EDITORIAL

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The production of a journal calls for perpetual motion, but in May 2000 the *New Formations* editorial board decided to call a brief halt to everyday editorial business to consider our trajectory. A half-day was devoted to looking back over *New Formations*' thirteen-year history and to planning future moves. The last four years under David Glover's editorship have seen, amongst others, themed issues on the law, race nation and ethnicity, cultural theory, violence, Diana, sexual geographies, the Frankfurt School and the politics of Culture/China. Moving between culture, theory and politics, themed and unthemed issues have redefined those terms and intervened at the points at which they intersect. An intellectual mobility across disciplines, across national borders, and in and out of the academy has been a hallmark of our published work. This was, in part at least, a consequence of the journal's origins in the late 1980s.

That decade and the one that followed saw a productive exchange between cultural politics, cultural studies and cultural theory: the most prominent being the development of queer politics and queer theory and the emergence of postcolonial studies. Issues such as *Hybridity* (no.18) and *Perversity* (no.19) were part of these developments. By the end of the 1990s the editors of *Frontlines/Backyards* (no.33) wrote of the conference that led to that issue: 'most of the 400-strong audience were under thirty [and] not only crossed over many of the customary racial and ideological divides, but ... moved easily between the worlds of political campaigning, cultural enterprise and academic scholarship in a way that would have been unthinkable a few years ago'.[1]

These were signs of hope, but *New Formations* has always been as interested in the constraints to such movements as in their possibility. One of the meeting's gloomier points of discussion focussed on the limits to boundary crossing in the current climate, and specifically in British academic institutions. The political atmosphere in the first year of the twenty-first century is very different to that of the late 1980s. If the 1980s was a decade of political defeats - in Britain, the miners' strike, the demise of the left-wing Greater London Council, and the introduction of anti-lesbian and gay legislation, internationally, Reagan's escalation of the arms race, and the immiseration of large parts of the world under the World Bank's policies of structural adjustment - the politics of protest were characterised by a new confidence in the face of daily set-backs. The term *identity politics* is often used to criticise narrow and sectional agendas; but no one could deny the importance of the *politics of identity* in the last thirteen years. Where sexual, gendered and ethnic identities had been established in the 1960s, in the

1. Phil Cohen and Bill Schwarz, 'Editorial', *New Formations*, 33, 1998, p8.

1980s and 1990s they were joyfully transgressed. For a while that energy fed into intellectual life, resulting in new theoretical initiatives across disciplines, but there is a danger that that energy will now be dissipated.

Concern was expressed at the meeting that British universities have become less rather than more amenable to interdisciplinary work in the last thirteen years. While dialogues between political activists and academic work are hardly over, in Britain the time and space for those kinds of engagement have become circumscribed. The overdue expansion of higher education in Britain, initiated by John Major's Conservative administration in the early 1990s, came with a sting in its tail. While student numbers have soared, academic staffing levels have been held back. The unit cost per student has diminished with each year, so that universities have experienced a gradual, but constant drain on their resources. Just as Thatcherism sapped the economic infrastructure in return for quick profits, so the intellectual infrastructure is being run down bit by bit in the race for mass education on the cheap. The potential consequences for a journal like *New Formations* have been twofold. First, the gap between the roles of institutional academic and public intellectual has widened. There is simply less time for the kinds of intellectual activity that built the bridges between research and the public sphere. Second, these same activities are actively penalised by the new culture of targets and assessment that has been imposed to manage under-resourcing. Political journalism, book reviews, polemics and interventions are all discouraged by the disciplinary rigours of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). This quadrennial, utilitarian measure of four publications within a specified discipline has redirected energy away from innovative work across disciplines.

As with any regime the results have been contradictory. The new universities have been able to use new funding (which they did not receive at all under the old binary divide between universities and polytechnics) to build up new centres of research. Overall however, the net effect of crude measures and the narrow range of their scope has been to bolster a conservative and backward vision of intellectual life: an article in a discipline's 'top journal' is worth more than any number of contributions that seek to test ideas in the public arena.

If these concerns seem overly parochial for a journal with an international readership - contributors in this issue write from the Netherlands, the United States, and New Zealand as well as Britain - then it is worth considering the extent to which parochialism is a paradoxical effect not just of the RAE (despite its goal of 'international excellence') but also, as one written contribution to our discussion suggested, globalisation itself. Economic globalisation has exerted pressures on the public sector within nation states that act to limit the scope of critical interventions (through lack of time and money), while research with an international scope is only funded if it furthers 'global competitiveness'. If this is the case then, like a classic Foucauldian regime, it has at least the advantage of defining what *New Formations* is against and, in so doing, offers the

opportunity to define what we are for. As this issue demonstrates, we invite contributions that seek to challenge the constraints under which knowledges are produced, which explore why and how boundaries are defined: boundaries between different kinds of knowledge; between nation-states; between different cultural media; and between high and low culture.

Three articles supply the title theme: 'Mobilities', introduced by Tim Cresswell. In the opening article, Cresswell argues against an uncritical celebration of movement, contending instead that mobility is produced. Ginette Verstraete and Don Mitchell both examine specific examples of population movements that are produced - both sanctioned and constrained - according to the dictates of the political economy of the new free trade areas of the European Union and the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Although Vikki Bell's article 'Negotiating and Narrating Emplacement: Belonging and Conflict in Northern Ireland' was not part of the 'Mobilities' colloquium in which Cresswell, Verstraete and Mitchell participated, she too discusses mobilities, albeit from a different direction. Using recently conducted interviews, Bell explores the concept of 'emplacement' to investigate how conflict and cultural divisions are embodied and lived. In a complementary article, Alan Finlayson tackles the theoretical problematic of how to define the relationship between culture and politics in the North of Ireland. Both pieces raise the methodological issues surrounding the social analysis of conflict. Bell points to the danger, on the one hand, of viewing Northern Ireland through the prism of sectarian divide and, on the other, of acceding to a view of everyday life that produces a false normality, disguising the continuing presence of violence. Finlayson argues that: 'Theories of nationality, culture, politics and communal identity have imposed upon this diversity the simplification of two traditions or of the liberal unity waiting to break through. But it is to multiple antagonisms that analysts and activists need to turn their attention'.

Seeking a way out of solutions that 'end up reproducing the logic of the problem they were intended to resolve', Finlayson employs Derrida's concept of 'undecidability' as 'a *determinate* oscillation between possibilities'; and it is to that same concept that Eleanor Byrne and Martin McQuillan turn in their analysis of Disney's recent output. Starting with the remarkable fact that since 1997 Disney has released four films that deal with yet another kind of border, 'the meeting between the "savage" and the civilised, the animal and the human', Byrne and McQuillan deploy the tools of deconstruction to unravel the contradictions in Disney's powerful hold over popular culture. While its racism is no longer as starkly obvious, they suggest, the choice of content and the formal representation of a Disneyfied humanism demonstrates the films' failure to suture the wounds created by the racial structure of American society. A comparison between Byrne and McQuillan and Verstraete is instructive. While Byrne and McQuillan are writing about representation and Verstraete about population movements, both articles explore the way in which the human/inhuman divide is

mobilised. Verstraete writes of the link forged between illegal 'aliens' and their representation as 'an animal-like non-citizen', while Byrne and McQuillan write of the racial hierarchy inscribed in Disney's representation of anthropomorphic animals. Both pieces point to the perpetuation of these categories despite the opportunities for mobility (for some) offered by newer transnational economic and cultural developments.

Byrne and McQuillan's article takes its place in *New Formations*' long interest in using theory to interrogate popular culture. But, as Rebecca Beasley makes clear in 'Art as Propaganda for Literary Modernism', there is now no argument that convincingly makes the case that even the elitist pretensions of Anglo-American modernism can be separated out from the larger cultural history of its time. The distinction between the avant-garde and modernism is, Beasley argues, a formalist differentiation that does not stand up to a cultural materialist analysis that looks across media and includes the dissemination of cultural artefacts. In a careful and detailed account, she suggests that Pound's imagism constructs a space between the avant-garde and the anti-avant-garde that cannot be understood except in its relation to other modernist movements in the period, particularly the visual arts.

The final article in this section moves back across the increasingly permeable high/low culture divide to engage with the startling success of Patricia Cornwell's Scarpetta series. Cornwell's fictions have crossed over from the crime thriller's stable position as a best-selling genre to make her a best-selling author, a position that can only be compared with Stephen King's singular success in producing best-selling titles from gothic horror. The Scarpetta novels are indeed extraordinary in the way they have fused the feminist detective tradition with a conservative political agenda. In a striking analysis, Eluned Summers-Bremner focuses on the corpse as central character of Cornwell's thrillers. It is, she argues, the female detective pathologist's relation to the corpse that raises questions about a liberal feminist project that has put a woman into the detective's role only to find that the most popular manifestation of that role has 'furnished the tools for a conservative, rather than a progressive or a disruptive enquiry into the persistence of violence at the heart of both the social and identity'.

Future issues will continue *New Formations*' moves between culture, theory and politics in ways that confront the political and institutional constraints of our times. Working titles include 'Mass Observation as Poetry and Science', 'The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation', 'Prosthetics or Bodies and Machines'. Issues are planned on the work of Laplanche and his followers, science and culture, and the legacy of the 1990s. In the coming months, as a result of our discussions last May, the editorial board will be commissioning issues on political economy and on intellectual work. The journal itself remains mobile, still not permanently tied down to any one institution, and from this issue we take up a new residence at the European Studies Research Institute at the University of Salford. We would like to thank the institute for its support and for temporary shelter from the storm.