

## INTRODUCTION

The first editorial is a dangerous genre, all too prone to vacuous good intentions and unredeemable hostages to fortune. (Remember *Citizen Kane*!) A few years ago, we might still have managed a certain boisterous self-confidence in defining the categories of 'culture', 'ideology', 'subjectivity' and 'power' that we shall be investigating in *New Formations*.<sup>1</sup> In these bad new days - made worse for us by a concerted conservative attempt to recolonize this intellectual field - we have learnt to be a bit cannier, a bit more sceptical. It is therefore as well to start by saying that it is these categories, and the relationships between them, that will themselves be under interrogation. Never the last word, they provide a starting-point, a series of questions to be asked.

Even if there are no hard and fast definitions and no statements of position here, though, a new journal does need some justification. The impulse behind *New Formations* is the need for sustained critical engagement with the regimes of representation that have become a characteristic and peculiarly pervasive feature of the way power is exercised in contemporary societies. This production and circulation of meanings and images may be most spectacularly evident on occasions like the totalitarian extravaganza of the Los Angeles Olympics or Live Aid's neo-colonial 'party', when the global address of such events threatens to destroy cultural differences as these differences are staged for privatized television consumption. But the concerns that flow from an engagement with a politics of representation lead in many other directions too, as the variety of the articles in this issue suggests. Subjection and the subject - always imagined and lived through its differences from an 'other' - provide one set of questions which is explored here in relation to categories of gender and sexuality, experience and biography, and the ideological community of nationality. Or again, that conception of 'otherness' as constitutive not just of subjectivity but also of cultures, recurs in the consideration of forms as historically and textually diverse as Poiret's orientalist fashion designs and the exoticized sexuality of the Ballets Russes, the theoretical and political writings of Frantz Fanon, the films of Powell and Pressburger, and the invention of 'Englishness' as an imaginary artefact. And the growing political importance of the cultural sphere is evidenced yet again in the attempts of the Greater London Council between 1981 and 1986 to create a radical, pluralistic public culture by 'giving a voice' to groups that were supposed to represent gender and ethnic identities. Of particular interest for us are the problems thrown up by this reliance on common-sense notions about communities of identity and the attempts within the GLC to develop theoretical alternatives which could inform different programmes. These led to an engagement from the position of municipal socialism with questions about the market, the cultural industries and civil

society - a reminder not only that practices of representation have historical conditions of existence, but also that rethinking of cultural categories can change political demands and make them strategically more effective. In creating a new politics of truth, as Foucault reminded us, 'the problem is not changing people's consciousness - or what's in their heads - but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth'.<sup>2</sup>

Across all these investigations runs, as a recurrent and inescapable theme, an interrogation of modernity and 'postmodernity'. Postmodernist forms of analysis have injected a refreshingly iconoclastic style and approach into the solidified certainties of cultural theory and debate. But it is also feared that they can invite another *trahison des clercs*, a defection of the (post-'68) intelligentsia into a stylish and knowing pessimism. The seductive nostalgia of 'coming after' can slide all too unresistingly into utopianism, passivity, adventurism and beyond. Perhaps therefore the time has come to start thinking not only in terms of the Post, but also in terms of the 'Pre'. From that perspective, the point of our questions and investigations - here's a hostage to fortune after all - is less academic reflection on 'culture' as an object of study than critical and polemical responses to what Gramsci called 'the possibility and necessity of creating a new culture'.<sup>3</sup> What we hope to promote here, therefore, is not just the posthumous archaeology of past or existing formations but also, especially, the prefiguring of new formations.

#### NOTES

- 1 In this, we shall be continuing in a different form the work of the volumes already published in the *Formations* series: *Formations of Pleasure* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), *Formations of Nation and People* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984) and V. Burgin, J. Donald and C. Kaplan (eds), *Formations of Fantasy* (London: Methuen, 1986).
- 2 M. Foucault, 'Truth and power', in C. Gordon (ed.), *Power/Knowledge* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), 133.
- 3 A. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, edited and translated by Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), 276.