

Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication

Hall, Stuart

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Subject: Critical/Cultural Studies Online Publication Date: Jul 2017 DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.46

Summary and Keywords

Stuart Hall was a Jamaican-born, British-based theorist, critic, and activist, who flourished between the late 1950s and his death in 2014. Known both for his theoretical and empirical work on culture and communication and for his role as a public intellectual, Hall produced scholarly writings and charismatic teaching that were matched by his columns and interviews in magazines and newspapers and appearances on television and radio.

Keywords: Stuart Hall, cultural studies, Marxism, ideology, hegemony, conjuncture, articulation, racism, post-structuralism

Introduction

Stuart Hall was the public face of cultural studies in England and a spirited advocate of critical multiculturalism. He authored and edited, both alone and with others, many essays and books of original ideas and research, including *The Popular Arts* (Hall & Whannel, 1965), *Resistance Through Rituals* (Hall & Jefferson, 1976), *Policing the Crisis* (Hall et al., 1978), *Culture, Media, Language* (Hall et al., 1980), *The Hard Road to Renewal* (Hall, 1988), *New Times* (Hall & Jacques, 1989), and *After Neoliberalism?* (Hall et al., 2015). He was also a founding editor of two significant journals, *New Left Review*, in the 1960s and *Soundings*, in the 1990s.

Following studies in Jamaica and Oxford, Hall spent his scholarly life in two very different environments. First, he worked at the University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies between 1964 and 1979. Initially a research fellow, he became the Director in 1968 when its foundational leader Richard Hoggart departed. The Centre undertook bravura collective and individual work on questions of feminism, Marxism, race, class, and popular culture, at both applied and theoretical levels.

This small but vibrant research institute, which was fortunate only to teach graduate students, included a number of distinguished student members during Hall's era: for example, Charlotte Brunson, Angela McRobbie, Lawrence W. Grossberg, Dick Hebdige, David Morley, Andrew Tolson, Dorothy Hobson, and Paul Willis. People visited from across Europe to listen and speak, animated—just as generations of TV viewers and conference attendees were—by Hall's vibrant, open-minded commitment to, and performance of, interaction, rigor, and relevance (McRobbie, 2014).

Hall then moved to a very different, undergraduate-oriented institution, the Open University, where he served as professor of sociology. This university was Britain's large distance-education initiative. Although he drew on ideas developed during his time in Birmingham, this institution provided a far different context from the original-research sphere that the Centre had luxuriated in. At the Open University, Hall edited synoptic books designed for omnibus survey courses in the sociology of culture, rather than original research or works for the public reader.

Hall was remarkably successful at producing these collections, which were characterized by clear prose covering complex social and cultural issues. The list of volumes is long and impressive, and many became important beyond the undergraduate education for which they were designed. Representative titles include *Formations of Modernity* (Gieben & Hall, 1992), *Modernity and Its Futures* (Hall et al., 1992), *Modernity* (Hall et al., 1996), *Questions of Cultural Identity* (Hall & du Gay, 1996), *Doing Cultural Studies* (Du Gay et al., 1996), *Visual Culture* (Evans & Hall, 1999), and *Representation* (Hall et al., 2013). Hall personally wrote many fascinating chapters of exposition and application.

During both of these lengthy engagements, and an equally long and productive retirement, Hall also made many noted contributions as the author of works on everything from Asian and black British arts to the nature of identity.

Hall's own undergraduate background was in literature. He never finished a graduate degree, but his enormous body of work could have filled book after single-authored book of sociology. Hall wrote what he described as “interventions in a field, rather than autonomous scholarly works”; hence, he produced few articles in refereed journals and did not write research monographs (Hall & Back, 2009, p. 664).

Perhaps the principal original and fully cohesive contribution he made in long-form prose was *Policing the Crisis* (1978), a joint venture by many minds but one that showed the clarity and complexity of thought and expression characteristic of Hall's efforts to understand what he came to call “Thatcherism.” This

term described the mixture of economic deregulation and police reregulation that changed Britain so radically from the late 1970s.

Hall's one scholarly co-authored volume, *The Popular Arts*, is now largely forgotten, possibly because it is basically leftist Leavisism. Conversely, his sole single-authored book in English, *The Hard Road to Renewal* (1988), which collects numerous Marxist magazine pieces he wrote over the previous decade, is greatly valued.

The most thorough collection of Hall's writings over three decades is *Sin garantías*, an anthology of his articles on social and cultural theory, Marxism, race, and cultural studies (Hall, 2010). There will undoubtedly be posthumous collections in English that are similarly comprehensive.

Throughout his adult life, Hall had a complex relationship with Marxism, structuralism, post-structuralism, and cultural studies as it evolved in the United Kingdom and other countries. Some of his principal theories and themes are discussed serially in the following sections.

Cultural Studies

Cultural studies is both an irritant and a master trope in the humanities and qualitative social sciences, blending and blurring textual analysis with social and cultural theory and empirical ethnography, and focusing on the margins of power over established lines of force and authority. For example, rather than researching canonical works of art, governmental leadership, or quantitative social data, cultural studies devotes time to subcultures, popular media, music, clothing, environmental representations, and sport. It does so with strong commitments to class, gender, racial, sexual, and cosmopolitan equality and justice, bringing together and incarnating various tendencies that productively splinter the human sciences: Marxism, feminism, queer theory, and postcolonialism.

Hall's version of cultural studies placed value on how culture was used and transformed by ordinary and marginal social groups. He regarded such people not simply as consumers, or victims of corporate and governmental power, but as potential and actual producers of new social values and cultural languages with the potential to challenge elites.

Hall's early collaborative work largely focused on the symbolic resistance of class, race, and gender oppression, notably during the intense economic and social strife that began with the 1970s and centered on youth culture. This was seen by Hall and his collaborators of that period as resisting dominant cultural forms and social norms alike through subcultural activity (Hall & Jefferson, 1976).

Subcultures are spaces under culture, simultaneously opposed to, derivative of, and informing official, dominant, governmental, commercial, bureaucratically organized forms of life—refusals of culture as a tool of domination and movement toward culture as a tool of empowerment. This movement is driven by an effort to find out how the socially disadvantaged use culture to contest their subservient position. Historical and contemporary studies conducted on slaves, crowds, pirates, bandits, and the working class emphasized day-to-day noncompliance with authority. For example, Birmingham-based research into teddy boys, mods, bikers, skinheads, punks, school students, teen girls, and Rastas identified truants, dropouts, and magazine readers—people who deviated from the norms of school and the transition to work by entering subcultures—as its magical agents of history.

Such studies examined the structural underpinnings of collective style, investigating how their *bricolage* subverted the achievement-oriented, materialistic, educationally driven values and appearance of the middle class. The working assumption was that subordinate groups adopt and adapt signs and objects of the dominant culture, reorganizing them to manufacture new meanings.

Consumption was the epicenter of such subcultures; paradoxically, it also reversed their members' status as consumers. They become producers of new fashions, inscribing alienation, difference, and powerlessness on their bodies. For instance, the decline of the British economy and state across the 1970s was supposedly exemplified and contested in punk's use of rubbish as an adornment: bagliners, lavatory appliances, and ripped and torn clothing.

There is a paradox and possibly a contradiction in cultural studies' engagement with such anticorporate tropes, because commodified fashion and convention learn to respond almost gratefully to subcultures: capitalism appropriated the appropriator. Even as the media and politicians announced that punks were folk devils and set in train various moral panics about their effect on society, the fashion and music industries were sending out spies to watch and listen to them as part of a restless search for new trends to market. Whenever social movements effectively use the politics of spectacle, advertising agencies watch on and parrot what they see in much more effective ways.

An emphasis on breach moments of resistance to dominant norms did not find Hall taking culture as a lodestone from which all else flowed, in a reductionist manner. Although he "was always convinced that culture was constitutive of any social formation," Hall was not "convinced that culture acted alone." As he put it, "I'm not interested in cultural politics as the only kind of politics, but I'm interested in the fact that all politics requires economic, political and cultural conditions of existence" (Hall, 2013, p. 2). In reflecting on his life's work, he wrote that "[o]ur object was to develop theories and concepts as a toolbox with which to think. And what you were thinking about was not culture. You were thinking about the whole social formation with culture as a kind of privileged prism" (Hall, 2013). But this prism was neither all-determining nor itself solid: "culture ... is partly about *where you are going to*, what you might become, as well as *what you were* and *what your ancestors were*" (Hall, 1997, p. 4).

This was not a purely scholarly endeavor:

Cultural studies, wherever it exists, reflects the rapidly shifting ground of thought and knowledge, argument and debate about a society and about its own culture. It is an activity of intellectual self-reflection. It operates both inside and outside the academy. It represents something, indeed, of the weakening of the traditional boundaries among the disciplines and of the growth of forms of interdisciplinary research that don't easily fit, or can't be contained, within the confines of the existing divisions of knowledge. As such, it represents, inevitably, a point of disturbance, a place of necessary tension and change.

(Hall, 1992, p. 11)

Markets and Economics

Hall's early engagements with Marxism frequently warned of the perils of economism:

If you expect there is some moment when His Majesty the Economy is going to stride forth and say, "Hold on lads, I'm about to determine everything"—if you are really waiting for that moment, then good luck to you—for His Majesty is always not only acting and speaking through other levels, they are the principle [*sic*] languages of his ventriloquism. He constantly speaks in cultural and political and ideological terms.

(1978, pp. 9–10)

Hall was vigorously opposed to "the notion of simply reading off the different kinds of social contradiction at different levels of social practice in terms of one governing principle of social and economic organization" (Hall, 1985, p. 91).

As time passed, however, Hall had equally little respect for those who would deny the political economy:

For a long time, the distinction between the right and the left was stabilised by the polarisation of attitudes towards markets. The left was characterised by the belief that, since "the market" always creates winners and losers, always creates deep inequalities, and social fragmentation, its remedy was the opposite, the abolition of markets and the absorption of state and economy into the so-called "planned society"—state socialism. Now we know this doesn't "work" either. Its costs are writ large in the collapse of the so-called Soviet model and its many variants and the catastrophes which its inauguration in that form brought in its train. It does not take a genius to work out what, in such circumstances, constitutes "the grand idea" of democratic politics. Is it possible, and in what form, to harness the significant advantages of the market (supposing for the moment that there is any one such thing—which there isn't—and that it is "free", which it certainly is not), within a logic of social calculation which transcends a market forces conception of society and social need, and an "economic man" or "entrepreneurial subject" conception of human nature? Can one show, in thinking, in forms of organisation, in policy and strategy, that there is such a thing as "society", though it is not the closed totality, the sutured closure conceived of by state socialism and all its derivatives (including much of Labourism), but remains fundamentally open to the contingency of historical movement and change—a place of calculation and strategic operations, not an ultimately predictable social essence.

(Hall, 1995, pp. 32–33)

In keeping with that critical *rapprochement* with political economy, Hall rejected neoclassical economics' fabulations about the natural life of markets:

Actual markets ... do not work mysteriously by themselves or "clear" at their optimum point. Only by bracketing out of the calculation the yawning differences between the relative wealth which buyer and seller bring into the exchange can they be called "fair." No "hidden hand" guarantees the common good. They require the external power of state and law to establish and regulate them. But the discourse provides its subjects with a "lived" "imaginary relation" to their real conditions of existence. This does not mean that markets are simply manufactured fictions. Indeed, they are only too real! They are "false" because they offer partial explanations as an account of whole processes.

(Hall, 2011, p. 716)

These insights led Hall to a profound, late engagement with neoliberalism—one of the most successful attempts to reshape individuals in human history. Its achievements rank alongside such productive and destructive sectarian practices as state socialism, colonialism, nationalism, and religion. Neoliberalism's lust for market regulation was so powerful that its prelates opined on every topic imaginable, from birth rates to divorce, from suicide to abortion, from performance-enhancing drugs to altruism. Rhetorically, it stood against elitism (for populism); against subvention (for markets); and against public service (for philanthropy). Hall was a crucial and perceptive critic (Hall & Massey, 2010).

Ideology and Hegemony

Hall wanted to see democratic social and cultural transformations, in ways that would take account of the left's traditional agent of change—the working class—but also the many other lines of flight and institutions of subjectification and control that formed identities and controlled them. Race was a particularly

important part of his concerns, especially as the New Left and its principals, such as E. P. Thompson, Ralph Miliband, Raphael Samuel, and Raymond Williams, were so driven by class analysis and so little taken by the need to understand and forward other kinds of identity. Hall was also well aware of “the whole, disastrous experience of ‘state socialism’ which came to so abrupt and dramatic an end in 1989, in the light of which the entire historical basis and trajectory of ‘the left’ in serious politics has had to be rethought” (1995, pp. 25–26).

That said, Hall was driven by many Marxist concerns, among them how dominant ideologies function and may be contested: “A class is both the locus of a possible incorporation and the focus for possible resistance” (Hall, 1978, p. 10). He also saw the utility of such thinking beyond the terrain of class, as per his interest in Louis Althusser’s quasi-Leninist, allegedly scientific, but in fact psychoanalytic account of ideology as the dominant ideas of an epoch (Hall, 1985). Hall wrote that “[o]ne of the ways in which ideologies function is to naturalise themselves. They disguise the fact that they are historic and symbolic constructions by appearing to be part of what nature is” (1983, p. 267); “[i]deology works best by suturing together contradictory lines of argument and emotional investments ... Contradiction is its metier” (2011, p. 713).

The leftist functionalism of Althusser lacked sufficient warp and woof for Hall, who found himself drawn more to the idea of hegemony. Perhaps the foremost theorist influencing him was Antonio Gramsci, whose opposition to fascism in the 1920s and 1930s remains an exemplar for progressive intellectuals.

Gramsci maintained that each social group creates “organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields”: the industrial technology, law, economy, and culture of each group. The “‘organic’ intellectuals that every new class creates alongside itself and elaborates in the course of its development” assist in the emergence of that class, for example, via military expertise. Intellectuals operate in “[c]ivil society ... the ensemble of organisms commonly called ‘private,’ that of ‘political society’ or ‘the State.’” They comprise the “‘hegemony’ which the dominant group exercises throughout society” as well as the “‘direct domination’ or command exercised through the State and ‘juridical’ government.” Ordinary people give “‘spontaneous’ consent” to the “general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group” (Gramsci, 1978, pp. 5–7, 12). In other words, popular culture legitimizes socioeconomic-political arrangements in the public mind and can be a site of struggle as well as domination.

Hall drew on the idea of residual, dominant, and emergent hegemonies, which he took from Williams (1977) after Gramsci, to describe the process whereby class formations compete over narratives that legitimize social control. Examples of these categories might be the remains of an empire, a modern mixed economy, and neoliberal transformation, respectively.

Extensive use has been made of hegemony theory beyond the Global North. In Latin America, Gramsci’s notion of the national popular harnessing of class interests is common sense for both left and right. The same applies in South Asia and segments of the Arab and African worlds: “If you are in a system which is structured in dominance, it will try to pick up even the most radical and negative features and build them back into its own self-regeneration” (Hall, 1978, p. 11):

Hegemony is a tricky concept and provokes muddled thinking. No project achieves a position of permanent “hegemony.” It is a process, not a state of being. No victories are final. Hegemony has constantly to be “worked on”, maintained, renewed and revised. Excluded social forces, whose consent has not been won, whose interests have not been taken into account, form the basis of counter-movements, resistance, alternative strategies and visions ... and the struggle over a hegemonic system starts anew.

(Hall, 2011, pp. 727–728)

Conjuncture and Articulation

In order to understand ideology and hegemony, Hall drew on two additional analytical concepts from Marxism, in the form of conjuncture and articulation. As he put it:

A conjuncture is a period in which the contradictions and problems and antagonisms, which are always present in different domains in a society, begin to come together. They begin to accumulate, they begin to fuse, to overlap with one another. The ideological becomes part of the economic problem and vice versa. Gramsci says that they fuse into a ruptural unity, and that’s the beginning of conjuncture. The aftermath of the fusion, how that fusion develops, its challenges to the existing historical project or social order, the efforts of the state and the people who run it, etcetera, to contain that, or the success of change and transformation ... constitutes conjuncture.

(Hay et al., 2013, p. 16)

The small print, as it were, of these conjunctures, and their implications for hegemony could be unearthed through the notion of articulation:

a connection or link which is not necessarily given in all cases, as a law or a fact of life, but which requires particular conditions of existence to appear at all, which has to be positively sustained by specific processes, which is not “eternal” but has constantly to be renewed, which can under some circumstances disappear or be overthrown, leading to the old linkages being dissolved and new connections—re-articulations—being forged.

It is also important that an articulation between different practices does not mean that they become identical or that the one is dissolved into the other. Each retains its distinct determinations and conditions of existence. However, once an articulation is made, the two practices can function together.

(Hall, 1985, pp. 113–114, n.2)

The State

Through these forms of theorizing, Hall sought to understand the great behemoth of the post-Westphalian era, that is, the state:

a contradictory formation which ... has different modes of action, is active in many different sites: it is pluricentered and multi-dimensional. It has very distinct and dominant tendencies but it does not have a singly inscribed class character. On the other hand, the State remains one of the crucial sites in a modern capitalist social formation where political practices of different kinds are condensed. The function of the State is, in part, precisely to bring together or articulate into a complexly structured instance, a range of political discourses and social practices which are concerned at different sites with the transmission and transformation of power.

(Hall, 1985, p. 93)

Hall had an almost tolerant, humorous, impish, if bewildered, attitude to political parties and the way they were buffeted by contradictory demands:

The more one sees of political parties, and the ways they are driven hither and thither, often at the whim of deeply irrational and unconscious forces, the more one is tempted to anthropomorphise them. They behave like partially crazed adolescents, tossed about by powerful undercurrents of emotion and uncontrollable spasms which are not amenable to a purely rational or empirical analysis.

(1995, p. 19)

But Hall was far from being a simple critic of the state, driven by the romance of anarchism and similarly touching delusions: “We are not ... Utopians who imagine that governments are dispensable or redundant, and that all power can be dispersed in some magical way ‘to the people.’ But we do hold that governments, even progressive governments, are and should be only one locus of power among many” (Hall et al., 1995, p. 16).

In addition to noting the adolescent behavior of political parties, Hall saw the state as a necessarily fraught site of contestation because of its contradictory formation as a point of “tension between the tendency of capitalism to develop the nation-state and national cultures and its transnational imperatives is a contradiction at the heart of modernity which has tended to give nationalism and its particularisms a peculiar significance and force at the heart of the so-called new transnational global order” (Hall, 1993, p. 353).

Racism

Hall talked and wrote a great deal about his own, Jamaica’s, and the UK’s racial formations. Alongside thinking through such issues in personal and theoretical ways, he also sought to influence public opinion and policy, perhaps most interestingly through the Runnymede Trust Commission’s *Report on the Future of a Multi-Ethnic Britain* (2000). Its Chair was the political theorist, Vice-Chancellor, and future member of the House of Lords Bhikhu Parekh, with Hall its secondary public face in the *bourgeois* British media.

The Commission examined racism within the UK’s national institutions of culture, education, policing, and welfare. It produced evidence and argument that pointed to a profound institutional racism at the heart of the British state and dominant national identities.

Press reactions to the Commission’s work give us a sense of how racial conflicts can run. In particular, Hall’s participation sent conventional media minds into palpitations as they encountered these findings: “Sub-Marxist gibberish”; “out-of-touch nonsense”; “an insult to our history and intelligence” were representative epithets, and the authors were accused of “a lack of loyalty and affection for Britain.” The *Daily Mail* reacted by producing a “list of ten dead white heroes of the last millennium”; the then leader of the Conservative Party derided the *Report* as an index of the left’s “tyranny of political correctness and ... assault on British culture and history”; and *The Scotsman* described it as “a grotesque libel against the people of this land and a venomous blueprint for the destruction of our country.” Jack Straw, then Home Secretary and later a notorious warmonger in Afghanistan and Iraq, rejected the linkage of Britishness to white racism (citations in Miller, 2007). Hall’s analyses could make for very uncomfortable reading!

Those hysterical reactions indicate how much can be at stake in these debates, as Hall well knew in his effort to illuminate:

the state of play as to race in Britain today, and signify its unresolved contradictoriness. The first speaks to multicultural “drift”—the increasing visible presence of black and Asian people in all aspects of British social life as a natural and inevitable part of the “scene”—rather than an “alien wedge”. to borrow Mrs Thatcher’s felicitous phrase—especially in the cities and urban areas. This is not the result of deliberate and planned policy

but the unintended outcome of undirected sociological processes. Though visibly registering the new play of difference across British society, this creeping multiculturalism is, of course, highly uneven. Large tracts of the country, most significant centres of power and many so-called “ethnic minority” people are largely untouched by it. Many white British people may accept it as a fact of life, but do not necessarily welcome it. Outside of its radius, the practices of racialized exclusion, racially-compounded disadvantage, household poverty, unemployment and educational under-achievement persist—indeed, multiply. The second, however, is an ancient story, banal in its repetitive persistence. From the early race riots of Nottingham and Notting Hill in 1958, through the 1970s campaigns against “sus” laws (permitting arbitrary stop-and-search), the death of Blair Peach from a police baton at a 1979 demonstration in Southall, the uproar following the death of Colin Roach in Stoke Newington police station in 1983 and the lack of explanation for many other black deaths in police custody, the Deptford Fire and the arson of Asian shops and homes, the 1980s “disorders” in Brixton and at Broadwater Farm, Tottenham, to Stephen Lawrence’s murder in 1993 or the flaming body of Michael Menson falling unheeded into the Thames in 1997, black people have been the subject of racialized attack, had their grievances largely ignored by the police, and been subjected to racially-inflected practices of policing. Each of those events was followed by a campaign, unofficial inquiries (I sat on two), recriminations from the authorities, promises of reform. Very little seems to have changed. Relations between black communities and police have continued to be a catalogue of disasters, marked by mistrust, prejudice and disrespect, often leading to tragedy.

(Hall, 1999, p. 188)

Such powerful words—you can see why they are quoted at such length here, both for their vividness and for their arc of history and geography—were matched by a desire for appreciating that racism was not necessarily or primarily an interpersonal matter. It went much deeper than that; in fact, it was deeply embedded in the infrastructure of the nation:

Institutional racism does not require overtly racist individuals: it conceives racism as arising through social processes ... [I]nstitutional racism has clearly taken the argument that culture regulates conduct. These behavioural norms are carried within the occupational culture of an organization, and transmitted by informal and implicit ways through its routine, everyday practices as an indestructible part of the institutional habitus. Racism of this kind becomes routine, habitual, taken for granted. It is far more effective in socializing the practice of officers than formal training or regulations. (The arduous reporting of racial incidents or domestic violence, by contrast, is defined, in the occupational culture, as “rubbish” policing.) And it blocks a professional reflexivity from ever coming into operation.

(Hall, 1999, p. 195)

While he was very taken with black art and music, Hall noted not only the utility of the word “Black” in the UK context, as a reversed, renewing trope against racism, and its more negative coefficients, such as the exclusion of Asian people of color, or of black people with different collective identifications. He recognized that even social movements founded on difference were bounded by exclusion. Their united fronts, adopted for the purposes of external conflicts, concealed “differences ... raging behind” (Hall, 1991B, p. 56)—frequently economic ones. He was not one for the fiction of people of color as a formation *de principe*.

Nor was Hall keen on restricting free speech. A symptomatic thinker who was concerned that denying powerful regressive tendencies would only encourage them to surge forward in ever more violent ways, he argued to readers of *Early Child Development and Care* that “you have to create an atmosphere which allows people to say unpopular things. I don’t think it is at all valuable to have an atmosphere in the classroom which is so clearly, unmistakably [*sic*] anti-racist that the natural and ‘commonsense’ racism which is part of the ideological air that we all breathe is not allowed to come out and express itself” (Hall, 1983, p. 260).

Hall wrote of cultural identity as a constant “production ... never complete ... always constituted within, not outside, representation” (1990, p. 222) and necessarily as collective as it is individual—part of

the unending dialogue with identity and identification which has opened up in late-modern societies at the end of the twentieth century. Not the old, existential question of “who am I”, but the new question to which, in their very different ways, Foucault and Simone de Beauvoir—to name but two recent writers—have directed us. The one which breaks across the old boundaries between private and public worlds, between the subjective and the objective divide, between personal and political, which the idea of “heroism” requires us to negotiate anew: “What can I?”—and “How am I to”—become?

(Hall, 1996, p. 118)

An interest in fluidity as well as structure also characterized Hall’s ambivalent feelings toward post-structuralism, leading at the height of a rather unyielding Marxism to this dismissive remark: “A narrow hothouse intellectual culture, which feeds off its own most recent, usually French, ideas, is quite incapable of actually contesting the grasp of conventional ideas and conventional wisdom where it counts” (Hall, 1978, p. 8). Years later, having grown seemingly more ambivalent, he nevertheless worried that

post-structuralism has done a lot of damage, although I’m very influenced by post-structuralism. It has done a lot of damage because the writing is so elusive that you can’t see how they got there except to say, you’re brilliant Foucault. Well you know, that doesn’t help anybody. What that

produced in cultural studies was ventriloquism. Everybody writing like Foucault, making French puns in English! [laughs] Différence, différence. So it produces a kind of internal explosion and yet, a sort of leaving the world.

(Hall, 2013)

Intellectuals

In keeping with his fascination with how hegemony is constructed, lost, won, and maintained, Hall ascribed great significance to the role of intellectuals, both within and beyond the academy, and did not subscribe to a romance of the subaltern in which people suffering because of their identities were somehow masters of understanding either their suffering or identity by contrast with intellectuals. In class terms, for example, he argued that

[w]orking people, in addition to everything else they need under capitalist conditions, need intellectuals to be active beside them in the struggle. But they also require intellectuals to be right about the game they are playing. We are the repositories of the mental capital which belongs to them. There is no point, at this stage in history, in appearing on the streets, or outside the factories and offices, saying, “You are always right, just go ahead with it. We are waiting for you.” That cannot be what they need from us. That cannot be the way of recognizing our intellectual responsibility to the struggle. Part of our support for the working class must be our commitment to understand the nature of intellectual politics.

(Hall, 1978, pp. 12–13)

Because of the dominance of capitalist ideology,

the culture of the resistant and subordinate [*sic*] classes will always be deflected. It will always contain imaginary elements. It will never be able to fully grasp the relations and conditions in which people exist. Therefore, the study of culture cannot be a transparency. A study of cultural resistance on the part of the working class cannot be simply an affirmation of their heroism, or what have you. It requires concepts: it requires the intervention of theory.

(Hall, 1978, p. 12)

Hall thought working people and university scholars ironically mirrored one another in their shuttered worldviews: “the profound anti-intellectualism and reductionism of sections of the left ... [is] partly because middle class academics pursue important intellectual questions in a fiercely academicist way. The anti-intellectualism of one part of the left is confirmed, as it were, by the hyper-intellectualism of the other” (1978, pp. 7–8).

Unlike many of his latter-day followers, who hunt around feverishly for semiotic insurrection, direct action, or bad behavior in public, and all based on the imagined emotions of the oppressed, Hall expressed great dubiety about accepting daily life as understood by ordinary people:

Social science is about deconstructing the obvious, it is about showing people that the things they immediately feel to be “just like that” aren’t quite “just like that.” The really crucial question is how do you begin to make that move away from the level of prejudice and belief. One needs to undermine the obvious. One has to show that these are social and historical processes.

(1983, p. 263)

Popular Culture

So despite his interest in subcultures, music, television, and so on, it would be a great and grave mistake to see Hall as a populist who placed his faith in the revolutionary tendencies of audiences, workers, or minorities per se: “we must keep taking our students back over and through and beyond the conventional. It requires teaching some bad history and some bad sociology and a lot of rotten philosophy so that our students can actively intervene in schools and colleges. If they don’t know these themes, they don’t know how to combat bourgeois common sense” (Hall, 1978, p. 8).

Hall described popular culture as a “sort of constant battlefield ... where no once-for-all victories are obtained but where there are always strategic positions to be won and lost” (Hall, 1981). He understood its genealogy: “The relative affluence of the 1960s was greeted with a widening of politics beyond its previous bounds. Many new voices—speaking for class, gender, race, nation and region, and alternative life-styles—insisted on being heard. New arenas of cultural and social contestation opened up” (Hall et al., 1995, p. 8); “[i]n the 1960s, rock music, the new youth culture, the decline of deference, the liberating effect for women of the contraceptive pill, the counter-culture and mind-expanding drugs were straws in the wind of trouble to come” (Hall, 2011, p. 712).

Hall’s engagement with commodification led to neither an embrace of the commercial nor a disdain for it because, again, he read it symptomatically: the “popular imaginary ... gets expressed in the dirty, compromised, commercialized, overridden world of popular culture, which is never an un-contradictory space, never an uncontested space” (Hall & Back 2009, p. 681). Hall sensed an “overwhelming mirror of football” (Hall, 1998, p. 191) that could encompass and refract the social world and saw humor in the popular, as when he cited Liberace saying: “If I play Tchaikovsky I play his melodies and skip his spiritual

struggles ... I have to know just how many notes my audience will stand for” (quoted in Hall & Whannel, 1965, p. 70)

Media

As part of this critique of the popular, Hall had a long and complex encounter with theories of the media. Sixty years ago, he wrote about the spread of consumer electronics among the poor as part of “a legitimate materialism, born out of centuries of physical deprivation and want” (1958, p. 26). But 50 years later, he discerned

an exponential rise in the marketing of “technological desire.” The mobile phone, fast broadband connection and a Facebook entry are now “necessities of life”, even in places where millions do not have them or actually know what they do. News, information, views, opinions and commentaries have been, as they say, “democratized”—i.e. flattened out—by the internet, in the illusion that, since internet space is unregulated, the net is “free”; and one person’s view is as good as another’s in the marketplace of opinion. We know more about the trivial and banal daily round of life of other people than we do about climate change or sustainability. The most “sustainable” subject par excellence is probably the figure of the self-sufficient urban traveller—mobile, gym-trim, cycling gear, helmet, water bottle and other survival kit at the ready, unencumbered by “commitments”, untethered, roaming free.

(Hall, 2011, pp. 722–723)

Hall had no truck with the simplistic, if beguiling, cybertarianism of many of his followers. Their technofuturism left him running to political economy:

The whole internet, the whole digital world, is currently financed by using this information as a commodity. You have to ask yourself “how do they manage to have ‘free’ sites?” They have free sites because they sell the demographic information for a high price. By Googling, for instance, any program or purchasing anything online, massive amounts of detail are accumulated that can be fed into apparatuses that convert that information to calculate what programs I watch, what music, where I live, how I dress. This information is operationalizing knowledge about what the popular is, making it more empirically precise, giving it demographic location, giving it place, situation, etc.

(Hay et al., 2013, p. 26)

As Hall pointed out, in an epoch of globalization, the world is increasingly and tellingly “dominated by television and by film, and by image, imagery, and styles of mass advertising” (1991a, p. 27):

Mass communications seek to standardize and homogenise outputs of information, to realise economies of scale and consequent profits, as much as to influence beliefs. But mass communications also mean more information and greater access to it for more people. Who can now say whether the net effect of these changes will be to concentrate or to diffuse power and opportunity?

(Hall et al., 1995, p. 14)

But again, there is great ambivalence in Hall’s view of the media. He became a noted interpreter of Umberto Eco’s mid-1960s development of a notion of encoding-decoding, open texts, and aberrant readings (Eco, 1972). Eco looked at the ways that meanings were put into programs by producers and extracted from programs by viewers and the differences between these protocols. Those insights were picked up by Frank Parkin (1971) and then by Hall (1980).

And in his retirement, Hall was definitely an active audience member: “I speak and talk to the radio and the TV all the time. I say, ‘that is not true’ and ‘you are lying through your teeth’ and ‘that cannot be so.’ I keep up a running dialogue” (Taylor, 2007). That dialogue, in varied forms, continues to run after its principal discussant has gone.

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Subscriber: OUP-USA Mirror; date: 25 April 2018



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Hua Hsu on the Jamaican scholar Stuart Hall and his contributions to the study, understanding, and appreciation of popular culture. Save this story for later. Save this story for later. In the summer of 1983, the Jamaican scholar Stuart Hall, who lived and taught in England, travelled to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, to deliver a series of lectures on something called "Cultural Studies." Stuart Hall's contribution to critical theory and to the study of politics, culture, media, race, diaspora and postcolonialism has been fundamental, hence his thought is difficult to summarise. In line with the "organic intellectual" of Gramsci, for whom knowledge has to be shared beyond the realm of the intellectual, his epistemological posture was embedded within political and public commitments. Stuart Hall was born in Jamaica and won a Rhodes scholarship to Oxford University, arriving in 1951. He always saw himself as a 'familiar stranger' in Britain. Photograph: Eamonn McCabe. David Morley and Bill Schwarz. Mon 10 Feb 2014 13.00 GMT. When the writer and academic Richard Hoggart founded the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University in 1964, he invited Stuart Hall, who has died aged 82, to join him as its first research fellow. The sociologist and cultural theorist Stuart Hall, who has died aged 82, was an intellectual giant and an inspirational figure in the field of sociology. He was one of the founders of what is now known as "British Cultural Studies", which Hall and his colleagues pioneered in the mid-1960s. Professor Henry Louis Gates of Harvard University called him "Black Britain's leading theorist of black Britain." Hall saw Britain as a country which is forever battling, within itself and with other nations. Stuart Hall is Professor of Sociology at the Open University in England and, for the last thirty years, has been at the forefront of work concerning the media's role in society. Hall is very closely identified in media studies with an approach known as "cultural studies," and he starts with one of its central concepts: representation. The usual meaning of this term is connected with whether the depiction of something is an accurate or distorted reflection.