

MICHEL FOUCAULT: *J'ACCUSE*

What might we do with Foucault's philosophy? To what new uses might it yet be put? These two questions, raised by John Rajchman in his 'Foucault Ten Years After', seem to capture the underlying concerns of the contributions in this collection.

25th June 1994 marked the tenth anniversary of the death of Michel Foucault. To reflect upon this moment a one-day conference was organised in London by *Signs of the Times*, exploring the legacy of Foucault's work ten years on.¹ *Signs of the Times* is an open and independent discussion group based in London. In the words of their founding statement they are 'committed to developing an understanding of the profound changes which are redrawing the political and cultural map. We aim to chart this new landscape and shape new agendas for the nineties.'² A selection of the most stimulating and provocative papers from this staggeringly well-attended conference are brought together in this issue of *New Formations* (along with other more general pieces) as our contribution to the continuing debates sparked by the memory of Michel Foucault.

These essays embody a range of different answers to Rajchman's question: what might we do with Foucault's philosophy? Clearly what we might choose to do with it will be influenced, as David Macey argues, by the political landscape and the theoretical climate of the day. I take it as a rather positive 'sign of the times' that the contributors to this issue of *New Formations* have all resisted the tendency to commemorate and revere Foucault, in favour of a more dissonant and experimental use of his thought to pursue varied agendas of current concern. The issues of new technologies, feminism, subjectivity, the philosophical life, race, sexuality and space are all contemplated in the light of Foucault's philosophy.

These various contemplations are premised by David Macey's political cry of 'j'accuse': the democratic state challenged in the name of democratic values. The demand for the 'clearing of a non-party space for an ethically governed politics', thereby represents, both within this collection and more generally, the context and the consequence of the art of philosophical experimentation. In answer to our opening question then, perhaps we might respond positively that the most significant use to which the philosophical life of Michel Foucault might yet be put is in providing both a reminder of the importance of the philosopher engaging in the political, and a model for its possibility.

Whatever our response, it would seem that, in the words of Alan Schrift: '... although Foucault himself may have been "erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea", the discursivity founded by his analytics of power have established possibilities whose end we are far from reaching.'

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1. The Conference was sponsored by *New Formations*, the journal *Economy and Society*, and the publisher Lawrence & Wishart. In addition it also received valuable financial assistance from the Barry Amiel and Normal Melburn Trust, and the Lipman Trust.

2. The group organises seminars, produces discussion papers and in 1994 published, in association with Lawrence & Wishart, the book *Altered States: Postmodernism, Politics, Culture*. For details of *Signs of the Times* seminars, publications and 1 July 1995 'Postmodern Times' Conference write to *Signs of the Times*, 28 Wargrave Avenue, London N15 6UD.