerning the official demands that art was expected to meet. Although it had quite a lot in common with its western counterparts — the productions of Peter Brook, Jerzy Grotowski, Living Theatre, La Mama and others — it had almost no contact whatsoever with them."

The late socialist environment, with its rigid life models and mentality, may have supported interest in the concept and phenomenon of game as something that can offer hope. A romanticized view of games as phenomena that allow some kind of higher humanness to manifest itself, may also have played a role. Referring to two renowned Estonian playwrights in the first instance, Allas continues:

"The arrival at one's 'true self' described by Vaino Vahing and Mati Unt, the tearing off of masks and liberation from the vices of the modern civilization that games are supposed to enable, derive in a broad sense from this romanticized view, according to which the game leads to a more real life, a greater humanity and 'authenticity'".

Also: Young Estonian creators of computer games discuss problems specific to games as opposed to other modes of communication and infotainment; and Oliver Laas discusses the game as a conceptual metaphor in the history of ideas.

The full table of contents of *Vikerkaar 1–2/2015*