

Preface

The first time, I set eyes on Colin Sumner was at an enrolment event for course options one afternoon in the old Institute of Criminology building in West Road Cambridge. All the staff had set out the aims and objectives for their courses in meticulous detail and took the students in the room through a series of PowerPoint presentations. Colin turned up a bit late dressed in a black roll-neck jumper, black trousers and black Chelsea boots. He was smoking a black Gitanes cigarette through a black cigarette holder. He certainly stood out from the rest of the teaching staff who stood before us in their shirts and ties and their understated Laura Ashley prints. He told the assembled room that he was not sure what he was teaching exactly but that he had just read a book and intended to build on that. Of course, I signed up and it proved a great choice. I was right to take his words as a sign of intellectual curiosity and not unpreparedness. Colin's seminars were, by far and away, the most exacting, exciting and penetrating hours I ever spent in a classroom. Colin demanded a total immersion in the work and his seminars were very open-ended and often spilt over to the pub and the local curry restaurant where the theorising continued over poppadums and drinks. As a teacher Colin is a natural: he effortlessly gets the

best from students. He never demands that anyone sign up to a party line only that after doing the necessary work that his students come to their own view. He is an intellectual of the front-rank and also a cosmopolitan having worked, at various times, in such places as Berkeley, Cambridge, Hamburg, Onati and Dar-es-Salaam. His enduring reputation rests largely upon two books—*Reading Ideologies* (1979) and *The Sociology of Deviance: an Obituary* (1994). These works are stunning not only in their penetration and intellectual rigour but also for their prose style. Colin remains the clearest of writers, elegantly and concisely making his points and always considering the aesthetics of the written form. He understands language and how it operates. I recall one morning wandering around Durham Cathedral with him some years ago. He halted by one of the ornate tombs and translated the inscription from the Latin, without drawing breath, and speculated on the impact that those words would have had *politically* in earlier times. For him, it was not so much an ornate tomb as it was an instrument of social control. This collection is the first to deal with Colin's work in a single volume. Colin's influence has been profound in terms of his impact on generations of students in Bristol, Cambridge, Salford, UEL and latterly Cork. His work continues to animate scholars as the continued interest in his output demonstrates. *Reading Ideologies* and *The Sociology of Deviance: an Obituary* are still read, re-read, and newly discovered by those looking for a more political and philosophically inclined take on crime and criminalisation. The contributors to this collection are drawn from Colin's former colleagues, students, collaborators and academics who have been inspired by his writing. They have all engaged with Colin's work and see it as of continuing relevance at a time when Criminology and socio-legal studies, more generally, have arrived at a crossroads. A great deal of contemporary Criminology is superficial, under-theorised and without much concern for political imagination or history. History weighs heavy on Colin's shoulders and he stands out amongst contemporary criminologists in drawing upon many of the giants of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as Durkheim, Marx and Nietzsche, in his work as well as radical historians, such as E.P. Thompson. It has to be stated that Colin has never been all that clubbable but this has only meant he has never been beholden to a party

line: his writing, accordingly, has a real sense of integrity. The essays in this volume take up much of what has been ignored or glossed over by others. This collection will be useful to anyone interested in understanding the operation of the law, and its processes, and to those thinking seriously about the ways in which history, and social structure, interject in, and through, the criminal justice system. It will convey something of the debts, and love, the contributors have for the man and his writing.

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