INTERVIEW **Stuart Hall**

Culture and power

RP: How would you describe the current state of cultural studies in Britain in relation to its past?

Hall: It's a question of how far back you want to go, because everybody has a narrative about this and everybody's narrative is different. There was certainly something distinctive about the founding moment in the 1960s, but even during that period, when it was mainly Birmingham, the field was transformed several times by some pretty major reconfigurations; and in any case, there was never simply one thing going on at any one time. This was partly because of the structure of the Birmingham Centre: each study group had its own trajectory, so there wasn't a uniform field. Since then, each appropriation, each widening, has brought in new things. Nonetheless, it's pretty extraordinary to compare the founding moment with what cultural studies is today. Increasingly varied practices go under the heading of cultural studies. If you include the USA, that's another bag of tricks, and global dispersion is happening very rapidly. Australians have gone in for cultural studies in a very big way and the Asian development is massive: in Taiwan, Saigon… So the most distinctive thing about the present is its situational appropriation. There must be some core which allows people to identify *this* as opposed to *that* as cultural studies, and not something else, but in each case there is a tendency for it to take on the intellectual coloration of the place where it's operating. The questions that people are asking cultural studies to answer in Japan are very different from those in Australia or the UK.

RP: What makes up the core?

Hall: It's quite difficult to define. You could say something very general – that culture is the dimension of meaning and the symbolic – but cultural studies has always looked at this in the context of the social relations in which it occurs, and asked questions about the organization of power. So it's cultural power, I think, that is the crux of what distinguishes cultural studies from, say, classical studies, which is after all the study of the culture of Roman times. There are all kinds of cultural studies going on, but this interest in combining the study of symbolic forms and meanings with the study of power has always been at the centre. However varied the appropriation becomes, I would hesitate to call it cultural studies if that element was not there. So I would distinguish between cultural

***A leading figure of the New Left in the 1960s, Stuart Hall is one of the founders of cultural studies in Britain and its most influential representative, internationally. The first editor of* New Left Review, *1960–61, and author (with P. Whannel) of* The Popular Arts, *1964, Hall was Director of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University from 1967 until 1979. During this period, he oversaw the collective production of a wide range of work, through which many of the central ideas of European sociology, semiotics and the theory of ideology were introduced into the study of culture for the first time in Britain (see, for example, S. Hall et al., eds,* Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972–79, *1980; and S. Hall and T. Jefferson, eds,* Resistance through Ritual: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain, *1976). At the same time, the Centre was at the forefront of analysis of the increasing importance of race within British politics (see S. Hall et al., eds,* Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order, *1979 – a work which prefigured aspects of Hall's own subsequent analysis of Thatcherism). Following his move to the Chair of Sociology at the Open University, and his participation in the debates at the Communist University of London in the late 1970s, Hall's essays on Thatcherism made him the dominant intellectual figure in a group of writers associated with the heretical Communist Party monthly* Marxism Today, *and its project for a new kind of Left politics: 'New Times' (see S. Hall,* The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left, *1988). More recently, Hall has written extensively on questions of identity and ethnicity – essays which are collected, along with interviews and critical essays by other writers, in David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (eds),* Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies, *Routledge, 1996. Stuart Hall retired from his position as Professor of Sociology at the Open University earlier this year. He is an editor of the journal* Soundings.**

studies and certain versions of deconstruction, for instance. A lot of deconstructionists do work which they consider to be a kind of cultural studies. But a formal deconstructionism which isn't asking questions about the insertion of symbolic processes into societal contexts and their imbrication with power is not interested in the cultural studies problematic, as I see it; although it may be a perfectly appropriate practice. It doesn't mean that deconstruction is ruled out. But around the circumference of cultural studies there has always been this link with something else: cultural studies and psychoanalysis; cultural studies and feminism; cultural studies and race.

RP: It's interesting that you haven't referred to your well-known periodization of this history in terms of changes in a core regulating notion of culture – in that, in Britain, cultural studies began with an anthropological notion of culture, and then shifted towards a more semiotic conception, at a particular point in the early 1970s. Is there no new notion of culture regulating the field today, in the way that these two paradigms did in the past? Or has the field become more piecemeal, lost its theoretical core?

Hall: I am not sure that there is, or ever was, one regulative notion of culture, although the shift you are talking about is a very substantial one. The Williams appropriation, 'a whole way of life' as opposed to 'the best that has been thought or said' or high ideas, raised questions from the very beginning. He'd hardly written the sentence before a critique of the organicist character of that definition emerged. It was an important move, the sociological, anthropological move, but it was cast in terms of a humanist notion of social and symbolic practices. The really big shift was the coming of semiotics and structuralism: not because the definition of culture stopped there, but that remains the defining paradigm shift, nonetheless – signifying practices, rather than a whole way of life.

There had to be some relative autonomy introduced into the study of signifying practices. If you want to study their relation to a whole way of life, that must be thought of as an *articulation*, rather than the position which Williams had, which was that 'everything is expressive of everything else': the practices and the signification, they're all one; the family and ideas about the family are all the same thing. For Williams, everything is dissolved into practice. Of course, the new model was very linguistic, very Saussurean, but nevertheless, that was the definitive break. Everything after that goes back to that moment. Post-structuralism goes back to the structuralist break. Psychoanalytic models are very influenced by the Lévi-Straussian moment, or the Althusserian moment. If I were writing for students, those are still the two definitions I'd pick out, and I wouldn't say there is a third one. I suppose you might say that there was a postmodern one, a Deleuzian one, which says that signification is not meaning, it's a question of affect, but I don't see a break in the regulative idea of culture there as fundamental as the earlier one.

RP: How does Marxism fit in here? In terms of the two paradigms, something rather ironic would appear to happen, which is that Marxism comes in with the linguistic turn, the turn to signification, through structuralism. So the very thing that people might have thought was distinctive about Marxism – its emphasis on practice over and against some self-sufficiency of meaning – was one of the things it was used to attack.

Hall: The late 1960s and early 1970s was such a big moment: a big moment in terms of cultural studies, to be sure, but also a big moment for everything else, politically. So people see cultural studies in terms of its Marxian development. The moment of its flowering was also that moment. But to understand that moment, you have to go back to an earlier point: cultural studies was already developing on the presumption that classical Marxism alone cannot explain the cultural; that there are weaknesses there. You can read Williams's early work as an attempt to speak a kind of cultural Marxism without ever mentioning Marx. If you know how to translate Raymond, you can write in 'mode of production' in *The Long Revolution*, but he would never use the term. It goes back to the 1930s. It goes back to Leavis. It goes back to the fact that the Marxism that was available then was a very economistic Marxism. It wasn't European Marxism, it wasn't Lukács – that was unknown. What was available was Ralph Fox or *Left Review*: the best of the literary Marxists. And Leavis said: this is inadequate to a conception of culture. Everything begins there. Some people never asked the question about that connection ever again, but a lot of people went on worrying about it, including a lot of Leavisites: L.C. Knights, critics like that, kept wanting to know, 'What is the relationship between language, literature, and society?' If you can't do it in a Marxist way, you still have to answer that question, or rephrase it, or reformulate it. That was the formation that Raymond addressed. The relation to Marxism was *already inside* the argument prior to 1968. We knew we couldn't simply go by that route. Then, after 1968, something happened: *New Left Review* translated all those writings. Suddenly there was an available European Marxism. There was Adorno, there was Lukács, and so on. There was a moment when the possibility arose that cultural studies might have grounded itself in a Hegelian tradition, rather than a Saussurean one.

RP: This was the moment of the sociology of literature?

Hall: Yes, that's right, but remember, at this point the Birmingham Centre was reading practically everything: reading Mannheim, reading Parsons, reading Weber, reading Goldmann – anything which would help us to ask the question of the relation between culture and society in a way which wouldn't be subject to an economistic reduction, but which would avoid formalist criticism. That's when we first heard about Gramsci. Everything was read as a possible model. It wasn't until the 1970s that things became more grounded in a theoretical understanding of Marxism – but critically, a Marxism which was distinctive in that it tried to get around the problem of reductionism. That's why Gramsci and Althusser became important: they offered ways through these questions without reductionism.

RP: One thing the Birmingham Centre wasn't reading much of was philosophy. Cultural studies developed in Britain almost wholly without recourse to the theoretical resources of the philosophical tradition – 'analytical' or 'continental'. On the other hand, as people became increasingly interested in theory – theory in the generic sense, the unqualified sense, Theory with a capital 'T' – some of the bad things about philosophical abstraction get reinstituted as theory. Cultural studies often seems to have lacked the conceptual resources to deal with this. Do you regret the lack of a philosophical dimension to the formation of cultural studies in Britain?

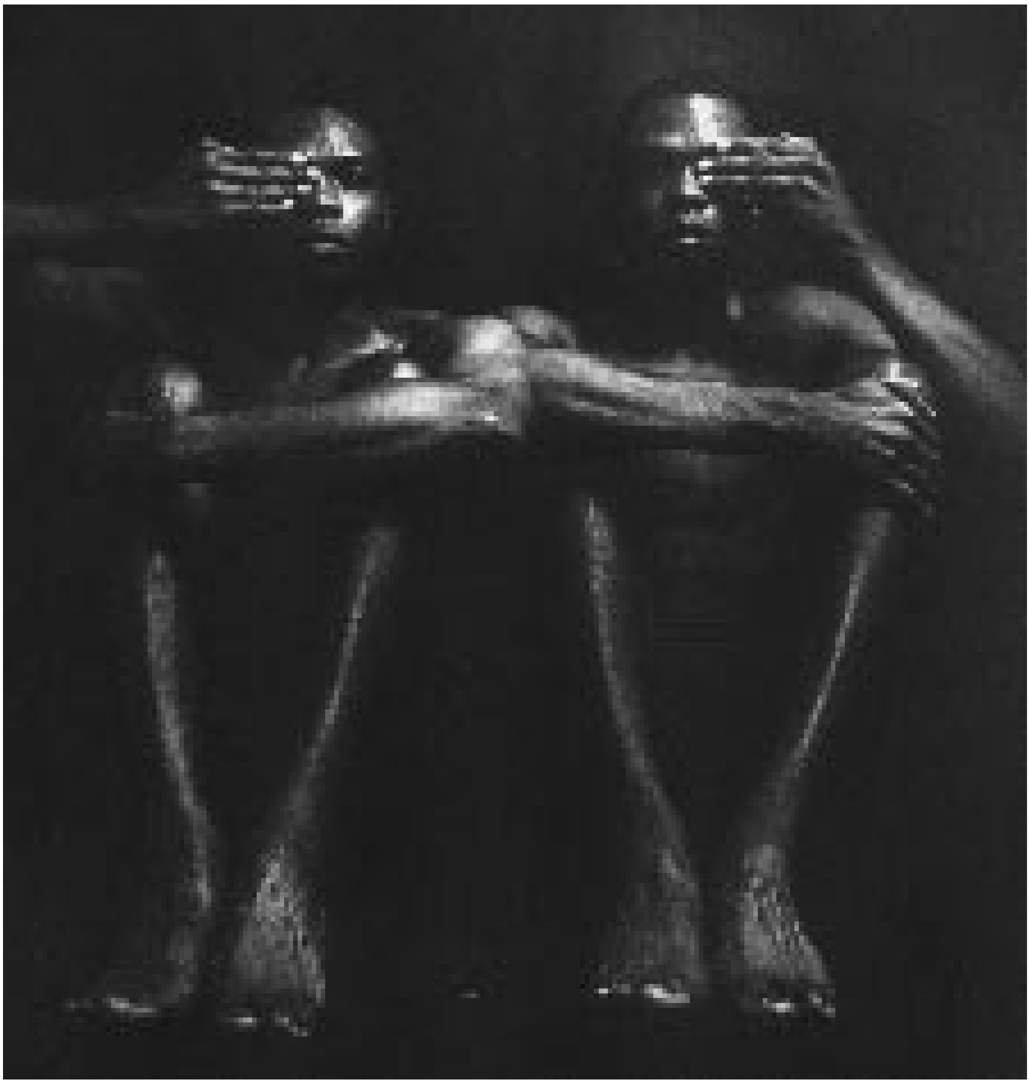
Hall: I have two possibly contradictory thoughts about this. One is that we were in various ways inheritors of the critique of philosophical abstraction as such: not in a Wittgensteinian way, but as part of the Marxist and sociological critiques of philosophy. We did shift very powerfully towards theory, but we resisted Althusser's notion of theoretical practice, in the name of that earlier critique. We never accepted the notion that theory was an autonomous instance which produced its own internal validation. On the other hand, equally important was the pragmatic absence of anybody interested in or trained in philosophy. Cultural studies came out of history and literature, partly because those were the people who were there. Later, something huge happens with the appropriation of philosophy through literary theory. Homi Bhabha is a product of that moment, when all that had been excluded by British analytical philosophy was taken up by literary people, including psychoanalysis, of course.

It's already there in Anderson's 'Components of the National Culture' essay: literature became a repository of psychoanalysis in Britain, and also of a kind of sociology, because there were no powerful indigenous traditions. Similarly, British philosophy excluded so much that seemed to be relevant: if you wanted to read Hegel – no chance; if you wanted to read Saussure – nothing; if you wanted to read Kant – not much, not much that was intelligible to a broader readership anyway. What was there as philosophy wasn't of any help to us in a pragmatic sense. You could see this as disabling, since there are rich traditions in philosophy and a disciplined mode of thinking, which would have made us much more rigorous.

The relevance of Gramsci

RP: Nonetheless, you continue to be suspicious of general theory. In your recent piece 'The Relevance of Gramsci to the Study of Ethnicity', I was struck by your insistence that Gramsci is not a general theorist. It seems that Gramsci continues to be a point of orientation for you *because* he is not a general theorist. This raises an interesting question about the role of Gramsci's thought in the rethinking of Marxism, especially in relation to Althusser. What has Gramsci's role been for you?

Hall: That's a big question. First of all, I am perfectly well aware of making Gramsci up, of producing my own Gramsci. When I read Perry Anderson's classic piece on Gramsci, 'The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci' – Gramsci, the true Leninist – I recognize that there are many aspects of Gramsci's life and work that my Gramsci doesn't take on. It's an appropriation at a particular moment for a particular purpose. I don't think I'm doing violence to Gramsci, but I do know that I am reading him in a certain way, for my own purposes. I'm not a Gramsci scholar, trying to re-occupy his moment. The legitimacy or illegitimacy of this as a practice is neither here nor there. One thinks as one can. Now, one of the most important things about Gramsci for me is precisely his insertion in the specificity of the historical moment. That operates for me as a kind of protocol. Since this isn't Italy, you can't take him literally. You've got to do your own work to make Gramsci work for England. What is good about him is



Rotimi Fani-Kayodé, Half Opened Eyes Twins precisely the specificity: the intricate interweaving of religious, regional, cultural, historical, political and rural elements in the Italian context.

But there is also a second aspect, which I find most powerful about Gramsci: the analysis of conjunctures. Conjunctures are precisely an overdetermination. That is to say, the level of analysis at which the conjuncture operates is the level of analysis at which various different elements that you can analytically separate out are no longer separated out, because they're in an overdetermined relation. You can go back and isolate out, analytically, the economy, or the political, but at that level Gramsci doesn't do very much for me. What he offers me is a way of understanding the condensation of all of these elements at a moment which is not repeatable, in a condition which is not repeatable. This focus on the conjuncture is theoretical, in a way, because it defines the level at which the analysis operates, but it is also specific, historically specific. In addition to the question of economism, the aspects of Marxism about which I've always been most hesitant are the ones which are often most attractive theoretically: the ones which allow you to break into the messiness of the historical conjuncture and show that really, if you understand things in much longer terms, in terms of aggregates and tendencies, then it *will* all work out in the end. It's not that I deny that level of the analysis, but what interests me is the next, more determinate, stage (to use Marx's own terms).

It's about privileging a certain level of analysis, a certain object of analysis. I am not interested in capitalism as such. I am interested in why capitalism was like that in the 1960s – or is like this in the 1990s – and why these moments have to be understood as an overdetermination of cultural and political and other factors: 'the concrete analysis of a concrete situation' as Lenin said about 1917, and Althusser reminded us. Of course, there is a sense in which, for Marx, it all has to make sense in terms of the logic of capital, but you couldn't have predicted the moment of 1917 without taking a variety of other determinations into account. This is the level at which Gramsci operates. When he is writing about the analysis of situations he is much better than when he is telling you about what's happening to capital. He doesn't tell you anything new about that. It's a practical-theoretical interest. What is interesting about Althusser is that he was also trying to theorize many determinations. 'Contradiction and Overdetermination' is a reworking in another language, a structuralist language, of the Gramscian method. However, it seems to me that Althusser is actually better at the opposite moment. He's better at the *longue durée*, analytically separating out the instances. So I use Gramsci as a check on Althusser.

RP: This sounds very empirical, this opening up of the order of determinations to history. But isn't there also a theoretical focus to Gramsci's interest in overdetermination? Isn't overdetermination in Gramsci always something to do with the way that class forces are mediated in their relations to the state? Gramsci may want to avoid class reductionism, but his is still a politics of class, in the sense that the political function of other social forces is to rearticulate the relationship between classes via their relations to the state. Doesn't this cast doubt on the idea that Gramsci is the route to a political pluralization of social forces, in which class becomes just one social force among others, without any inherent theoretical privilege?

Hall: That is my difference from the people who write about Gramsci who don't take my road. I'm interested in what enabled Gramsci to be so good at elaborating the *other* actors on stage. Take the movement from class to the national-popular, for instance. This movement between the class and the national-popular, which has class inscribed in it but is never reducible to it, is an intriguing movement for me.

RP: Is there a connection here for you between Gramsci's notion of the popular and the emphasis on the ordinary in Williams? Is the former a way of continuing the political work of the latter? Indeed, could one say that the popular is the key political concept of cultural studies?

Hall: Well, the idea recurs in slightly different forms in a continuing thread. In my own case, I have made no proper attempt to be consistent between the various versions. Williams was interested in moving down from high theory to thinking about working-class organizations as a part of culture, rendering culture ordinary. I was interested in the popular arts. This was the first thing I ever wrote about: the breakdown between high cultural forms and popular forms, and the idea that popular forms give one, not an unmediated access, but some access to forms of consciousness which are not inscribed in the great books or in the serious high-level philosophies. Then you come to Gramsci and you get the meditation between philosophy and common sense – the popular. Common sense is what ideologies transform: the relationships between common sense and good sense. Then there's the national-popular. Each of these is somewhere along the continuing thread of interest, but I wouldn't say that Williams's culture of the ordinary is the same as my popular culture, is the same as common sense, is the same as the national-popular.

The national-popular has some powerful elements in it, but it also has some worrying ones too. The nation is inscribed there in a slightly different way from other notions of the popular. Common sense doesn't have that notion of the national in it; it is often articulated *against* the national. Williams is not interested in inscribing his 'Culture is Ordinary' into a particularly national framework; although when you reread it later, you realize that in his work it does have all kinds of national peculiarities inscribed in it. But it's not conceived as *English* popular culture, *English* common sense. By the time you get to the national-popular, though, you have a more political approach to the question of the popular, because the national-popular becomes an object of national political strategy. So you can use it to think about the terrain of operation of the state. Nonetheless, it also inserts us into a curious argument where we suddenly find ourselves at the edge of socialism in one country: the idea that you could create a national-popular conception of the UK which wouldn't have anything to do with anywhere else. It's a very tricky moment. We're only saved from that by the fact that I move out of the Birmingham Centre and Paul Gilroy moves in! If you go down that path too far, thinking that the privileged object of politics must be the nation – the national-popular, rather than the popular – what a bag that puts you in.

RP: This is because Gramsci develops his concepts out of an analysis of fascism?

Hall: Sure. First, out of the Italian context, and then out of the appropriation of that context in fascism. Absolutely. It works for him because the problem of the nation is so critical in Italy. The issue of the nation was a focus of popular politics and agitation in Italy, and still is, in a way it wasn't in Britain, where the contours of the nation were already resolved. Here, the problem of the nation is only too well defined, with its borders – its signifying borders – very clearly delineated. This is one of the areas in which the transfer of ideas from Gramsci doesn't work well, the fit isn't good, and it lands you in problems that you didn't foresee.

The ideological instance

RP: These problems appear to be connected to the descriptive character of the Gramscian analysis, or what has been called the 'neutrality' of its concept of ideology. Your use of the concept of ideology has been criticized, by Jorge Lorrain for example, for remaining neutral, for rejecting the element of epistemological critique associated, for some, with its classical Marxist variant. How do you respond to this criticism? It's important because one of its upshots is that people are going to accuse you of complicity in Thatcherism, as a consequence of the neutrality of your analysis of its success.

Hall: The problem arises from the Althusserian framework of three different 'instances' of the social (the economic, the political, and the ideological), because there is no cultural instance. Where do you put culture, especially after culture has been redefined in terms of signification? Well, one solution is to absorb what is going on in cultural studies into the place of the ideological instance. There is in Althusser's 'Ideological State Apparatuses' essay a broad definition of ideological apparatuses which is very close to what Gramsci would have called a hegemonic institution – despite its functionalism, which destroys that essay. 'Church, state, family, and school' presents a much broader definition of the ideological apparatuses than the media. So that's one issue: the interface between the Althusserian schema and the more Hegelian question of theorizing the place of culture. The Althusserian schema accepts that each instance is constitutive rather than reflexive. One is looking for what is constitutive about each of them, and then at the articulation between them. That's where the notion of articulation comes in. It's very important. One has already escaped from the notion that if this is the ideological instance it is because it *reflects* economic and political practice, or because it is dependent on them.

Second, there is the Althusserian argument about the impossibility of getting outside of ideology. I accept it. If you have substituted culture for ideology, the notion that getting outside of ideology is possible, because you can get into science, no longer holds. You can't get outside of culture, because you can't understand what a human being would be like outside of a cultural frame. You can't get outside of the economy either – you can't get outside of the reproduction of material life – but also, you can never get outside of the reproduction of symbolic life. Culture is for ever. Thus, for me, the difference between one cultural formation and another cannot be conceptualized in terms of the distinction between ideology and science where the latter stands for 'truth'; it cannot be thought in terms of mystification in the straightforward sense of 'mystification versus enlightenment'. It may be thought in terms of relative degrees of mystification or misunderstanding, but all culture is misunderstanding, in the sense that all culture imposes particular maps on everything. Everybody is not constantly mystified in the same way or to the same degree. There are differences between a better and a worse explanation of something. But there is no truth versus mystification which we can write into the very *a priori* definition of ideology.

RP: So you would say that the charge that you fall prey to a certain 'ideologism' misunderstands the concept of ideology that you are working with?

Hall: Yes, it does. Ideology is 'neutral' in the sense that ideology and culture are inscribed in language and language is the infinite semiosis of meaning. Now, particular ideologies intervene in language to secure a particular configuration. Language always goes out having many meanings and ideology says: 'This is the particular linguistic thing that explains the world. The meaning must stop here, because this is the truth.' Ideology intervenes to stop language, to stop culture producing new meanings, and that, of course, is the opening through which interest operates. Why do you want to stop the slide of meaning? You want to halt it because you want to do something, you want to control society in some way. That is the moment of the articulation of power in language. The moment of power is not in ideology or culture as an instance. The moment of power is in the historically situated intervention of ideology in practices of signification. That is the moment of overdetermination. That is the moment of suturing. As Voloshinov says, that's when the powerful want to bring history to an end. They want one set of meanings to last for ever and of course it doesn't, it can't: hegemony is never forever. It's always unwoven by culture going on meaning more things. There are always new realities to explain, new configurations of forces. So a neutral definition of ideology and culture does not require me to leave the critical question aside. But I place it elsewhere: in the contingent articulation between social forces and signifying practices, not definitionally in the signifying practices themselves.

RP: But doesn't that leave you with a kind of pragmatism?

Hall: Of course it does. I would say it leaves me with a much more contingent notion of history, because ideology is never the *necessary expression* of a class interest. It is the way certain class interests and other social forces attempt to intervene in the sphere of signification, to articulate or harness it to a particular project, to hegemonize.

RP: Something else happens at this point, which is the reception of Foucault. The discursive becomes ever more powerful as a way of understanding subjectivity. Yet in the move from the Althusserian moment to the Foucauldian moment the social forces that you mention seem to disappear. The discursive becomes the total social interest. If Williams dissolved everything into practice, Foucauldians dissolve everything into language. Isn't this what happened in the mid 1980s?

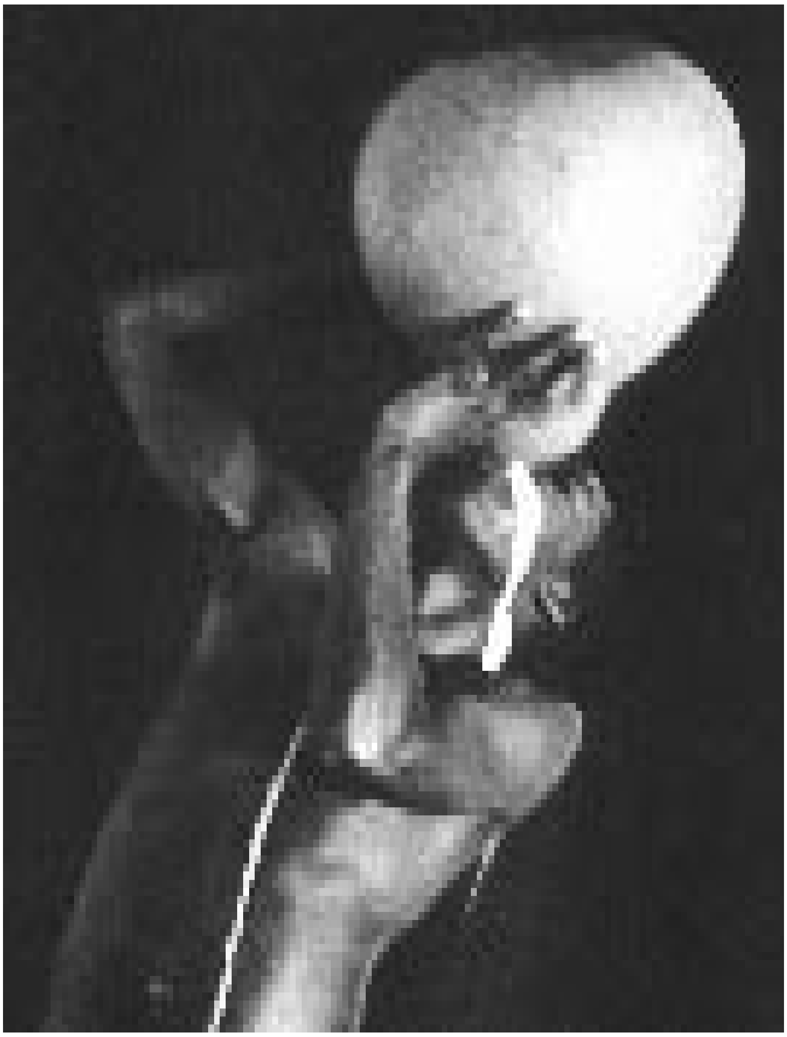
Hall: It happens in a lot of Foucault, but I don't think it's necessary. The reason one doesn't swallow Foucault whole is because Foucault does not recognize the importance of the state, or the importance of social forces in securing a configuration of discourse. Nonetheless, I buy the Foucauldian critique of the science/ideology couplet; I buy the Foucauldian notion that it's not only classes that intervene; and I buy the notion that one has to rethink an expressive relationship between class and ideas. A discursive definition is close to the way in which I've been using the terms 'ideology' and 'culture', but I want to ask residual ideological questions about the Foucauldian notion of the discursive. This is why I wouldn't call myself a paid-up Foucauldian.

The notion of discourse is ambiguous in Foucault. A thinking of discourse as *both* what is said and what is done, which breaks down the distinction between language (discourse in the narrow sense) and practice, is much closer to what I think he intends than just language, but this is not always how he uses the term himself. Unfortunately, most people who use the word discourse think he is talking about what people say. For me, the only function of discourse is to end the action/language distinction. Here I am closest to Laclau – a weak Laclauian or Wittgensteinian position: building a wall includes the things you say, a model in the head, and the things which you do with your body. You can't reduce it to the things you do with your body and you can't reduce it to the things you say. So why say 'discursive'? To resist the notion that there is a materialism which is outside of meaning. Everything is within the discursive, but nothing is only discourse or only discursive. It's a convenience, really. Rather than battle on with 'ideology', always adding, although not in the classical Marxist sense, in a world saturated by the question of discourse, I find it more convenient to conduct that argument in polemical relation to the linguistic appropriation of Foucault; instead of going on doing it within the Gramscian–Althusserian–Marxist frame, which is not how people are talking about it any longer. It's a strategy of theorizing – to insist on the constitutive nature of the symbolic-cultural level.

Loosening the moorings

RP: It's a strategy, yes; but surely it has theoretical effects of its own. One of which is an intensification of the pragmatism of the position, a further embrace of contingency. One thing I find problematic about this is that one of the great strengths of Marxism – its status as a historical discourse, a discourse which allows you to think historically about the present – seems to get lost, once the present acquires a certain theoretical self-sufficiency. The notion of conjuncture shifts from describing a condensation of forces about which you can also tell a broader story, to a temporally self-sufficient complex of events. Narrative is reduced to the serial sum of conjunctural moments. In Laclau, for example, the idea of discourse is tied up with the notion of contingency in such a way that there's very little credibility given to broader historical and political narratives, which allow one to look *beyond* the conjuncture.

Hall: There is clearly a link between the interest in the conjuncture, the interest in overdetermination, the interest in the infinite semiosis of meaning, and the interest in contingency. All of them are about structuration without structure, or structure without closure. They are all open-ended structures. This is why I like the notion of discursive formation too. I am interested in all of these contingent concepts. However, I do believe that, at a certain point, in thinking the appropriation and expropriation, the reappropriation or reconfiguration of Gramsci, Laclau was in danger of moving to a point where anything could be articulated with anything; where any story is as good as any other story; where any narrative can be told. What I resist saying is that there's only one story to be told, whose 'truth' one knows from another level. But I do insist that some stories have a much longer structuration, a *longue durée*, almost a historical inertia. Some stories are just bigger than others. Certain social forces have been attached to them historically, and they are likely to go on being attached to them. Unless you do something fairly radical, in Britain, the notion of nation will connect you with particular social forces and a particular, imperial, definition of Britain. It's not inevitable – you could decouple it, but a huge struggle has to go on to do so. Why? Because that is how a formation has developed, has become embedded in its subjects, embedded in its institutions, embedded in public narratives. At a certain point in the argument, discursive reconfiguration became a loose, free-floating thing. But the way to tie it down is in terms of historical specificity. That limits my notion of contingency, but it doesn't get rid of it. I agree with Laclau that, without contingency, there is no history. If there's an inertia in historical systems, it's the result of a historical, not a theoretical materialism.


Rotimi Fani-Kayodé, Milk drinker, 1983

RP: Yet it was an ahistorical idealism which dominated the reception of these ideas. For people coming out of the social movements of the 1970s, what was so strange about the take-up of Laclau by *Marxism Today* in the mid-1980s was that the historical theorizing which those movements had done – of the entrenched nature of gender hierarchy, and the entrenched nature of race, for example – was ignored in favour of a general theoretical principle of equivalence between different social forms of subjectivity. There was a clearing away of political-historical narratives at the very moment when the forms of power they narrated were reasserting their centrality to political life. And all in the name of supporting a politics of movements!

Hall: Well, I agree that is largely what happened. But I would say that it wasn't necessary, from the theorizing, that it should have been so. It was more to do with the Communist tradition which these people came from. Coming from a very fixed position, they embraced its opposite with a kind of heady openness. They jumped over the intermediary space, which is historically defined. In looking at the actual conjuncture, they should have asked: what are the actual social forces opening this up, on the real terrain in front of us? But they didn't ask that question. It wasn't grounded in that way. In spite of the fact that the Laclau and Mouffe book is about hegemony – *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* – hegemony wasn't thought in a Gramscian way. What I like about Gramsci is that there is always some concrete instance there, and there is always power. This doesn't prevent you from generalizing, but you can always see some forces on the ground. Whereas what happened in Britain was that the theorizing went up a notch, I agree.

RP: It went up another notch when Lacan was thrown into the brew, because on top of this linguistically based equivalence of subject positions we suddenly had overlaid an account of sexual difference as something which overrides all other differences. We were presented with a version of feminism which you have described very well, I think, as 'reductionism upwards', in which the only issue is positionality in relation to sexual difference in language. All the other work which was done by feminists in the 1970s was let go – in relation to the state, social structures, even gender regimes. All that became unimportant and we were back to fixity again. Once Foucault's concept of discourse is conflated with Lacan's notion of the symbolic – and Laclau does this explicitly – it's hard to see how to make a politics out of it. All this happened in the late 1980s, of course, when politics was not a very desirable terrain to be occupying.

Hall: At that moment, the psychoanalytic reduction upwards was very seductive. It reminded one of the valid critique: that so many of the other theories are inadequate to subjectivity – inadequate to sexuality, inadequate to the psychic. It validated that critique. It also has some common origins with cultural studies in terms of Lacan's relationships to Saussure and Lévi-Strauss. It seemed to come from the same stable: it's about gender, which people need to talk about, since it's been neglected in most of the other central strands of theorizing; but it does land you in an apolitical space in the end, I agree. It leaves you with what I continue to see as the central problem: the more difficult question of the relationship between the symbolic and the social, the psychic and the social. It's a puzzling terrain.

RP: The way you address it in your recent work is through the idea of identity: in particular, you have been trying to give the notion of positionality a cultural turn. In your essay 'What's Black about Black Popular Culture?', for example, you talk about moving away from the essentialism debate towards 'a new kind of cultural positionality, a different logic of difference'. What is it, this 'new kind of cultural positionality'?

Hall: It's the notion that identity is position, that identities are not fixed. I make exactly the same moves that I make in relation to Laclau: I loosen the moorings, but I won't float. Identity is not fixed, but it's not nothing either. The task is how to think the fact that identities are important to us, and register some continuities along a spectrum, but we're never just what we were. I think of identity in terms of positionality. Identity is, for me, the point of suture between the social and the psychic. Identity is the sum of the (temporary) positions offered by a social discourse in which you are willing for the moment to invest. It is where the psyche is able to invest in a public space, to locate itself in a public discourse, and from there, act and speak. It's both a point of enunciation and a point of agency, but it won't be repeated, it won't be the same position that you will take up later on; or at least, it won't be the same position that you have in relation to another discourse. The question of whether you identify with black causes is different if it's in relation to white, from when the question of black men or black women is at issue. These are two positionalities. What you might call your 'self' is composed of the different positionalities or identities that you are willing to 'subject' yourself to, to be 'subjected' to.

The only model that I have for thinking this in a broader way is the Derridean model of *différance*. As you know, this is a model which thinks difference, but not in a binary way. Any particular meaning stakes a positionality on a spectrum which is given by its binary extremes, but you cannot occupy either end. You just need the ends theoretically to think of the spectrum. That's what I call a cultural logical of difference. Difference is important, but I don't think of difference in binary terms. It is positional.

Diasporic identities

RP: In this work on identity there is one notion which has grown in prominence as a way of giving determinacy to the kind of distributive difference of cultural positionalities that you have been talking about. This is the notion of diaspora. Diaspora has become increasingly generalized: from the Jewish context, to the black context, to ethnicity in general. Do you see it as offering a theoretical model for cultural identity *tout court*?

Hall: Well, it is certainly doing a lot of work. It's connected with the Derridean notion of dissemination, so it's connected with the idea of movement – there is no single origin – and the movement outwards, from narrower to wider, is never reversed. It's connected with the notion of hybridity, so it's connected with the critique of essentialism. But the notion of diaspora suggests that the outcome of the critique of an essentialist reading of cultural transmission is not that anything goes, is not that you lose all sense of identity; it is the consequential inscription of the particular positionalities that have been taken up. The history depends on the routes. It's the replacement of 'roots' with 'routes'. There are no routes which are unified. The further back you go, something else is always present, historically, and the movement is always towards dissemination.

So I certainly don't mean diaspora in the Jewish sense – some umbilical connection to the holy land – quite definitely not! Quite the opposite. That is the most dangerous notion of all. I prefer to use the word adjectivally – diasporic – and I think of ethnicity in the same way. I don't mean by ethnicity some kind of collective home, which you then police. I use ethnicity to signal something specific in the positionality, the particular histories inscribed in the position: what makes your difference different from my difference. That is our ethnicity. And because it is disseminated, it is constantly open to repositioning. That's the logic of *différance* which I am using to think the question of positionality, the question of ethnicity, and the question of diaspora. Theoretically there is a kind of low-flying use of erasure, in the Derridean sense. Ethnicity is the only terminology we have to describe cultural specificity, so one has to go back to it, if one doesn't want to land up with an empty cosmopolitanism – 'citizens of the world' as the only identity. But I don't go back to the concept in its original form. I use it with a line drawn through it. The diaspora has a line through it too: in the era of globalization, we are all *becoming* diasporic.

RP: Is this a historical phenomenon, then?

Hall: That's a big issue which I haven't yet resolved in my mind: whether you can look at earlier periods – pre-conquest, say – when cultures were more self-sufficient and had been over a long period of time, and apply the notion of diaspora there. Whoever lived in Latin America pre-1494 lived in seclusion from Europeans. I'm interested in globalization because it describes our increasing interdependence. It is not that everywhere is the same, but nowhere is any longer outside the play of influence of somewhere else. That is, increasingly, a historical phenomenon. These terms are urgent now because more of the world looks like this. But it isn't that once things were fixed and now they are diasporic. They always were diasporic, at least in the sense that they were always open to difference, always had a bit of the other inside them. So these are relative questions. Those societies were relatively closed, compared with now; just as the old ideologies were relatively stable, compared with now. In the age of the media and the global, ideologies are transformed much more rapidly.

RP: How does this relate to multiculturalism? One of the consequences of Homi Bhabha's use of the term 'hybridity' would appear to be a rejection of the established notion of multiculturalism, on the grounds that if culture is produced through difference, *all* culture is multicultural.

Hall: This is an instance of taking an insight one step too far. I'm critical of American multiculturalism, which is inscribed pluralism, because it is grounded in an essentialist notion: each group to its own culture. As in the case of 'ethnic' and 'diasporic', I prefer to use the word 'multicultural' adjectivally. Ours is a multicultural society because of the different cultural registers, but is not closed. You can see the impact when you walk through London, the impact of difference: differences which are hybridized but not erased. It doesn't enclose any one group to the exclusion of another. There isn't a strong boundary. However, in Bhabha's work, there is a movement towards a radical cosmopolitanism. The notion of cosmopolitanism has some interesting things going for it, but it doesn't ask the questions 'Who has the power to become cosmopolitan?' and 'What kind of cosmopolitanism is this?' Is the cosmopolitanism of the Humanities Institute at Chicago University the same as the cosmopolitanism of the Pakistani taxi driver in New York who goes back to Pakistan to look after his wife and family every year? These differences have not been inscribed in the idea. That's one difference of emphasis between us.

Having refused the binarism which is intrinsic to essentialism, you have to remind yourself that binaries persist. You've questioned them theoretically, but you haven't removed their historical efficacy. Just because you say there is no absolute distinction between black and white doesn't mean that there aren't situations in which everything is being mobilized to make an intractable difference between black and white. So in that sense, conceptually, I want the binary reintroduced 'under erasure'. The binary's relation to power is like meaning in language: it is an attempt to close what, theoretically, you know is open. So you have to reintroduce the question of power. The binary is the form of the operation of power, the attempt at closure: power suturing language. It draws the frontiers: *you* are inside, but *you* are out. There is a certain theoreticism from the standpoint of which, having made a critique of essentialism, that is enough. It isn't enough. It isn't enough in the world. Apartheid tried to mirror the fantasy of binary closure. It wants to produce exactly what it thinks should be the case. I can't be cavalier about the Nation of Islam if, in an LA project, they are the only people capable of protecting black kids against the LA police. Under theses circumstances, let us have a little 'strategic essentialism'.

RP: I can see how your account of positionalities works at the level of the histories of individuals, the level of existential biography, but I am less sure how it relates to the construction of explicitly political identities.

Hall: Positionalities may begin individually, in the sense that there is a psychic investment in them, but they become positions of enunciation and agency. If the agency includes the building and developing of a common programme around some collective political identity, then they acquire exactly the institutional historical inertia that I described earlier. It doesn't mean you can never leave them; it just means that it's much more difficult. You don't exchange them, like dealing the cards, every time you come back to them. You come to situations with a history and the enunciation is always in the light of an existing terrain. You've already said something like this before and to a degree you're bound by what you said before. Even if you're not wanting to say that again, the new thing you say has to make sense in terms of the thing that you said before, although it also moves it on a bit, of course. The past narrows the field of contingency. There are collective projects and there are therefore collective identities. Those identities are not given for ever, but they're hard to shift. The longer you live them, the more historical weight they have.

RP: But in what sense are these collective identities 'political' rather than just 'social'? There are different ways of thinking about politics in a society like Britain today. One would be to say: politics is about the distribution of social identities; everyone is involved in the constant rearticulation of the elements of the signifying chains which suture people's identities; so all social identity is political. Another, more restrictive approach would be to say: political identities require identifications with collective projects for the constitution of the social, but there are relatively few

people who have such identifications, because we don't live in a particularly politicized society; there's not a lot of political identity around. How would you respond to that?

Hall: I would tend towards distinguishing the political from the social, but not quite as much as you do. You are talking about the institutionalization of political practice. I think of politics as the mobilization of social identities for particular purposes, rather than in terms of political identities as things in their own right. This is a shift I made during my analysis of Thatcherism. To begin with, I was interested in the political identities that were being staked out, the political project, the seizure of power in the state, and I saw society and culture as the terrain on which this was happening. Today, I would view it the other way round. I think of Thatcherism as a mobilization of shifts that were already going on in the socio-cultural field. It built a political programme by recruiting political agents out of that wider field. So I have inverted the relative weight of the two perspectives. It comes from a suspicion of people who write about politics in a very narrow way, who said about my work on Thatcherism that when political surveys are taken, it turns out that everybody *is* willing to pay their taxes after all. Of course, if you stop people in the street, they will tell you that. But behind that lies the definition of the taxpayer as a socio-cultural figure. Once that discursive figure gets a grip, it doesn't matter what anyone tells the British Social Attitudes survey, because when they get into the polling booth, that is not how they are going to behave. It's another Gramscian notion: what's happening in civil society is where the real political articulations are made.

The infernal mix: *Marxism Today* and the Left in Britain

RP: Perhaps this is a good moment to move on to some questions about your political views, and in particular, your role during the 1980s in helping to define the political project of that group within the Communist Party of Great Britain associated with the journal *Marxism Today*, through your analysis of Thatcherism. That project was enormously influential, far beyond the parochial circles of the CPGB out of which it emerged. Yet it was also highly contentious. In particular, many people, ourselves included, felt that the way it conducted its criticism of the rest of the Left, at its weakest moment for several decades, contributed significantly to its demoralization. At times, *Marxism Today* seemed to want not so much to transform the Left as to destroy it. There was no solidarity. Indeed, it hardly seemed to consider itself part of the *actual* Left. If one looks at the mode of address of most of those pieces, there is no 'we' in them. You have spoken elsewhere, biographically, about your difficulty in adopting any of the available positions marked out by the 'we' in British politics – speaking about race. *Marxism Today* could never bring itself to adopt the 'we' of the British Left. How do you view these matters today?

Hall: I agree about the 'we', but I think that there were two different aspects to it. In the first place, *Marxism Today* had a problem with the 'we' because of the historic relationship of the Communist Party to the Labour Party, which was always an antagonistic one. Once the *MT* people left the moorings of the Communist Party tradition, they did not want to stop at social democracy. There was an anti-Labour element in their formation and they couldn't give up the reflex habit. The tradition of the New Left, which I came from, was different. The New Left had a long history of being both inside and outside, with and not-with, Labour. It recognized Labour as the only viable instrument – not just tactically, but out of a commitment to respect the broadly democratic institutions of the labour movement, with all its faults. But it had a profound critique of 'Labourism' as a political culture.

RP: But it wasn't just, or even primarily, the Labour Party that *Marxism Today* attacked. It was 'the Left' – something much broader than Labour. The Left included many people who weren't necessarily in the Labour Party, or even in any of the various Trotskyist groups. There was a non-aligned, broadly Marxist and libertarian Left, and *Marxism Today* attacked that too.

Hall: That is the second aspect. You may think this is apologetics, but I believe the non-aligned Left disappeared from *Marxism Today* for different reasons. It disappeared because it had never been part of the culture of the CP. My position was that some people, at least, on the non-aligned Left should be our natural allies. I argued that we should have more people writing about the women's movement, about race. There was no actual resistance to the idea, but with a few exceptions they didn't then take the social movements very seriously. This was different from their relationship to the Left of the Labour Party or the Trotskyist Left, whom I think they genuinely believed – on good evidence – weren't convinced that anything fundamental had changed, and didn't see the need to question in any radical way traditional Left ideas.

RP: What prospects do you see for the revival of a broad Left politics today, beyond the mainstream of the Labour Party?

Hall: Having the Labour Party in government presents problems of tactics and organization. When it's in power the Labour Party has a rather different *modus operandi* from when it's in opposition. When it's in opposition, it's formulating policy and is still open to certain grassroots pressures. When it's in power, the doors close, so you have to push from the outside. But the project is no different. The project remains getting people to recognize how radically the context of power has shifted, and to find ways of intervening on the strategic questions that mark out a real difference between Right and Left.

RP: This would be some kind of transformed social-democratic politics? Would it retain the horizon of an anti-capitalist project, or do you think that has disappeared for the foreseeable future?

Hall: In the present circumstances, social democracy is the only field we have on which to play. It contains anti-capitalist elements, but nothing so automatic or comprehensive as to be labelled 'anti-capitalism', because social democracy also means acceptance of the market, to some extent, though never without qualification. Where the stopping point to the market is in each instance is what the politics is now all about. It is also about advancing the public, the collective, the social interest, in opposition to the market, while nevertheless recognizing that a society without markets is a society seriously in danger of authoritarianism. That's what I call 'the terrain of social democracy'. (I don't use the term in its more historically delimited sense.) It is the infernal mix. It is anti-capitalist in the sense that it's committed to the notion that markets alone cannot deliver the social good, but markets can be regulated, markets can be more or less competitive, and markets can operate alongside the public and the co-operative.

RP: So it's not anti-capitalist in the sense of projecting another, qualitatively different kind of society?

Hall: Exactly. It's not anti-capitalist in the sense of gathering together a whole other alternative solution. It's about setting limits to capitalism, setting limits to possessive individualism, and setting the limit separating the private from the public. That's why it's inevitably a messy kind of politics and a dangerous kind of politics. It can always be appropriated to a softer version of itself. It requires 'sleeping with the enemy', which is why today, in the Labour Party, John Prescott remains one of its great hopes. It's more important to have an element of publicly sponsored transport in a public/private system than to have a fully nationalized transportation system, for example.

RP: Prescott is the symbol of a new kind of social-democratic politics?

Hall: He could be: where he stops, where he can be pushed to, where someone like him is positioned along the spectrum, is very important. He is somebody who is willing to play.

RP: He's a rather old-fashioned symbol for the much heralded 'new times'!

Hall: I know, but that's interesting. You don't take me seriously enough when I say that ideology is contradictory. What excites one is exactly somebody with the older instincts like Prescott, formed in the old traditions, addressing the new issues; because none of this is about repudiating the past. It is not about saying you were wrong in the past, it's about the fact that the past is past, it's not that period now. One needs more bridging figures, who were formed in the adult education movement, who lived their lives in Labour, but who are able to take on the question of public space, to take on the new, modern issues. This was the hope of the GLC: an old type of politics becoming a new one. This is what is exciting – not Prescott himself, as such, but figures like him. Blair has never had much connection with these older things. They aren't a real presence for him, in his culture, his formation. He's never been part of even the male-dominated sort of democratic structures where at least in principle you have to be accountable for what you do to anybody. That's why Prescott's very ambiguity is exciting. He stands for where most folks out there are, in relation to modernity.

If Prescott can become aware of environmental questions, gender questions, questions of public safety for women, and if he can battle through to a new kind of solution which wins private money and makes it regulated by social ideals, it's a path that thousands of others could take. He's an old trade unionist who's become a new kind of person in the 1990s. These continuities are exciting. *Marxism Today*'s attack on Labourism was not a destruction or a repudiation of these forces. It was a critique of the idea that they could provide the basis for a new politics in a new situation. They are not adequate as such, but they're not inadequate as historical resources. The trade union movement is a resource that one has, but the resource has to think itself anew in new conditions, where you are not going to have the collective ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange; where you can't nationalize everything. What then does that ideal mean now, in the context of a globalized market and an unregulated capitalism? What would it be like to want those old things in these new conditions? The politics of *Marxism Today* was risky because it aimed to shock the Labour movement out of its security. Our hunch was that they wouldn't face up to the novelty of the new unless they were really shaken. They'll make a small concession here and there and then go back to thinking what they always did. That's why we felt we had to polemicize against the old Left – the radical challenge posed by modernity.

Education, democracy, New Labour

RP: You referred to Prescott coming out of adult education – he studied at Ruskin College, with Raphael Samuel, among others. This takes us back to an idea which was central to the politics of both the New Left and cultural studies in its original form: the democratization of education. We have seen a rather different version of this idea realized over the last few years in the massification of higher education in the new universities, under conditions of radically reduced resources per student, and in a quite different political climate from what was originally envisaged. How do you view these developments, and the institutionalization of cultural studies within the academy which has accompanied them?

Hall: I'm in favour of the democratization of the university system and opposed to its elitism and narrowness, but of course I have mixed feelings about what has actually happened. It's been done in a very instrumental and contradictory way, at the expense of teaching. The change in the balance between the number of students and the teaching staff has been no benefit to students. We are upping the numbers at the serious expense of the quality of the education we offer. That may sound conservative, but it's true. I can't look my Open University students in the face and tell them that I think they're getting the best education that they could get in our system at present. The Research Assessment Exercise is structured to favour the already established, older universities, to validate their position at the top of the tree, and to create differences between teaching universities and research universities, and between teaching staff and research staff. So it's very divisive.

Regarding the institutionalization of cultural studies, I have been criticized for romanticizing the marginality of the Birmingham Centre, and for remarks I've made about the problems that I see affecting cultural studies in its academic institutionalization, particularly in the USA – problems about the kinds of questions cultural studies now asks itself. I can see that there may be a romance of the margins in this, but there *was* a connection between the intellectual productivity of the Centre and its attempt to transform its own ways of working. And both were connected with, on the one hand, its relative marginality in relation to the university, and, on the other, the political context in which it was operating: 1968 and after. We were very involved in the sit-in in 1968 in Birmingham, for example, and in student politics generally. In relation to the democratization of knowledge, this was a very creative moment. We had a genuinely collective way of producing knowledge, based on a critique of the established disciplines, a critique of the university as a structural power, and a critique of the institutionalization of knowledge as an ideological operation.

It was not massively successful, but it was very exemplary, very instructive. If you look at the books we produced, they are in a sense unfinished. They lack the tightness of argument that you can get out of a singly authored book. They don't have the coherence of conception. But we were making up the field as we went along. Positions of authority were not open to us. We were deciding what went into next week's MA seminar this week. The circumstances made the field open to the pressure of students, as much as to staff, across those traditional barriers. The most significant act that I performed in the democratization of knowledge was to buy a second photocopier to which everybody in the Centre had access, so that everybody could duplicate, everybody could circulate. It was a literal collectivization of the means of dissemination. We operated by means of internal bulletins and papers, and anybody could put any position into circulation. Of course, there were rows as a result of what appeared, but other people could say 'I don't agree' and distribute that. It was very heady. Then there was trying to write collectively, which has its perils. There's nothing quite like having your own sentence rewritten by a student whom you are convinced does not understand and is not going to put it as well as you can! You can get over it, but the experience is certainly salutary.

Now, this is not the only position from which questions about culture and power can be asked, but one does have to struggle with the practice of cultural studies in order to keep on asking such questions when it is situated differently in relation to academically institutionalized knowledge. Institutionalization is not necessarily depoliticization, but you have to work very hard for it not to be. The present situation of cultural studies is not unlike that of feminism, where the permeation of feminist ideas is much wider than those who are consciously in touch in a sustained way with feminist politics, but its moment may already be passing. The backlash against feminism is there, and I can see it coming against cultural studies and media studies. It could be that cultural studies is being taken up by large numbers of institutions at the very moment it has actually crested. One sign of this is the extent to which it is unaware of the way in which the intellectual milieu is being ideologically transformed by a preoccupation with certain kinds of science: genetics and evolutionary theory, especially. It doesn't understand how massive this new line is.

RP: What about its relationship to cultural production; specifically, alternative forms of cultural production? This is clearly something that preoccupied Raymond Williams, although his thoughts on the matter were closely tied up with his hopes for a transformation of the Labour Party. Has the academicization of cultural studies broken that connection, insofar as it was there previously?

Hall: I'm not sure that it was there, in practice, in the 1960s and 1970s, although it was there in the head, in the sense that people involved in one sector were influenced by people involved in the other. There wasn't a very direct relationship, it was more a flow of ideas.

There are more developments now, actually, given the institutional expansion, if you include media studies; although that's not always the same thing as cultural studies, by any means. But this is less a relationship to *alternative* cultural production than to the cultural *industries*. In part, it's a question of survival, because you get funded more generously if you teach practice in the media. At no time has there been an adequate connection between the two spheres. At one stage, we imagined that the Centre might take people for a short period, six months or so – the editor of *Spare Rib* could come and work with us, and then go back to the magazine – but it never happened.

There is one exception, though, and that is in the black community. This is one area where alternative production is theoretically informed by what happened in the 1980s – in photography, film, video, painting, and installation. It's an area where cultural politics has very deep roots and resonances; where a lot of the political issues are also issues about identity and representation. This was the first generation which entered higher education, art schools and the polys, where they encountered a lot of new ideas. It's been extremely valuable for me, because my own work on ethnicity and race has been as much informed by the work of people who are actually producing creative work as by those who are theorizing about it. I'm excited about the forms in which a lot of that theorizing now takes in artistic practice.

With respect to Raymond, I must say that this is the area where I have always believed that it was least worth thinking strategically in relation to the Labour Party. Cultural politics is the one thing Labour seemed destined not to understand (Blair may actually represent a shift here). The GLC was the last moment when urban politics, alternative cultures, and the idea of a popular politics came together. Since then, for all its talk about modernization, the Labour Party has, until recently, been rather deaf to cultural change.

RP: Is this connected to its apparent indifference to questions about race?

Hall: In part. It's stuck in a minority equal opportunities strategy, and if it can keep that ticking over it thinks it's done its duty as far as race is concerned. It has no idea about the cultural diversification that has taken place in Britain, of how important cultural politics and identity questions have become to the politics of race. It has no sense of the infiltration of black street culture into mainstream British popular culture, or of the transformation of popular language by the black vernacular. It is deaf to the wider cultural terrain. The Labour Party could not have occupied so complacently that dead appeal to 'Middle England' in the way it did in the last election, if it had any inkling of the importance of cultural diversity. So it's not only about race, it's about all the different cultures that make up the mosaic of culture in Britain today.

RP: Presumably, this will cause them trouble over Europe. Further unification doesn't seem likely without some transformation in people's cultural identities. Unless people can be persuaded to think of themselves as in some sense European citizens, Euroscepticism will never go away. How do you view this?

Hall: I'm gloomy. I've always been dubious about the way in which Labour became converted to Europe on narrowly economic grounds. It never asked itself how it's going to govern people who don't think of themselves as sharing the European inheritance in any large cultural sense. Again, the cultural dimension has been missing. They don't have a strategy for it. They don't have a language for it. It could put a brake on other things they want to do. Euroscepticism, as a cultural phenomenon, may just keep repeating itself and limiting how far it's possible for them to go.

RP: Is this the sort of thing you had in mind when you wrote about the 'lost opportunities' of New Labour in *Soundings* recently?

Hall: It was one of them. The lost opportunity I had in mind was the opportunity to develop a truly transformative reformist politics: a politics which explicitly sets out to mark its difference from Thatcherism in carefully defined ways. New Labour are right about the profoundly changed conditions in which they are operating. Thatcherism was very effective in mobilizing a political project out of the confusions of socio-economic and socio-cultural change. It almost succeeded in making it appear as if there was only one project, only one politics that could flow from these changes. It has always seemed to me that the only way in which any kind of Left could be rescued from that situation is by saying: 'Yes, we will address the change, in the Gramscian sense, and direct our minds violently towards the reality of the changed circumstances in which we find ourselves. But at every point we will try to mark out the difference of our philosophical-political response to these circumstances.'

Labourism was rooted in a historical moment which has gone. The Labour Party had to go through a process of asking itself: 'What is this society really like? What are the forces at work, leading in what direction? What are the changed global conditions in which we take power? And what would be a Left political project which could be developed out of that?' Then it had to undertake a second, tactical assessment, at the popular level: 'How far can we go?' It needed both things: a strategic assessment and a tactical adaptation. These things would have changed the reflexes of Labourism. But I'm afraid Blair settled for something more cosmetic.

RP: You said earlier that if they'd had a cultural politics, they could never have made the kind of appeal to Middle England that they did. Yet some would say that was the basis of their electoral success. So if they'd had a cultural politics, would they still have got elected?

Hall: That's why I separated the two things out. Strategically, one thinks: 'This is a much more culturally diverse society and this is a good thing.' Tactically one thinks: 'After eighteen years of Thatcherism, this is not a message we can quite put out at the moment.' One needs a minimum programme. You don't simply announce that cultural diversity is wonderful. You do things each of which has something attached to it which says: 'What is important about this is that it is for a more culturally diverse population, which can't any longer be harnessed to one identity, in one place. What is important about this is that people also think like this in France and Denmark.' You don't just plonk cultural diversity down, because then nobody votes for you.

Take privatization. You can't find the money to take everything back from privatization, and in any case you probably don't want to, but you do need an alternative to privatization as an exemplary resolution. You don't say, 'This is a programme designed to roll back privatization.' You pick the most unpopular privatization and make an example of it. You pick rail privatization, which nobody wanted. You get as many Middle England people on to your side as possible. You say: 'Rail happens to be one of the things which we cannot run properly through privatization and the market. Draw your deductions from that.' That's what I mean by a minimal but paradigmatic programme. The difference isn't what you organize on politically, to get the vote, but you always look for the wider, philosophical deduction which can be drawn from what you do, which can be generalized: 'If that is so, what else is like that? Water is like that.' This is like that, that is like that… In ten years of the educative function of the state, people will be saying: 'Some things have to be run by the state, because you can't get what you want by the market alone.' Thinking about tactics in terms of a broad strategic, long-term historical alternative perspective: this is what 'learning from Thatcherism' always meant.

Interviewed by Peter Osborne and Lynne Segal
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