

EDITORIAL

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Nothing better illustrates the brittle cultural logic of the present than the trajectory of the term 'cool'. As Dick Pountain and David Robins show in their lead essay, in the 1990s 'cool' ceased to be a performative style of hedonistic disaffiliation assiduously cultivated by an oddly assorted collection of rebels and minorities and became instead one of the most important orientations to consumerism and marketing, the cynosure of style itself, particularly among the young and their imitators. For a brief moment 'cool' even came to signal a curious alliance between fashion-designers and spin-doctors around the fantasy-life of a nation under Blairism, the infamous re-branding of the United Kingdom as 'cool Britannia'. But 'cool' sits uncomfortably with the moralising civic rhetoric espoused by New Labour and championed by its leader. If Pountain and Robins are right in supposing that 'cool is the way to live with lowered expectations by going shopping', its intrinsically amoral appeal may yet prove to be the principal grave-digger of Blair's punitive democracy.

Questions of style and consumption also animate several of the other essays in this collection. In his essay on smoking 'in an age of techno-moral consumption', Fred Botting argues that the growing condemnation faced by cigarettes arises partly from the consummate hedonism that they offer, an excessive enjoyment of pure waste that reveals more about the uncanny compulsiveness of consumerist desire than almost any other act and must therefore be suppressed. Anathema to utilitarian and humanist forms of progressivism alike, smoking represents the last resort of an aesthetics of abjection, embodied in those 'beggarly figures, solitary or in groups, [who] huddle, cold and sodden, outside buildings, coughing and choking on foul clouds of smoke amid the detritus of soggy ash, crushed tobacco and butt-ends'. Scenes of bodily abjection also haunt Steven Connor's wide-ranging discussion of contemporary theorisations of skin. Thus the child's fascination with the scab, which quickly becomes a site of play, a controlling perpetuation of the wound as a mode of reconstituting the psyche in another register may have its parallels in the increasing prevalence of ritual piercing and marking of the skin - the ring or stud standing in for the scar - so closely linked to the contemporary staging of identity. Yet it is important to remember that these practices take place against the background of an insistent technological penetration of the body which calls into question the inviolability of the skin as the primary medium of individuation. Piercing or perforation can perhaps be read as a local symbolic counter to this threat.

From a different angle, the link between bodily control, identity and style forms the topic of Mariam Fraser's paper on the implications of mental impairment for the discourse of aesthetic originality. Looking at the last ten

years of painter Willem de Kooning's life when he was suffering from Alzheimer's disease, Fraser suggests an alternative model to that of the authentic individual artist, preferring - like Deleuze - to think of creativity as a cluster of 'forces and affects', capacities that lend themselves to new critical engagements with the canvas.

The concept of everyday life has become almost ubiquitous in contemporary cultural theory; yet it is rarely subjected to sustained scrutiny. In her detailed examination of the history of the term, tracing its diverse origins in marxism and phenomenology, Rita Felski emphasises the need to recapture the ordinariness of the everyday, rather than elevating it into a primary setting for resistance or struggle. Under the routine conditions of modernity, everyday life enters into the very definition of humankind, especially through the medium of the home, shaping our knowledges and our habits: *la vie quotidienne* is the crucible of human agency, not the streetwise measure of its alienation. Felski's essay partially overlaps with Anny Brooksbank Jones's analysis of micro-cultural practices in Latin America, though they come to quite different conclusions. Focussing upon the flexibility of global marketing strategies, Brooksbank Jones shows how the multinational manufacturers of cosmetics provide low income women with a pleurably hybridised sense of identity while drawing them into new networks of consumption. Her essay offers a valuable account of recent Latin American work on globalisation and cultural politics, which has hitherto been given scant attention in the Anglophone world.

The three remaining articles are each directly concerned with a politics and ethics that eschews false or disabling polarities. Gregory Stephens provides a case study of interracial 'sampling' in popular music through a detailed discussion of the independent film *Zebrahead*, a development that he suggests indicates 'new definitions of community allegiance and national citizenship'. In a lucid and rigorous essay, Syed Manzurul Islam attempts to theorise the possibility of a nomadic ethics for 'minoritarian' communities in the postcolonial era. Moving from Ibn Khaldun to Gilles Deleuze and from Nuruddin Farah to J. M. Coetzee, Islam insists upon the paradoxical necessity of a politics of minority rights and self-determination 'as part of a total liberatory movement' if such communities are to avoid being pulled on to the terrain of majority discourse, while still continuing to engage with the dominant centres of power. Finally, we publish the first English translation of the late Guy Hocquenghem's 1987 essay 'On Homo-sex, Or Is Homosexuality a Curable Vice?', together with an analysis by Bill Marshall of both its historical context and its implications for current gay politics. Like Islam and Stephens, Hocquenghem's argument also valorises a certain strategic predilection for the in-between or the tentative middle ground, in this instance for what he calls a distinctive 'homosexual sense', a situated mode of being that resists the absorption of gay identity into an indifferently straight world, while simultaneously refusing the pathologising fixedness of conventional understandings of homosexuality: 'an "innocent" or playful perversity', perhaps.