

## EDITORIAL

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*Jeremy Gilbert*

*new formations* is, and always has been, an interdisciplinary journal with a theoretical and conceptual bias. As such, the journal tends not to publish issues dedicated to the study of any one particular medium or even in one particular discipline. This isn't a hard and fast exclusion, however; where a topic seems sufficiently important, and where concentration on a particular medium or discipline seems natural or inevitable to its treatment, we're happy to recognise this and to give space to the exploration of such themes. The collection of essays presented in *Reading After Empire* constitutes one such exploration, taking as its starting point the investigation of a practice which is today everywhere and nowhere: reading. While the long-heralded end of the age of print is still often assumed to involve a shift into a media universe dominated by images, animation and ubiquitous sound, it remains quite obvious that a large proportion of recent innovations in communications technology (from instant messaging and SMS through to the glamorous gloss of the ipad) actually involve a proliferation of sites and forms of reading. The nature of text-based communication may be changing, but there is no less reading taking place than there ever was. At the same time, the persistence and centrality of print media - from newspapers to literary fiction - to many public contexts is a constant reminder that the written word and its reception remain fundamental to the understanding of contemporary culture, as the varied and fascinating contributions to this volume make clear.

At the same time, the transformations of world culture which are normally grouped together under the heading of 'globalisation' are most often linked to the spread of electronic media and digital communication; but the persistent proliferation of textuality in this context should remind us that the mutually-constitutive relationships between geopolitics, biopolitics, population flows and the multiple permutations of reading and writing have much older histories. Empires and their opponents have always depended upon writing and reading, have generated writing and produced readerships; today the legacy of the European empires and their aftermath is one which marks indelibly practices of reading and writing around the world, and one which is in fact enacted in those practices themselves. The investigation of our post-imperial condition cannot be meaningfully separated from the analysis of text and the situations of its reception. As such, *new formations* is very pleased to present this collection of articles. Originating with the AHRC-funded *Reading After Empire* conference at the University of Stirling in 2008, they constitute a timely, incisive and wide-ranging contribution to our understanding of these interrelated issues.