

## EDITORIAL

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*David Glover and Scott McCracken*

This issue of *new formations* explores two philosophical interventions into the politics of culture. One provoked by Étienne Balibar, the other by Richard Dyer. Étienne Balibar is still remembered as one of the key collaborators in the philosopher Louis Althusser's attempt in the mid-1960s to re-establish Marxism's scientific credentials by reading 'Capital to the letter.' Since that period, Balibar has continued to work within a broadly Marxist problematic that combines 'action in the present' with 'a theoretical knowledge of the material conditions which constitute the "present".<sup>1</sup> In conversation with Sandro Mezzadra, Balibar surveys his recent studies of the relationship between borders and citizenship, and especially the prospects of an emergent European citizenship, placing them within the context of the new militarised order of conflict, post 9/11. What is at stake here is a simultaneous weakening of territorial boundaries under globalisation which goes hand in hand with the idealisation of these same contested boundaries in order to provide a secure ideological homeland for the protection of national identities. Balibar's tentative way out of this impasse is a radical democracy that needs to engage with a now transient workers' movement, which is just barely class-based. In this sense, the spectre of Marxism returns once again in the call for 'consciousness, organization and institutions' on the model of a reinvented International.

Étienne Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx*,  
Chris Turner (trans),  
Verso, London,  
1995, p122.

As a response to Balibar and Mezzadra's far-reaching dialogue and in an attempt to further the conversation, we publish three specially commissioned commentaries on different aspects of Balibar's work. Claudia Aradau turns (via a former fellow-Althusserian Jacques Rancière) to the conceptual underpinnings of Balibar's approach to politics by focusing upon his emphasis on civility as a form of identification and detachment that avoids the violent extremes of idealisation – an emphasis that she sees as crucial to the process of 'institutional creation' that Balibar commends. William Outhwaite looks at the pitfalls and promises that animate the current moment of European integration and takes Balibar's remarks on 'transnational social practices' as an anticipation of a new phase of democracy that sublates the earlier liberal and social versions of democracy into a truly cosmopolitan democratic Europe. Finally, Iain Chambers reflects upon the wider cultural parameters against which Balibar's interrogation of Europe's political possibilities must be set – a longer *durée* of difference in which the elaboration of rights and privileges have been secured by the hypostatisation of a series of religious and racialised Others – and in so doing re-opens a chapter on the legacies of empire that has never quite been closed, though it has sometimes been left for dead.

Our concluding section returns to Richard Dyer's 1979 essay 'In Defense of

Disco'. As Jeremy Gilbert argues in his introduction to the section, Dyer's essay, reprinted here, needs no defending today. Tim Lawrence's accompanying essay provides the historical context and an update on the politics of disco.

Three more essays complete this edition, each of which engages critically with contemporary culture. Fabio Vighi and Heiko Feldner's essay 'Beyond Liberal Democracy: Slavoj Žižek's Politics of Ideology Critique' argues for the efficacy of Žižek's critique in confronting the limits of liberal democracy at a time when the Left seems paralysed by the dynamism of global capitalism. Timothy Bewes reads two recent works by Paul Auster in the light of Lukács' early work on the novel to argue against the 'ontological relation to the present' exhibited by so much postmodern theory, and for a historical view of the contemporary. Finally, following Cora Kaplan's analysis of class in contemporary British cinema in *new formations* 52, James Procter examines British Asian cinema's representation of the everyday and the familiar as a deflation of the 'canonical exoticism' of certain trends in postcolonial theory. He argues that films such as *Bend it like Beckham* or *East is East*: 'present a mundane *and* imaginative alternative to the extreme, extraordinary versions of South Asian culture in the UK since 9/11'.

*Correction*

*Please note that the map that appeared on p120 of  
new formations 57 The Spatial Imaginary  
didn't reproduce very well from the original drawing and  
therefore some details are missing.*