

Through the experience of the first global recession of the new century, it feels as if the new millennium has not brought the silver space suits and hovercraft transport that we were expecting but a momentous decline in all aspects of human existence: economic stability, environmental resources, political freedom and support for cultural expression. Whether or not we, and particularly those of us living outside the Developed World, ever had these pillars of progress is debatable but, nonetheless, loss is felt. In the context of the UK, 2010 has witnessed not only the endurance of the current recession but also the prospect of future and continuing decline. Prior to the general election, newspapers, reports and studies were filled with the prediction of a Tory win with cuts and freezes on all aspects of public life. The coalition with the Lib Dems has done little to abate these fears and there is a lingering breeze that brings in the battering down of hatches rather than the bloom of new prosperity.

That the prior boom had given us so much expectation and had conditioned us to forget past miseries was nowhere more evident than in the obsessions with the glitz and glamour of celebrity. It was ushered in to the new millennium by a flurry of gossip mags and round the clock reality shows. But as Patrick Tobin notes in his expedition to Sundance, the engagement with their cultural sphere is far beyond mortal reach. The saddest side to his exhilarating tale may be the discovery that the supposedly superior celebrities, the “filmic intelligentsia,” have not declined but rather failed to exist in the first place.

This uncovering of failed potential strikes a chord with other contributions to this issue in which artistic and cultural expression is described to be far more complex than the great public projects that try to drive on the progression of civilization. Emma Lennox details the way in which Eisenhower’s grand American interstate highway system has been interpreted and remade by cultural pioneers from film noirists to the beat poets and counter culture rebels. Nihilism and identity crises rather than future potential have ruled the movies that began with the possibility inherent in the early cinematic phantom rides. In Johnny Rodger’s description of a Berlin that confronts us with anti-answers to what it means to be a metropolis in the aftermaths of the destruction wrought in the twentieth century, decline becomes not so much a trajectory as a spiralling continuum that interacts in new ways

with the population. The city appears to offer implosions of urban growth, “Alexander Platz (– think St Enoch Square, but on a vast, near interplanetary-space scale),” the potential for a civic forum “wasted”. However, the architecture does take on the quality of its inhabitants and the psychological scarring of fascism and political division is represented in a city that introduces and reiterates the questions of gaps and absences that define its make up. These aspects can be seen as parallel to the ‘dislocating cycle’ that James Clegg locates in Modern Art, a form that by ‘excluding the past in order to be present, is always partial and fragmented.’

Yet were we to presume that the clashing of the new world and the old world necessarily brings about change, Dudley Owen Edward’s examination of John Wayne and *The Quiet Man*’s Irish reception, points to the way in which identity can be reconfirmed and resolutely fixed in the meeting of different cultural forces.

While the various journeys through decline in art and culture often make it hard to imagine optimistic, heartfelt, productivity (and do we desire such a thing), the one thing they do not do is posit an End. As Clegg points out, decline is not ‘fall’ but instead the potential for a never-ending state. As for Žižek, Mitch Miller will let you know.

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