

Summary

The 136th *NZ* issue addresses a number of topics, spanning a wide range of subjects in humanities and social sciences. Although these topics belong to different fields, one can nevertheless trace certain links between them.

The issue opens with *NZ ARCHIVE*, a section featuring a chapter from *"Russian Purge and the Extraction of Confession"* by Frederick Beck and William Godin, first published nearly 70 years ago. The authors – a German physicist of Dutch descent and a Soviet Ukrainian historian, both of them had survived the Gulag and ended up in the West after the war – hid their identities under pseudonyms to analyze various theories invented to explain possible reasons behind the Stalinist purges: versions they had learned from friends, acquaintances and fellow inmates. Such theories helped a number of Soviet citizens, the majority of them dedicated Communists, to find some rationale for the mass repressions inflicted by the state on its own people. Almost forgotten today, Beck and Godin's book once played an important role in establishing an entire branch of Sovietology and was widely quoted in works on Stalinism that have come to be considered classics.

The chapter was translated by Alexander Kustarev, the author of our regular column *POLITICAL IMAGINARY*, whose essay is published alongside the excerpt. In *"Crisis in a Crisis-Free Society"*, Kustarev builds on the work of the socio-

logist Max Weber and his followers to construct a "theory of purges" that can to some extent be seen as further developing the arguments of Beck and Godin.

The theme is continued in *SOCIOLOGICAL LYRICS*, in which Aleksey Levinson attempts to rationalize another political and social psychological phenomenon: the repressive line taken by the Russian authorities lately and the society's attitude towards this new, pragmatic stage of authoritarianism.

Over the recent years, animism has gained popularity as a school of thought, provoking lively discussions in some philosophical circles. The relationship between the mechanical and the human; philosophy of things; dynamic links and entanglements between things; a possibility to animate them – all these notions, to some degree, continue the old tradition of "Nature vs. Culture" debates and even the mediaeval discussions around *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*. This range of subjects is the focus of the section "ENTANGLEMENTS: ANIMISM AND THE LIFE OF LINES". It begins with a seminal article by Tim Ingold, a professor of anthropology at the University of Aberdeen. As well as providing an introduction to the subject, *"Bringing Things to Life: Creative Entanglements in a World of Materials"* also defines a set of ideas on which to build in subsequent discussions. Denis Shalaginov further develops some of Ingold's themes, while Evgeny Kuchinov concentrates on the idea of what is known as techno-animism.

Finally, another classic in this field, Isabelle Stengers, a professor at the Free University of Brussels, proposes to “reclaim animism”, going beyond conventional philosophical notions and concepts in her article.

This section is complemented by the articles in which relationships between the technical and the human (as well as between the technical and the natural) are interpreted in a more traditional key, mostly using the language of cultural description and analysis. “ENTANGLEMENTS: BY WAY OF AN AFTERWORD” comprises two essays, beginning with “*Darwin among the Machines*” by the late 19th-century English writer Samuel Butler. Although relatively unknown in Russia, this brilliant polemicist is famous, among other things, for his critique of technological progress and Darwinism. The translator Vladislav Degtyarev expands on Butler’s essay in his own piece, developing the notion of contrast/entanglement between the mechanical and the historical. Philosophical theories of science – those essentially leave unanswered the question of the so-called “scientific truth” – are at the centre of a conversation between Richard Marshall, a regular *NZ* contributor, and Steven French, a professor at the University of Leeds.

The theme of entanglements between Nature and Culture (the latter understood as the political here) is further developed in some sense in the next section of this *NZ* issue. “THE ARAB WORLD AMID THE PANDEMIC, DE-SACRALISATION AND WAR” opens with a key article by the German historian, political scientist and essayist Stefan Weidner, whose title speaks for itself:

“Virus and Terror: On Unspoken and Frightening Similarities between the Coronavirus Crisis and the War on Terror”. The other two pieces in the section – “*The Kingdom of Morocco, the Bureaucratization of Islam and a New Arab Spring*” by Andrey Zakharov and Leonid Isaev and “*The Social Politics of the Taliban and Hezbollah as a Way to Legitimize These Movements*” by Margarita Medvedeva – examine the specifics of the socio-political and ideological situation in certain Arab countries of the Maghreb, the Middle East and Central Asia. The section is thematically linked to a conversation between Dmitry Ermoltsev and the orientalist Rustam Shukurov.

Another theme explored in the 136th issue is marginal movements and manifestations in postwar Soviet culture, both official and underground. To accommodate this subject, we have made a slight change to the title of one of our regular columns: POLITICS OF CULTURE appears in this issue (and only this once) as POLITICS OF (SOVIET) CULTURE. It contains Vadim Mikhailin’s piece on hidden gnostic and mystical motifs in Andrey Tarkovsky’s diploma film “*The Steamroller and the Violin*”, and on the historical and cultural circumstances behind them. Igor Smirnov offers a brief survey of the Moscow Conceptualist school, interpreting the work and (self-) reflections of its artists through their attitude towards avant-garde art and thought.

The issue traditionally concludes with a NEW BOOKS section, which features, among others, a piece by Alexander Lyusiy: a detailed review of Aleksey Popov’s socio-economic and political history of Crimean resorts.

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