

*In my essay I tried to articulate positive moments as clearly as you managed to articulate negative ones.*

- Walter Benjamin to Theodor Adorno

It has been part of the distinctive project of *New Formations* to try to understand the cultural forms and lived relations of a world moulded and defined by the accelerating rhythms of technological change, without falling into the euphoria or despair that haunts so many accounts of the 'postmodern condition'. The 'positive moments' that Benjamin, replying to Adorno's charge of romanticism, identified as the project of his essay 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction', revolved around the perception that the very technologies of mass entertainment and indoctrination - continuous lithographic printing, sound broadcasting, cinematography - which supplied the foundations of a pervasive capitalist 'culture industry' and the circulatory system of National Socialism itself contained none the less an emancipatory potential; a perception that, coming from a compatriot, Jewish and Marxist, of Rosenberg, Goebbels and Riefenstahl, can scarcely be thought to have been cheaply or complacently acquired. Benjamin's essay has since enjoyed a wide prestige; but it would be hard not to conclude, looking around, that it is Adorno's analysis, with its icy scepticism and implacable negativity, that better meets the mood of the later 1980s. The question, then, in the 1980s as in the 1930s, is not one of contemplative understanding alone, but of imparting an active momentum to the analysis of the technicature of 'late' or (more cautiously) 'advanced' capitalism, and harnessing it to effective forms and agencies of collaborative association and response.

That 'effective' means also, in this context, *new* is something that is coming to be widely recognized. From Star Wars to satellite TV, technology constructs not only a new material environment but a new repertoire of cultural identities; often, in both cases, through a devastating and irreversible supersession of the old. For Felix Guattari, writing in this issue, we find ourselves in an 'unprecedentedly nightmarish historical period', a period of 'integrated world capitalism' in which 'it is not only animal species that are disappearing; so too are the words, expressions and gestures of human solidarity'. Thus, Guattari argues, the traditional means of political mobilization and resistance are not merely inappropriate; they are becoming impossible. In their place, we must address and connect our threatened 'ecologies', social, psychic, and environmental, through a 'logic of intensities'

whose articulative principle is not rational and scientific but 'ethico-aesthetic'. Such a conclusion is certainly controversial; S. P. Mohanty, for example, in debate both with pragmatism and with its deconstructionist antitype, argues in this issue that a model of rational choice and action, a 'minimal account of the human', remains centrally indispensable to any political-critical practice, no matter how decentred its aims. But he would agree with Guattari that there can be no simple recuperation of the old categories of enlightened rationality and civic responsibility, rooted as they are in bourgeois individuality and the predatory freedoms of the market. John Keane's reflections on the privatization of British broadcasting turn on the ironic observation that Thomas Paine's ringing defence of the liberty of the press has become the motto-theme not of the defenders of public service broadcasting but of Murdochian 'deregulation' and neo-liberal 'freedom in viewing and advertising'. For Keane, as for Guattari, fundamental issues are at stake. The privatized technologies of communication, regulated not by public debate and accountability but by unanswerable state power, have the capacity 'to shape irreversibly the future of our society', remoulding 'our sense of time and space, our basic likes and dislikes, even our very language'. In a dystopic projection of Adornian bleakness, Keane looks forward to a time when the denizens of a privatized techno-environment, contentedly grazing the tabloids and the satellite schedules, 'will no longer invest any hopes in public life'; but his argument for a reformulated 'liberty of the press' founded in constitutional change and a devolved media system monopolized neither by state nor market, with its acknowledgement of a surviving human capacity 'to select, criticize, reinterpret', retains the 'positive moment' of analysis in terms that Benjamin might have recognized.

Technology, in its ambiguous intrication with culture and subjectivity, runs through several of the essays in *New Formations* 8. Peter Wollen, whose reflections on 'Fashion, Orientalism and the body' helped launch the journal in 1987, turns to their dialectical double within modernism, the automatism of the rationally organized production line, and speculates on the paradox by which the computer, the supreme symbol of (techno)logical rationality, may yet in a post-Fordist culture open the way to a new aesthetics of difference. For Paul Theberge, the rationalization of the techniques and routines of performance and recording in popular music, its ability to simulate holographic effects of presence, spontaneity, and community, lead to wider questions about the simulative processes of ideology itself. The technological nightmares conjured by Keane and Guattari are actualized in brilliantly disorienting detail in the cyberpunk narratives of William Gibson, reviewed here in David Tomas's virtuoso commentary. For Gibson's 'technophiles', with their access to near-limitless biotechnological transformation, identity has become quite literally an open-ended play of, and with, difference (somatic, ethnic, sexual): a 'continuous rewriting of the body's organic structure that can be directly related to the reconstitution of cultural identities'. The category of difference, so pervasive in contemporary debates about culture, writing, and politics, is also central to Mohanty's restrained polemic against the possible overinflation of a discourse of 'Otherness' - an argument which, although here

posed in philosophical and epistemological terms, has clear implications for the urgent political and educational concern with questions of 'race', ethnicity, and multiculturalism in Britain today. And David Kazanjian and Anahid Kassabian pursue the rebarbative question of national identity through the terrible negativities of Armenian history.

This is the last issue of *New Formations* to be edited by James Donald. From *New Formations 9*, the editor will be Erica Carter.

The illustration of Tokyo on pages 4 and 5 of *New Formations 7* is by Nigel Coates; we apologise for the omission of this credit.