

## EDITORIAL

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*Jeremy Gilbert*

*new formations* has always been proud of its internationalism, and the publication of this issue represents this aspect of the journal particularly well, in terms both of the geographical scope of its concerns and the international range of its contributors. The issue features contributors from the Finland, Denmark, the UK, Australia, the US, and Canada writing on issues ranging from Weimar politics to Chinese art to the Arab Spring. Throughout this set of contributions, issues of power, of the nature of revolutionary radicalism and nostalgic conservatism, and of the emotions which are always inseparable from politics, weave in and out of an intellectually and thematically diverse collection of persuasive and original studies.

Both within Anglophone cultural studies and critical theory, and in the wider public sphere the political valency of consumer culture has never been more hotly contested than it is in this age of fiscal austerity. Finn Bowring's contribution to this issue therefore makes a timely return to Marcuse's concept of repressive desublimation, arguing that it still provides a useful intellectual tool for thinking through the tensions and dilemmas of contemporary consumer societies, and one which is surprisingly compatible with the post-Weberian sociology of recent years. Continuing a recent preoccupation of the journal, Bowring draws on the work of Hannah Arendt to argue judgements of taste are ultimately political judgements, suggesting that this is a fruitful way of understanding the responsibilities of the citizen-consumer.

Globally, no series of recent events has been more important than the uprisings of the 'Arab Spring', posing as they have an enormous challenge to the residual rhetoric of the 'war on terror' (which, despite all promises to the contrary, continues to inform both US-led international politics and domestic security policies in many western countries). Bülent Diken explores the idea that the key image of thought in the war against terror is 'clash', of civilizations and of religions. Diken makes an intriguing and persuasive contrast between the assumptions informing this insidious discourse with with Taubes's revolutionary eschatology, which seeks a total deligitimization of power, arguing that to locate Islamic fundamentalism in relation to the apocalyptic tradition in this way provides an alternative to the standard critiques of Islamic terrorism, opening the way to a discussion of contemporary politics which re-visits the idea of communism in the context of the recent Egyptian Revolution.

It has become a commonplace of both academic and popular commentary to say that the West does not understand contemporary China, despite the consensus as to the historic significance of its rise. One pioneer of efforts to overcome this ignorance is Stephanie Hemelryk Donald, not least with

her editorship of the landmark *Culture/China* issue of *new formations* (issue 40). Here Donald goes further, actually making a critical, and not merely expository, engagement with the work of a major contemporary Chinese artist. Her essay on the series 'Chinese Historical Figures 1966-1976', by Beijing artists Xu Weixin, focuses on the relationship between pedagogy, historicity and memorialization in Xu's work, drawing on both Xu's perceptions of his own work, and on the theoretical frames in which it might be evaluated both in and beyond Chinese art practice. It is informed by Sara Ahmed's work on emotion, and Gerhard Richter's notion of the blur as a clarification of the historical moment. In assessing Xu's approach to memorialization, the essay questions whether, by adopting an aesthetic of monumentality and compulsive repetition, Xu risks the series appearing too close to the governmental regime of excess and dogmatism that he is, in fact, attacking.

In a highly significant piece of recent intellectual history Matt ffytche undertakes a critical analysis of the boom in 'uncanny' theory. As the 'uncanny' has carved its image in cultural, political, sociological and aesthetic theory, there has been little attempt to challenge the notion that all critical work is or should be uncanny, paying particular attention to the watershed of the late 1980s when the idea of the uncanny was increasingly assimilated to a Derridean or post-Derridean concept of the 'spectral'. It probes the influence of Heidegger, who inflected Derrida's own turn to spectres, and the way the uncanny is mobilised on cultural and sociological terrain as a specifically ethical tool: a site of historical mourning or sociological resistance. ffytche proposes that the anti-conceptualism of the uncanny is a transcendent gesture which needs to be read in the context of a crisis in the theorisation of Marxism at the end of the 1980s, and must be examined carefully for its potentially reactionary implications.

*new formations* is not only concerned with recent or merely intellectual history, but remains an important forum for theoretically-informed historical research. In his contribution to this issue, Robert Heynen examines the early years of the Weimar period in Germany (1918-33), which saw radical right paramilitaries and other activists engage in a violent struggle to roll back the post-war advances of the revolutionary left. His article examines the writings of Ernst Jünger and a number other writers from the period, arguing that their work elaborated a violently misogynist pedagogy of the body and subjectivity designed to engineer these counter-revolutionary fighters. What is frequently missed in commentary on these writers, he argues, is the extent to which their work was not simply about the repression of the left, but involved the production of a radical right 'socialism' whose powerful dynamic was crucial in breaking down the left socialist project over the course of the Weimar years.

Turning back to the contemporary Middle East, Laura Junka attempts to understand Palestinian politics in relationship to the wider changes associated with globalisation and late modernity, focusing, in particular, on the globalisation of neoliberal subjectivities and political sensitivities. These

themes are explored through a variety of discourses and struggles that have developed around mobile telephony in Palestine during the first years of the 2000s. Mobile telephony, it has been argued, epitomises a diversity of social processes and ideas that are connected to late modernity and globalisation of neoliberalism. In Palestine, however, the emergence of mobile telephony and the deterritorialising qualities associated with it intersect with an ultra-territorial colonial occupation, resulting in a largely unexamined space of multiple and clashing temporalities, spacialities and identifications. A study of these encounters builds an image of a late modern subject of colonial occupation, of a Palestinian subject that is increasingly individualised, hybridised, and hard to represent within the dominant discourses of the Palestinians' struggle.

Far from such energetic centres of struggle, many post-war cultural commentators have perceived a lack of impetus to the political project of the Left in recent decades. Wendy Brown, for example, argues that the traditionalist left has succumbed to melancholia, refusing to abandon its ideals while blaming their disappearance on those representative of newer developments which render many of its historical reference points redundant. In his contribution, Andrew Lison argues that the output of two contemporary electronic musicians, Burial and Farben, working respectively in the genres of dubstep and microhouse, provocatively illustrates these developments. By examining their work alongside its online reception as well as more historical debates over left-wing melancholy, he demonstrates convincingly that we can both understand the insights they offer into the present political landscape and begin to identify the outline of a more productive relationship to political loss.

Finally, in another fascinating work of intellectual history, Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen analyses the letter that Jacques Derrida sent to Jean Genet in 1971 as a contribution to an anthology compiled in honour of George Jackson who was imprisoned at Soledad Prison. His essay explores Derrida's reservations about the attempt to get French writers and intellectuals to defend Jackson, not because he did not support the fight of the oppressed black population in the US, but because he did not want to speak in their name and thereby reproduce the very submission that had to be critiqued.