

ROUTLEDGE *Critical* THINKERS

Stuart  
Hall

James Procter

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# STUART HALL

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Stuart Hall is one of the founding figures of cultural studies. He was director of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, famously coined the term ‘Thatcherism’ and assessed New Labour as the ‘Great Moving Nowhere Show’. One of the leading public intellectuals of the postwar period, he has helped transform our understanding of culture as both a theoretical category and a political practice. James Procter’s introduction places Hall’s work within its historical, cultural and theoretical contexts, providing a clear guide to his key ideas and influences, as well as to his critics and his intellectual legacy, covering topics such as

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- Media and communication
- Racism and resistance
- Postmodernism and the post-colonial
- Thatcherism
- Identity, ethnicity, diaspora

*Stuart Hall* is the ideal gateway to the work of a critic described by Terry Eagleton as ‘a walking chronicle of everything from the New Left to New Times, Leavis to Lyotard, Aldermaston to ethnicity’.

**James Procter** is Lecturer in English Studies at Stirling University. Recent publications include *Writing Black Britain: 1948–1998* (2000) and *Dwelling Places* (2003).

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# STUART HALL

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*James Procter*

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# SERIES EDITOR'S PREFACE

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The books in this series offer introductions to major critical thinkers who have influenced literary studies and the humanities. The *Routledge Critical Thinkers* series provides the books you can turn to first when a new name or concept appears in your studies.

Each book will equip you to approach a key thinker's original texts by explaining her or his key ideas, putting them into context and, perhaps most importantly, showing you why this thinker is considered to be significant. The emphasis is on concise, clearly written guides which do not presuppose a specialist knowledge. Although the focus is on particular figures, the series stresses that no critical thinker ever existed in a vacuum but, instead, emerged from a broader intellectual, cultural and social history. Finally, these books will act as a bridge between you and the thinker's original texts: not replacing them but rather complementing what she or he wrote.

These books are necessary for a number of reasons. In his 1997 autobiography, *Not Entitled*, the literary critic Frank Kermode wrote of a time in the 1960s:

On beautiful summer lawns, young people lay together all night, recovering from their daytime exertions and listening to a troupe of Balinese musicians. Under their blankets or their sleeping bags, they would chat drowsily about



the gurus of the time. . . . What they repeated was largely hearsay; hence my lunchtime suggestion, quite impromptu, for a series of short, very cheap books offering authoritative but intelligible introductions to such figures.

There is still a need for 'authoritative and intelligible introductions'. But this series reflects a different world from the 1960s. New thinkers have emerged and the reputations of others have risen and fallen, as new research has developed. New methodologies and challenging ideas have spread through the arts and humanities. The study of literature is no longer – if it ever was – simply the study and evaluation of poems, novels and plays. It is also the study of the ideas, issues and difficulties which arise in any literary text and in its interpretation. Other arts and humanities subjects have changed in analogous ways.

With these changes, new problems have emerged. The ideas and issues behind these radical changes in the humanities are often presented without reference to wider contexts or as theories which you can simply 'add on' to the texts you read. Certainly, there's nothing wrong with picking out selected ideas or using what comes to hand – indeed, some thinkers have argued that this is, in fact, all we can do. However, it is sometimes forgotten that each new idea comes from the pattern and development of somebody's thought and it is important to study the range and context of their ideas. Against theories 'floating in space', the *Routledge Critical Thinkers* series places key thinkers and their ideas firmly back in their contexts.

More than this, these books reflect the need to go back to the thinker's own texts and ideas. Every interpretation of an idea, even the most seemingly innocent one, offers its own 'spin', implicitly or explicitly. To read only books on a thinker, rather than texts by that thinker, is to deny yourself a chance of making up your own mind. Sometimes what makes a significant figure's work hard to approach is not so much its style or content as the feeling of not knowing where to start. The purpose of these books is to give you 'way in' by offering an accessible overview of these thinkers' ideas and works and by guiding your further reading, starting with each thinker's own texts. To use a metaphor from the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), these books are ladders, to be thrown away after you

have climbed to the next level. Not only, then, do they equip you to approach new ideas, but also they empower you, by leading you back to a theorist's own texts and encouraging you to develop your own informed opinions.

Finally, these books are necessary because, just as intellectual needs have changed, the education systems around the world – the contexts in which introductory books are usually read – have changed radically, too. What was suitable for the minority higher education system of the 1960s is not suitable for the larger, wider, more diverse, high technology education systems of the twenty-first century. These changes call not just for new, up-to-date, introductions but new methods of presentation. The presentational aspects of *Routledge Critical Thinkers* have been developed with today's students in mind.

Each book in the series has a similar structure. They begin with a section offering an overview of the life and ideas of each thinker and explain why she or he is important. The central section of each book discusses the thinker's key ideas, their context, evolution and reception. Each book concludes with a survey of the thinker's impact, outlining how their ideas have been taken up and developed by others. In addition, there is a detailed final section suggesting and describing books for further reading. This is not a 'tacked-on' section but an integral part of each volume. In the first part of this section you will find brief descriptions of the thinker's key works, then, following this, information on the most useful critical works and, in some cases, on relevant websites. This section will guide you in your reading, enabling you to follow your interests and develop your own projects. Throughout each book, references are given in what is known as the Harvard system (the author and the date of a work cited are given in the text and you can look up the full details in the bibliography at the back). This offers a lot of information in very little space. The books also explain technical terms and use boxes to describe events or ideas in more detail, away from the main emphasis of the discussion. Boxes are also used at times to highlight definitions of terms frequently used or coined by a thinker. In this way, the boxes serve as a kind of glossary, easily identified when flicking through the book.

The thinkers in the series are 'critical' for three reasons. First, they are examined in the light of subjects which involve criticism:

principally literary studies or English and cultural studies, but also other disciplines which rely on the criticism of books, ideas, theories and unquestioned assumptions. Second, they are critical because studying their work will provide you with a 'tool kit' for your own informed critical reading and thought, which will make you critical. Third, these thinkers are critical because they are crucially important: they deal with ideas and questions which can overturn conventional understandings of the world, of texts, of everything we take for granted, leaving us with a deeper understanding of what we already knew and with new ideas.

No introduction can tell you everything. However, by offering a way into critical thinking, this series hopes to begin to engage you in an activity which is productive, constructive and potentially life-changing.

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# ABBREVIATIONS

---

ASC	'A sense of classlessness' (1958)
CID	'Cultural identity and diaspora' (1990)
CMIE	'Culture, the media and the "ideological effect"' (1977)
CML	<i>Culture, Media, Language</i> (1980)
CP	'Culture and power: interview with Stuart Hall' (1997)
CS2P	'Cultural studies: two paradigms' (1981)
CSAC	'Cultural studies and the centre: some problematics and problems' (1980)
CSTL	'Cultural studies and its theoretical legacies' (1992)
DNP	'The determination of news photographs' (1972)
E/D	'Encoding/decoding' (1980)
E/D73	'Encoding and decoding in the media discourse' (1973)
ESB	'The empire strikes back' (1988)
FAW	'For Allon White: metaphors of transformation' (1996)
FDI	'The formation of a diasporic intellectual: an interview with Stuart Hall by Kuan-Hsing Chen' (1996)
FNL	'The "first" New Left: life and times' (1989)
GAS	'Gramsci and us' (1988)
GMN	'The great moving nowhere show' (1998)
HRR	<i>The Hard Road to Renewal</i> (1988)
LG	'The local and the global' (1991)

MNT	'The meaning of New Times' (1989)
MS	'Minimal selves' (1987)
NDP	'Notes on deconstructing "the popular"' (1981)
NE	'New ethnicities' (1988)
NLR	<i>New Left Review</i> (1960)
NT	<i>New Times</i> (1989)
OAN	'Old and new identities, old and new ethnicities' (1991)
PA	'On postmodernism and articulation: an interview with Stuart Hall' (1996)
PCS	'Popular culture and the state' (1986)
PM	'Prophet at the margins' (2000)
PTC	<i>Policing the Crisis</i> (1978)
QOCI	'The question of cultural identity' (1992)
R	<i>Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices</i> (1997)
RAR	'Racism and reaction' (1978)
RCC	'Race, culture, and communications: looking backward and forward at cultural studies' (1992)
RED	'Reflections upon the encoding/decoding model: an interview with Stuart Hall' (1993)
ROI	'The rediscovery of "ideology": return of the repressed in media studies' (1982)
RTR	<i>Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain</i> (1976)
SIH	'Subjects in history: making diasporic identities' (1997)
TMQ	'The multicultural question' (2000)
TPA	<i>The Popular Arts</i> (1964)
TWI	'The Williams interviews' (1980)
WTB	'What is this "black" in black popular culture?' (1992)
WWP	'When was "the post-colonial"? Thinking at the limit' (1996)

# WHY HALL?

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Stuart Hall's main contribution to postwar thinking has been to demonstrate that 'questions of culture . . . are absolutely deadly political questions' (SIH: 290). For him culture is not something to simply appreciate, or study; it is also a critical site of social action and intervention, where power relations are both established and potentially unsettled. Hall is a rare intellectual, in the sense that his writings have made a difference both to theoretical debates on culture, and to social policy and political reform (see Lewis 2000). *Policing the Crisis*, for many Hall's most remarkable published project, does not just appear on the bibliographies of cultural studies courses across the world, it also appears in the bibliography of the official enquiry into the Brixton riots of 1981 (see Scarman 1981).

Yet, Hall has said that he is not a revolutionary thinker. He is unconvinced by the idea that the intellectual can mobilise the working class, for example, to rise up and seize control of the state. On the one hand this is because Hall does not believe there is such a thing as *the* working class in the sense of a pure, authentic, unified community. On the other, it is because he does not believe there is a quick fix to cultural inequality, or for that matter, a way of fixing it for good at some unspecified time in the future. Culture, Hall argues, is a site of *ongoing* struggle that can never be guaranteed for one side or the



other. In this sense Hall's intellectual contribution has not simply been to expose the politics of culture, it has also been to reveal that culture is never reducible to politics.

For Hall, the study of culture involves exposing the relations of power that exist within society at any given moment in order to consider how marginal, or subordinate groups might secure or win, however temporarily, cultural space from the dominant group. This is an extremely complex process, full of potential pitfalls, and we will consider how Hall has theorised and put into practice this approach in greater detail below. For now, though, it suggests a way of thinking about Hall's thinking, not as a set of internally consistent, static ideas through which we can move step by step, chapter by chapter, but as part of an ongoing and necessarily incomplete process that is always historically contingent. Hall does not become interested in, for example, theories of deviancy and subculture because it seems like a good idea at the time; his thinking forms part of a response to cultural and political developments at precise moments in postwar history (e.g. panics over mugging in the early 1970s). As Hall puts it 'I'm not interested in capitalism as such. I'm interested in why capitalism was like that in the 1960s – or is like that in the 1990s' (CP: 28). For Hall, culture is a process over which we must struggle, rather than a static object we can simply describe or provide a grand, overarching theory of.

In this context, the role of the intellectual is, as Hall puts it, relatively 'modest'. Speaking on the subject of AIDS in the early 1990s, Hall pointed to the inadequacy of the cultural critic in the face of a killer virus: '[a]gainst the urgency of people dying in the streets, what in God's name is the point of cultural studies?' (CSTL: 284). What has cultural studies to offer somebody who wants to know 'if they should take a drug and if that means they'll die two days later or a few months earlier?' (CSTL: 285).

At the same time, Hall also stresses AIDS does raise politically important *cultural* questions. AIDS, he argues, is also

a question of who gets represented and who does not . . . the site at which the advance of sexual politics is being rolled back. It's a site at which not only people will die, but desire and pleasure will also die if certain

metaphors do not survive, or survive in the wrong way. Unless we operate in this tension, we don't know what cultural studies can do, can't, can never do; but also what it has to do, what alone it has a privileged capacity to do.

(CSTL: 285)

AIDS, Hall suggests, is not just about the stark reality of dying people, it is also about the cultural politics of representation (e.g. the silence surrounding the AIDS epidemic in South Asia and Africa) and the death of certain forms of desire (through the demonisation of, and legislation against, homosexuality). What the AIDS example points to is Hall's sense of both the limitations and the *relevance* of intellectual work and his commitment to cultural study as a deadly serious issue.

## **HALL'S CAREER: SPEAKING AUTOBIOGRAPHICALLY**

The Marxist literary critic Terry Eagleton once said '[a]nyone writing a novel about the British intellectual Left, who began by looking around for some exemplary fictional figure to link its various trends and phases, would find themselves spontaneously reinventing Stuart Hall' (Eagleton 1996: 3). In the 1950s Hall played a pivotal role within the New Left, a group of activists, students and intellectuals seeking to agitate the traditional Left and offer an alternative political vision to the Labour Party. In the 1960s and 1970s he emerged as the leading exponent of a new academic field: cultural studies. In the 1980s he was one of the most vocal and persuasive public intellectuals in debates on Thatcherism, race and racism. Meanwhile, since the 1990s, Hall's influential writings on identity, diaspora and ethnicity, combined with the re-evaluation of his work within the academy have earned him international recognition as what British sociologist Chris Rojek terms 'the pre-eminent figure in Cultural Studies today. Nobody enjoys the same prestige' (Rojek 2003: 1).

However, Hall himself has questioned the way in which his career has taken on a kind of originating centrality within narratives of cultural studies and the British Left:

I sometimes feel like a *tableau vivant*, a spirit of the past resurrected, laying claim to the authority of an origin. After all, didn't cultural studies emerge somewhere at that moment when I first met Raymond Williams, or in the glance I exchanged with Richard Hoggart [two of the 'founding fathers' of cultural studies]? In that moment, cultural studies was born; it emerged full grown from the head! I do want to talk about the past, but definitely not in that way.

(CSTL: 277)

These comments present students of Hall's work (and more immediately me!) with a particular problem: namely, how to produce a narrative of Hall, how to write about his writing, how to foreground his importance – 'why Hall?' – without reproducing him as an authority or origin?

Oddly perhaps, given the quotation above, the best way of doing this is to begin with a consideration of Hall's use of autobiography. Autobiography would appear wholly inappropriate here because it is a first-person narrative that privileges the authority and centrality of the self. Far from simple naval gazing however, Hall has suggested that 'paradoxically, speaking autobiographically' allows him 'not to be authoritative' (CSTL: 277). During the 1980s and 1990s, Hall repeatedly used autobiography as a strategy for theorising, not to present what he calls (tongue-in-cheek) 'the real me' but in order to explore identity as a de-centred concept (see Chapter 6). More generally though, Hall's autobiography offers a means of de-centring what he calls the 'grand narrative' of cultural studies.

Born in Kingston, Jamaica in 1932, Hall grew up in what he calls 'a lower-middle class family that was trying to be an upper-middle class family trying to be an English Victorian family' (MS: 45). Hall has described his upbringing within this class-conscious colonial environment as an oppressive one. He felt estranged from his family because of his relatively dark skin and the growing rifts between his mother (who 'thought she was practically "English"' (FDI: 485)) and himself, a relatively politicised student, sympathetic towards the Jamaican independence movement. Family relations grew increasingly tense when Hall's sister suffered a nervous breakdown after her parents refused to let her marry a medical student who was 'middle

class but black' (PM: 8). Keen to get away, Stuart Hall came to Oxford University as a Rhodes scholar in 1951 and has been based in Britain ever since. The frequency with which he has returned to document his early childhood experiences in Jamaica indicates their important formative impact on his subsequent thinking, most notably perhaps in terms of his intellectual preoccupation with class, race and identity politics.

Cultural studies takes on a different complexion when viewed from the perspective of Hall's early life. If Hall was, in certain ways, central to the establishment of the field in Britain then that was partly because of the insights afforded by his off-centre, equivocal relationship to prevailing ideas of England and Englishness. His background as a migrant from the colonies placed him at an angle to the fading imperial centre of postwar Britain (see Schwarz 1989, 1994 and 2000). Hall has recently said of his refusal to move to America: 'I feel better taking a sighting of the world from the periphery [England] than the centre [America]' (PM: 8). It was this peripheral perspective that in an earlier period of his career, allowed him to challenge some of the most taken for granted aspects of British cultural life, while opening it up to the submerged questions of ethnicity and migration. Viewed within this context, Hall's importance as a thinker has less to do with his authoritative, originary status than with the way he draws into question the idea of pure cultural origins. One of the characteristics of his work is its refusal of essentialist (the belief that culture has an essence) notions of both British culture and of cultural formations more generally. In the chapters that follow, Hall will be seen arguing that there is no authentic popular culture uncontaminated by dominant culture (see Chapter 1); no youth culture free of parent culture (see Chapter 3); no English culture without its overseas history (see Chapters 4–5); no self-contained identity untouched by the identity of others (see Chapter 6).

After staying on at Oxford to do postgraduate work, Hall eventually abandoned his PhD on the classic American novelist Henry James in 1956, feeling that he could no longer address the political questions that were starting to consume him in "pure" literary terms' (FDI: 498). Significantly this was also the year in which Hall became involved in the New Left, a movement that, among other things,

argued for a more politicised conception of culture and a more cultural conception of politics.

During his time as editor of the *New Left Review* (see Chapter 1), Hall supported himself financially by becoming a secondary school supply teacher in Brixton and elsewhere in south London. This marked the beginning of a teaching career that would span forty years, a career regarded by many as a central aspect of Hall's contribution to postwar cultural politics (see Giroux 2000).

Between 1964 and 1997 Hall worked in higher education, nevertheless he remained a prominent public intellectual during those years. Unlike some critical thinkers whose writings circulate almost solely among an academic elite, Hall's work has appealed to a much wider audience and his ideas have been disseminated on video, television and radio as well as in the print media of the university presses. As the American cultural theorist Lawrence Grossberg has observed, Hall's 'author-ity extends far beyond those texts he himself has authored; he is as much a teacher and an activist as a writer' (Grossberg 1986: 152).

In spite of a lifetime teaching in British universities, it is notable that Hall has consistently worked outside conventional academic institutions. Before moving into higher education, Hall was a further education college lecturer at Chelsea, teaching film and media: a unique post in Britain at this time (the early 1960s). He then moved to the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at Birmingham, where he was director between 1968 and 1979 (see Chapter 2). One of the most distinctive aspects of Hall's work at the Birmingham Centre was the production of research in groups (such as the CCCS's 'media group') where ideas and projects were not owned by individual intellectuals, but developed collaboratively by both staff and students.

In 1979, Hall became Professor of Sociology at The Open University, where he remained until his retirement in 1997. The Open University was another unorthodox institutional setting. Established in 1969, it abandoned the traditional cloistered confines of the university building, teaching instead via the broadcast media to a dispersed community of students across the UK. The university was also 'open' in the sense that it did not discriminate between applicants using formal academic achievements. As one commentator notes

the OU would have no walls . . . respect no boundaries . . . would reach out to all those incorrectly streamed by Britain's system of sponsored education; the late bloomers . . . the home-bound; and the massive number of women who had been systematically discouraged from academic pursuits.

(Miller 1994: 421)

Speaking of the motivations behind his move to The Open University, Hall has highlighted the attraction of 'that more open, interdisciplinary, unconventional setting . . . of talking to ordinary people, to women and black students in a non-academic setting . . . It served some of my political aspirations' (FDI: 501). In different ways the CCCS and The Open University allowed Hall to break with the more privileged, elitist aspects of higher education in order to connect with wider social formations beyond the seminar room.

Hall's research at both the CCCS and OU has tended to develop out of collaborative projects with others. Within his writing Hall typically adopts the collective pronouns 'we/our' in place of the authorial, centred 'I' of conventional academic research. While the following chapters are structured around Hall's 'key ideas', to forget their collective contexts of production would also be forgetful of the very spirit in which that research was produced and practised (see Chapter 2). Many of the ideas and publications viewed below emerge out of, and were made possible by, group work with others. For example, *The Popular Arts* was written with Paddy Whannel, *Resistance through Rituals* was edited with Tony Jefferson, *Policing the Crisis* with Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke and Brian Roberts. In what follows we will be as concerned with the work of Hall *et al.* as with the individual author 'Stuart Hall', a fact that underlines the dangers of regarding Hall as the authoritative origin of cultural studies.

Hall's refusal to occupy the role of protagonist appears almost wilfully inscribed in the very form of his publications which favour the provisionality of the essay over the permanence of the book; the relative anonymity of group work to the autonomy and prestige of the single-authored text. It is perhaps no coincidence that, to date, Hall has resisted the production of a comprehensive reader, or anthology of his writings. Such a text would impose upon his thinking a false unity and coherence. Hall's preference for the essay, the

journal article, the conference paper is, arguably, a strategic feature of his theorising. It allows him to constantly revise, update, retract and elaborate upon his ideas and to intervene in current issues and events in a way that book-length studies (which take much longer to write, produce and publish) cannot. Read collectively Hall's dispersed essays do not add up to a complete or finished position but are full of contradictions, discrepancies and U-turns. This is not a flaw but, rather, an essential part of the process of engaging with the unsettled and ever-changing conditions of contemporary culture.

For the student encountering Hall for the first time, however, such dynamism can bring with it its own set of problems. The dispersal of his thinking across a wide array of journals (some of which can be difficult to come by) along with his constant revision of key positions poses certain challenges to the reader hoping to keep abreast of Hall. One of the functions of this book is to pull together (but hopefully not to unify) Stuart Hall's main ideas during the various stages of his career. Its aim is to trace the development of these ideas and to assist students in situating specific works within the broader intellectual, social and historical contexts in which they were produced. Where possible, each chapter traces chronologically the shifts in Hall's thinking on key ideas and concepts such as 'the popular' or 'race' in order to signal what are, essentially, ongoing projects rather than finished positions. In this sense, the book has two contradictory and arguably irreconcilable aims. On the one hand, it hopes to provide an accessible, introductory overview of Hall's thinking over the past fifty years, a fact which risks imposing upon it a false coherence. On the other hand, it hopes to use Hall's thinking to raise questions about the current orthodoxies of cultural studies as a unified, self-contained discipline or set of formal theories incapable of making political intervention. To consider the biography of Hall's own career in relation to the emergence of cultural studies is not to recapture the essence of what the field really was, or should be. On the contrary, it indicates what is potentially lost in the institutional reduction of the field to a series of founding fathers, set texts, or key ideas, an issue we return to in greater detail in the final chapter of this text ('After Hall').

# KEY IDEAS

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## DECONSTRUCTING THE 'POPULAR'

Over the past forty years, Stuart Hall and the project of cultural studies have worked to disrupt traditional definitions of what constitutes culture, helping to transform popular culture into an area of serious, even 'popular' academic enquiry. Where the study of culture within universities was once notable for the extent to which it excluded the popular, the culture of cultural studies is almost entirely dedicated to the study of popular culture.

Before getting carried away with such neat inversions, however, it is important to temper them with Hall's distinctive take on the popular, which is less about elevating popular culture to a high academic status, than with unsettling the very distinction between 'high' and 'popular' culture. For Hall, popular culture is not a serious issue because of the 'profound' intellectual questions it raises but, first and foremost, because he believes popular culture is the site at which everyday struggles between dominant and subordinate groups are fought, won and lost. This, he has said, is 'why popular culture matters. Otherwise to tell you the truth, I don't give a damn about it' (NDP: 239).

In Hall's view the popular is not a 'thing' we can confidently point to, like a can of Coke on the supermarket shelf; it can only be understood in relation to the cultural forces within which it is caught at any

particular moment. This makes the popular an exceedingly difficult concept to define or pin down. As Hall has noted in this context, the term 'popular' raises nearly as many problems for him as 'culture', but when they are brought together 'the difficulties can be pretty horrendous' (NDP: 227). The two words seem to contradict and estrange

## CULTURE

The Welsh literary critic Raymond Williams (see Chapter 2), once said that culture is 'one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language' (Williams 1977: 76). He went on to note that while it originally referred to the cultivation of crops and animals (as in agri-culture), since the late nineteenth century culture has referred primarily to the arts: literature, ballet, painting, theatre. In spite of their differences, both definitions share particular connotations. Cultivation is associated with improvement, taming, making civilised – qualities frequently associated with the arts: we don't just read for pleasure, we do it because it 'improves' us. Of course many would argue it depends what we are reading. Stephen King might give us pleasure but he does not 'cultivate' us in the way Jane Austen does. Culture is not any old thing according to this perspective: it is shorthand for 'high' culture as opposed to popular culture.

This is how culture was understood by a number of influential conservative artists and critics in Britain in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries associated with the 'culture and civilization' tradition: Matthew Arnold, T.S. Eliot, F.R. and Q.D. Leavis. Broadly, these critics argued that culture needed defending from the popular cultural forms associated with the rise of industrial society and methods of mass production. The 'culture and civilization' tradition saw culture as, in Arnold's phrase, 'the best that had been thought and said' and associated popular culture ominously with 'anarchy'. While critics like Q.D. Leavis wrote about popular culture, they did so in order to condemn its debasement of an older, pre-industrial tradition, nostalgically evoked through the phrase 'organic community'. As Hall has noted within this context, 'High culture versus popular culture was, for many years, the classic way of framing the debate about culture – the terms carrying powerfully evaluative charge (roughly, high = good; popular = debased)' (R: 2).

one another. Culture is what we find in art galleries, museums and universities; the popular in shopping malls, on television or in the pub. Soap operas are popular culture; the opera is culture.

Such distinctions rely upon a conventional definition of the popular as the opposite of high culture. However, according to Hall, the popular 'can never be simplified or explained in terms of the simple binary oppositions that are still used to habitually map it out: high and low; resistance versus incorporation; authentic versus inauthentic, experiential versus formal; opposition versus homogenization' (WTB: 470).

In order to understand how Hall unsettles such habitual oppositions now, we need to establish why the popular became the focus of his thinking in the first place. Hall's earliest research was conducted as a PhD student at Oxford University where he began writing a thesis on the classic American novelist Henry James. Both his chosen institution and research topic could hardly be further away from the popular forms – television, the tabloid press, cinema, photography, youth and black subcultures – which became the raw materials of his subsequent research and for which he is today famous. So what made Hall start to take something as apparently 'light' and superficial as popular culture so seriously? More importantly perhaps, why should *we*? In order to answer these questions, this chapter traces the development of Hall's thinking on popular culture from his earliest, 'pre-cultural studies' writings in *New Left Review*, through his first book, *The Popular Arts* (1964) to his more radical deconstruction of 'the popular' in the 1980s and early 1990s.

## POSTWAR BRITAIN AND THE NEW LEFT

Transformations taking place in postwar British culture of the 1950s provide the single most important context for an understanding of Stuart Hall's early thinking on popular culture. Improved technology and the revival of the economy after the Second World War saw a rapid expansion and development in popular forms such as cinema, radio and print culture. As the nation's wealth and leisure time increased and the costs, due to mass production, decreased, people could afford television, radio, music, pulp fiction, magazines and films, on a level that would have been unimaginable before or during

the war. Full employment and wage increases meant that the working classes were among the main ‘beneficiaries’ of these cultural and economic changes. The primary producers within society were transformed by postwar capitalist society to become key *consumers*.

The new climate of consumerism in postwar Britain was a blow to the traditional Left. It challenged their faith in the idea that it would be the workers who would unite and rise up to create a socialist society. While the 1950s saw the Conservative Party thrive under a slogan that celebrated postwar prosperity (‘you’ve never had it so good’), the Labour Party, defeated in all three general elections of the 1950s, lost touch with its traditional constituency and the Left entered a period of crisis.

It was with this crisis that Hall engaged in the 1950s and 1960s through a series of articles on politics, literature and education published mainly in *New Left Review*. In these articles, Hall and the other contributors worked to subject the new consumer society, and the popular cultural forms and lifestyles associated with it, to serious analysis, rather than simply repudiate them, as the traditional Left had tended to do.

Though politically active (it shared strong links with the CND movement) and eager to attract ‘grassroots’ support (it opened 39 Labour clubs across Britain), the first New Left was, at times, criticised for being more of a cultural than a political movement. While there are grounds for such criticism, to suggest that the New Left represented a retreat from politics into culture is, in a sense, to miss the point. One of the main aims and contributions of the New Left was to demonstrate that popular culture is *itself* political and that the refusal of the traditional Left to take so-called ‘cultural politics’ (that is, culture *as* politics) seriously, explained declining support for the Labour Party after the war.

Hall has outlined three reasons for wishing to place the analysis of culture at the centre of politics in the 1950s and early 1960s:

First, because it was in the cultural and ideological domain that social change appeared to be making itself most dramatically visible. Second, because the cultural dimension seemed to us not a secondary, but a constitutive dimension of society (this reflects part of the New Left’s

## THE NEW LEFT

Taking its name from the French *nouvelle gauche* movement, the New Left emerged in Oxford in 1956 with Stuart Hall as a founding member. The year 1956 is significant as it was the year in which the Soviet Union invaded Hungary and Britain invaded Suez: the movement was 'new' in terms of its decisive break with the communist and colonial politics associated with those two events. Hall has summed up his politics at this time as 'anti-imperialist' (FNL: 15) while noting elsewhere that, of the socialists who came together to form the New Left, 'there was not an Englishman [sic] among us' (TWI: 96; see also FNL: 19–20).

The New Left's formation was the result of a merger between two former journals and intellectual groups: the *Reasoner* group (comprising ex-communists) and the *Universities and Left Review* group (co-edited by Hall and comprising Oxford University students). The result was a new bi-monthly journal, *New Left Review*, which Hall edited until his departure in 1961. The New Left brought into dialogue some of the key British intellectuals of the postwar period, many of whom would later be associated with cultural studies, such as E.P. Thompson, Raymond Williams, Perry Anderson and Raphael Samuel. There was certainly no easy consensus of opinion within the New Left, and Hall's departure was precipitated by differences with former *Reasoner*, E.P. Thompson. However, the movement shared a commitment to addressing economic changes after the war which had transformed working-class culture irrevocably, but which had been ignored by the Labour Party and the traditional Left.

After Hall's departure, Perry Anderson became editor of the *New Left Review* and the journal took on a more theoretical/intellectual inflexion. The group began an important project of translation, making available the work of a range of now classic Marxist intellectuals (e.g. Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, Theodor W. Adorno and György Lukács) for the first time within the New Left Books (later Verso) series. While Hall followed these New Left developments closely from the CCCS and contributed, with Williams and Thompson, to the seminal *May Day Manifesto* of 1968, he tends to distinguish his own early New Left participation by referring to it in terms of the 'first' New Left.

long-standing quarrel with the reductionism and economism of the base–superstructure metaphor.) Third, because the discourse of culture seemed to us fundamentally necessary to any language in which socialism could be redescribed.

(FNL: 25)

The prioritising of culture by Hall was founded upon a critique of Karl Marx's base–superstructure metaphor, which reduced culture to a secondary reflection of economic conditions.

## A SENSE OF CLASSLESSNESS

In New Left essays like 'A sense of classlessness' (1958), Hall rejected Marx's reductive notion of culture as a passive, secondary, reflection in order to stress its active, primary, constitutive role in society. The essay considers the implications of the increased access to commodities and consumerism within working-class culture following the postwar economic boom. The main thrust of Hall's argument is that these popular cultural transformations have not seen class differences disappear, as was commonly assumed. Rather 'classlessness' is an ideological effect of the new consumer culture, a *sense* that increasing access to commodities and consumer culture has released the working classes from a prior state of poverty:

The purpose of a great deal of advertising . . . is to condition the worker to the new possibilities for consumption, to break down the class resistances to consumer-purchase which became part of working class consciousness in an earlier period. This is known in the world of advertising as 'sales resistance'. ('When *you* buy your second car, make sure it's a Morris'.)

(ASC: 29)

By appealing directly to a classless *you*, the Morris advert (and advertising in general) 'conditions', constructs or positions its reader as consumer. This ideological 'positioning' was later referred to by the French Marxist, Louis Althusser (see Chapter 2) as *interpellation*, a concept that describes how ideology works by making us feel we are free to choose while actually choosing on our behalf. A common-sense

## IDEOLOGY AND THE BASE–SUPERSTRUCTURE METAPHOR

German philosopher, Karl Marx (1818–83) argued that economics was the key determining factor in society. In his preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859) he used the, now famous, architectural metaphor, 'base' and 'superstructure' to argue the economy is 'the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure'. The economic foundation, or 'base' (e.g. capitalism), determines the 'superstructure' (which includes cultural production such as film, literature and music). Cultural products are 'ideological' because they reflect or express the values of the economic base and, therefore, the dominant culture of society.

A weak definition of ideology might describe it as the shared beliefs and values of a particular community. Here, we might speak of the George Bush administration in the US in terms of those ideas, policies and political aspirations associated with his government. The problem with such a definition is that it implies ideology is a conscious position that we are freely capable of accepting or rejecting by, for example, voting or protesting against it. Marx suggests ideology is more like 'false consciousness' in that it conceals from us 'our real conditions of existence'. Following Marx's logic, the average Hollywood film might be said to reproduce, at a superstructural level, ideologies determined by the capitalist economic base. Its strong emphasis on 'closure', the symbolic resolution of social tensions and differences at the film's end, helps maintain the status quo by diverting our attention from the *actual* social tensions and inequalities produced by capitalism.

There are a number of problems with this orthodox Marxist reading of culture and ideology. It cannot explain why, for instance, a number of successful Hollywood films appear critical of prevailing economic conditions. Nor can it account for the fact that film audiences are not necessarily in a state of 'false consciousness', 'tricked' by the formulaic Hollywood ending: that they may be actively critical of such endings, or that their pleasure may derive from the very *recognition* of the Hollywood formula, for instance.



take on consumer society might be that it gives us greater freedom of choice, 'will I buy a Morris, or something else?'. However, this freedom of choice is only granted if we take up the (ideological) position of 'consumer' in the first place. Hall suggests that such a position is far from innocent. The personal pronoun 'you' constructs the worker as a freely choosing individual rather than a communal member of the working class. Such adverts erode class alliances and, therefore, the possibility of resistance.

Crucially, however, Hall differs from Marx in his argument that popular cultural forms like advertising are not simply a secondary reflection of the economic base but, as he put it earlier, 'constitutive of society'. The base is not singularly 'economic' according to 'A sense of classlessness', but is comprised of 'constituent factors' (cultural, social, political) none of which should be privileged and all of which help determine the superstructure. For Hall, the relationship between base and superstructure is not rigid or one way and he calls for a 'freer play' between them. The superstructure determines the base as much as the other way round.

In short, where the so-called 'vulgar' Marxist would argue economics determines cultural production ('economic determinism'), Hall, along with other 'New Left' intellectuals, argues that cultural production also determines the social and economic climate. If we follow the logic of Hall's argument then we must come to the conclusion that politics are inseparable from popular culture and that popular culture is central (rather than secondary) to political debate. Cultural production has real political and ideological effects in the sense that it erodes traditional class alliances, resulting in 'a sense of classlessness'. More importantly, if popular culture is not fixed, or guaranteed in advance by the economic base then its meaning and function can be negotiated and reconfigured through cultural intervention. This is why Hall sees popular culture as crucial to the redescription of socialism. Popular culture is not necessarily a capitalist instrument; it might be reclaimed for a socialist politics. As Hall forcefully argues in his editorial to the first *New Left Review* (1960):

The purpose of discussing cinema or teen-age culture in NLR is not to show, in some modish way, that we are keeping up with the times. These are

directly relevant to the imaginative resistances of the people who have to live within capitalism – the growing points of social discontent, the projection of deeply-felt needs . . . The task of socialism today is to meet people where they *are* . . . to develop discontent and, at the same time, to give the socialist movement some *direct* sense of the times in which we live.

(NLR: 1)

As it is described here, popular culture is not simply a capitalist tool used to fool and exploit the working class – or at least it should not be – it is also a site of potential resistance. The socialist Left, he suggests, should not turn its back on the new postwar popular forms and pretend that nothing is happening, it must enter the struggle over what the popular means now and what it could mean in the future.

Hall's early recognition of popular culture as site of political struggle directly or indirectly underpins all of his subsequent thinking. Most notably perhaps, it uncannily prefigures some of his most recent writing on contemporary politics in the 1980s and early 1990s on Thatcherism and 'authoritarian populism' (see Chapter 5). The most immediate consequences of Hall's New Left thinking on popular culture were to materialise in a much earlier project, however: a book-length study written with Paddy Whannel (an education officer at the British Film Institute), entitled *The Popular Arts* (1964). While its central arguments may have dated, this book remains one of the most diverse and sustained accounts of popular culture ever written, with chapters on the blues (Billie Holiday), Westerns (*High Noon*, *Stagecoach*), pulp fiction (Chandler, Spillane, Fleming), newspapers and magazines (*The Mirror*, *Picture Post*), mainstream British television (*Steptoe and Son*, *Candid Camera*, *Coronation Street*) and advertisements (for cosmetics and underwear). Moreover, in terms of its attempt to move beyond an oppositional reading of popular culture, *The Popular Arts* anticipates the direction of his subsequent deconstruction of the term in the 1980s.

## THE POPULAR ARTS

Where the New Left made the intellectual case for taking popular culture seriously, *The Popular Arts* was part of a more pragmatic

attempt to bring popular culture kicking and screaming into the classroom. The book drew upon Hall and Whannel's own experiences as secondary school teachers in the late 1950s/early 1960s and was centred on a set of case studies of popular culture, concluding with a series of exercises for classroom use. It was, in part, a practical attempt to confront working-class youth with their own cultural references:

[p]art of the teacher's task is to give . . . pupils some understanding of the world in which they live . . . the media are changing the world in ways important enough for a study of these changes to become part of formal education.

(TPA: 21)

There is an implicit sense within this text that popular culture might politicise youth. Its attempt to bring into dialogue the postwar revolution in popular culture identified by the New Left, with the "teenage revolution" . . . which had been particularly marked since the end of the war' (TPA: 19) was particularly controversial at the time. The Australian cultural critic, Graeme Turner has neatly summarised the climate of this period:

The cultural and ideological gap between schoolteachers and their pupils was widening as popular culture became more pervasive. The cultural development of the schoolchild became a battleground, defended by the 'civilizing' objectives of the education system but assailed by the illicit pleasures of popular culture.

(1990: 45)

In its opening chapter, *The Popular Arts* speaks critically of the 1960 National Union of Teachers (NUT) conference at which a resolution was passed arguing 'a determined effort must be made to counteract the debasement of standards which result from the misuse of press, radio, cinema and television' (TPA: 23). *The Popular Arts* does not simply fly in the face of this resolution; one of its most important contributions to postwar debates on culture is its theoretical attempt to move beyond the rigid binaries – high/low, either/or – underpinning that resolution. The phrase 'popular arts' operates as a kind

of third term in this text, offering an alternative position on popular culture as neither completely debased nor wholly authentic.

What remains most impressive about Hall and Whannel's approach is the way it views popular culture *seriously* rather than patronisingly or dismissively. This allows *The Popular Arts* to move beyond the earlier perspectives on popular culture associated with the 'culture and civilization' tradition to produce some of the most perceptive, penetrating analyses of everyday cultural forms available at that time. By viewing popular culture on its own terms, *The Popular Arts* refuses to use high culture as a yardstick to measure the success/failure of popular culture: 'the movies have their own special virtues but it is doubtful if these can be revealed when they are regarded only as stepping-stones in a hierarchy of taste' (TPA: 37). It is pointless, Hall and Whannel might argue, to compare the music of Kylie Minogue and Mozart because 'different kinds of music offer different sorts of satisfaction'. By registering and giving credence to the specific *pleasures* of different *audiences* here, Hall and Whannel anticipate some of the key developments within contemporary cultural studies.

For all its radicalism however, *The Popular Arts* reproduces, in practice, many of the more traditional assumptions about popular culture it seeks to question in theory. While Hall and Whannel challenge the notion that all high culture is intrinsically 'good' and all popular culture intrinsically 'bad', they nevertheless insist that evaluation is important in discriminating between good and bad popular culture. 'The struggle between what is good and worth while and what is shoddy and debased is not a struggle *against* the modern forms of communication, but a conflict *within* these media' (TPA: 15). It is in its attempt to 'develop a critical method for handling these problems of value and evaluation in the media' through the term 'popular arts', that *The Popular Arts* ultimately comes unstuck.

Hall and Whannel locate their notion of 'popular art' between two much more conventional categories of popular culture: 'folk art' and 'mass art'. Folk art, according to *The Popular Arts*, includes rural songs and dances, ballads and traditional crafts and is characterised by its communal nature, its closeness to, or intimacy with the local people and the 'direct relationship' it establishes between community and performer. Although Hall and Whannel acknowledge the

importance of folk art, they refuse to romanticise it, distancing themselves from the organicism and nostalgia associated with Leavisism and the 'culture and civilization' tradition. 'The desire to return to the organic community is a cultural nostalgia which only those who did not experience the cramping inhuman conditions of that life can seriously indulge' (TPA: 53). For Hall and Whannel, folk art is not something that simply died with the Industrial Revolution, but lingers on in urban working-class communities alienated by high culture. Where Leavis seems to hark back to a gentrified vision of the country, Hall and Whannel return to the industrial, working communities of the city.

According to *The Popular Arts*, popular art has developed historically out of folk art and maintains the strong 'rapprochement' between artist and audience to be found in that earlier tradition. Where popular art differs is in terms of its new emphasis on the individual performer in contrast to the anonymity of the folk artist. Charlie Chaplin, whose performances on the cinema screen emerged directly out of the music hall tradition (which is identified as a transitional form between folk art and popular art), is the embodiment of the shift to popular art according to Hall and Whannel. While Chaplin's reliance on improvisation and slapstick recall a folk tradition, his personal style (his dress, walk and expressions) and remote (cinema, or living room) audience is more typical of the popular arts.

Although, as the Chaplin example suggests, popular art has survived changes in the media, *The Popular Arts* argues that 'mass art' has become the dominant form of production in the postwar years. Mass art does not emerge out of folk, or popular art, but is rather a 'corruption' of them:

Where popular art in its modern form exists only through the medium of personal style, mass art has no personal quality, but, instead, a high degree of personalisation. Chaplin indelibly imprints his work with the whole pressure of his personality, which is fully translated into his art. By contrast, mass art often destroys all trace of individuality and idiosyncrasy which makes a work compelling and living, and assumes a sort of de-personalised quality, a no-style.

(TPA: 68)

The move from folk art to popular art involves a shift from anonymous to personal styles, while mass art involves a move towards the de-personalised and the derivative. For Hall and Whannel, popular art relies on stylisation and convention in contrast to mass art which relies upon stereotype and formulae. So in terms of jazz, *The Popular Arts* distinguishes between the 'improvisation and spontaneity' (TPA: 73) of musicians like Miles Davis and the endless repetitions of Liberace. In terms of film they distinguish between the tedium of Hollywood blockbusters like *Around the World in 80 Days* and a more sophisticated European cinema. In each case, the examples reveal a degree of elitism that would seem to contradict the authors' attempts to validate popular cultural forms elsewhere. In the same paragraph as they argue that the new media have the potential to challenge and bridge 'the established hierarchies of culture' they go on to install new hierarchies: 'the best cinema – like the most advanced jazz – seems to push towards high art: average films or pop music are processed mass art' (TPA: 78). Hall and Whannel's earlier point that popular cultural forms should not be viewed as 'stepping stones in a hierarchy of taste' appears to have been forgotten here.

## FANTASY AND ROMANCE

In order to illustrate how *The Popular Arts* deploys its three key categories (folk, popular and mass art) in the analysis of popular culture now, we will consider a specific example from the text. In chapter 8, Hall and Whannel explore 'Fantasy and romance', comparing the front page pin-up photograph of British tabloids like *The People* and *The Mirror* with an early film still, a frame from *The Blue Angel* by von Sternberg. Hall and Whannel begin with the tabloid model:

The pin-up is buxom and full-breasted, but in an anodyne way, thrusting herself at the reader with a fixed photographer's smile. She is never really sensuous, but she is always trying to 'act sexy'. She is a show-off. She relates to nothing in our experience. In real life the girl looks quite different: in the photograph she is 'processed' – she conforms to a stereotyped dream. She cannot suggest or invoke anything, since there is nothing behind her but a trumped up beach scene or the bric-a-brac of a studio.

(TPA: 196–7)

For Hall and Whannel, the pin-up appears to exemplify the processed and formulaic nature of mass art. There is no intimacy between ‘performer’ and ‘audience’ in such images: ‘The artificial lights have robbed her eyes of any message’ (TPA: 197). She is derivative, lacking authenticity, originality or depth: ‘If we were to pull, we feel, she would come away from the page like a cardboard replica.’ As such she dulls rather than arouses the senses of the viewer.

In contrast, in *The Blue Angel* still:

Marlene Dietrich’s very posture and costume reverberate with the subliminal sexual intimations. She is richly evocative. The hat and skirt belong to the world of the inter-war Berlin *cabaret*, their quality gives her a place in time and space in the imagination: they connect her, as an image, with everything else in the room – with the baroque interior, the costumed figures posed around her, the encrusted objects and the paraphernalia. Her legs are exposed, but the sensuality of the impression arises, not from these conventional signs, but from the particular way in which her whole body is a gesture – as well as the total context.

(TPA: 197)

Unlike the body of the pin-up, Dietrich’s body belongs to the realm of popular art. Her clothing signals continuities with the folk through its connotations of the *cabaret* tradition (a relation of music hall). Where the pin-up is divorced from her immediate context (the ‘beach scene’ as well as the audience), Dietrich is connected to and shares a *rapprochement* with hers. The superficial surfaces of the tabloid photograph become ‘subliminal’, and ‘evocative’ in *The Blue Angel*. Where the pin-up ‘conforms’ to stereotypes, Dietrich breaks with ‘conventional signs’, through the ‘particularity’ of her gesture.

The two images are used by Hall and Whannel to note a ‘qualitative difference’ between popular art, with its leanings towards folk culture, and a debased, processed mass art. Their prudish reading of the pin-up fails to address the specific pleasures of pornography, or convincingly account for its popularity: ‘men who exclaim at the sight of her are often faking their feelings’. What *The Popular Arts* ultimately lacks is a critical vocabulary capable of deconstructing the category of the popular altogether.

## NOTES ON DECONSTRUCTING 'THE POPULAR'

In 'Notes on deconstructing "the popular"' (1981), popular culture appears less a solution (as it does in *The Popular Arts*) than an unguaranteed site of contestation, as the scare quotes within Hall's title suggest. *The Popular Arts* offered a descriptive account of popular culture, which assumes it has an intrinsic value that can be identified within certain texts through close analysis. 'Notes . . .' on the other hand warns against such 'self-enclosed approaches' in which popular cultural forms appear outside history 'as if they contained within themselves, from the moment of their origin, some fixed and unchanging meaning or value' (NDP: 237). This radically revised theory of the popular as something that emerges at a particular historical conjuncture and which is a site of struggle without a fixed inventory (content) is influenced by the work of the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937).

While popular culture represents the earliest and most persistent subject of Hall's published writing since the 1950s, it was not until the 1980s and 1990s that he provided a fully elaborated theory of popular culture. This theory is reproduced and extended across a series of what are, on the surface, very different essays such as 'Notes on deconstructing the "popular"' (1981), 'What is this "black" in black popular culture?' (1992) and 'For Allon White: metaphors of transformation' (1993). What links them all is the influence of Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony'.

Gramsci believed that the popular was a key site at which ongoing hegemonic struggles take place. Developing this position, Hall argues that popular culture is a 'contradictory space', a site of continuous negotiation: 'we should always start from here: with the double stake in popular culture, the double movement of containment and resistance' (NDP: 228).

Gramsci's concept of hegemony underpins all Hall's writings on popular culture since the 1980s. It is what allows him to move beyond the kind of common-sense binary oppositions (soap opera versus opera) with which this chapter began and which have tended to dominate postwar debate on the subject. In 'Notes on deconstructing "the popular"', Hall expands upon some of these binaristic ways of



## HEGEMONY

Gramsci has had a greater influence on Hall's thought than any other intellectual and we will return to his central ideas again and again in later chapters. It is Gramsci's notion of 'hegemony' that has had the most productive impact on Hall's thinking. Developed from the work of Lenin, Gramsci's distinctive (but by no means consistent) use of hegemony is sometimes confused with the notion of straightforward domination. The key point to remember here is, as Hall puts it succinctly, 'Hegemony is never for ever' (CP: 30).

Gramscian hegemony actually describes the *process* of establishing dominance within a culture, not by brute force but by voluntary *consent*, by leadership rather than rule. The concept helped Gramsci explain why, for instance, the working classes had not become the revolutionary force Karl Marx had predicted. Hegemony resists revolutionary resistance by working through negotiation, incorporation and concession rather than by simple oppression. Hall pursues this idea in 'Notes ...' to argue that the meaning and value of popular culture is historically contingent; what appears to be a site of resistance at one moment is a site of incorporation at another:

[t]his year's radical symbol or slogan will be neutralised into next year's fashion; the year after, it will be the object of a profound cultural nostalgia. Today's rebel folksinger ends up, tomorrow, on the cover of *The Observer* colour magazine.

(NDP: 235)

In this context, hegemony works by partially accommodating or incorporating the subordinate elements of society rather than simply stamping them down. This means that the dominant class, or 'ruling bloc' (a term Hall prefers because it does not immediately reduce the popular to a particular class position) must constantly work to maintain hegemony: precisely because it is a process, it cannot be secured once and for all. For the subordinate class this means that revolutionary resistance in the sense of a conclusive inversion of power relations within society (what Gramsci calls a 'war of manoeuvre'), is also unlikely to succeed. The subordinate classes will only become hegemonic through a continual process of struggle and negotiation (what Gramsci calls a 'war of position') involving the linkage/articulation of dispersed popular forces to create a 'national-popular' culture.

thinking about popular culture in a way that helps illustrate the pitfalls of an either/or approach.

The most obvious definition of the popular, Hall suggests, views it as that which 'sells'; it is the latest Hollywood blockbuster or what is currently number one in the pop charts. This is an understanding of popular culture premised on commercial success. It is a definition that, Hall says, 'brings socialists out in spots' (NDP: 231) because it is associated with the manipulation of the people, the working classes. It confuses popular culture with the inauthentic, with homogenisation and incorporation. One of the problems with this definition, Hall argues, is that it produces an ultimately condescending, 'unsocialist' view of ordinary folk as 'cultural dopes', incapable of seeing how capitalist society exploits them. Such a view is not capable of explaining why, for instance, 80 per cent of new album releases fail to make money, despite sophisticated marketing strategies (see Storey 1993: 112), a statistic that suggests popular culture is neither completely manipulative nor viewed passively/uncritically by its audience.

Diametrically opposed to this definition is the one sometimes offered by radical Marxists who argue the popular is not about the debasement of the people by the dominant culture, but with the activities of the people themselves. This definition identifies the popular with an 'authentic' working-class experience uncontaminated by the ruling classes but waiting in the wings to overthrow them, to put the 'low' in place of the 'high'. This definition associates the popular with revolutionary 'resistance', 'opposition', and the 'experiential'. Hall argues this is an 'heroic' but equally unconvincing view of popular culture, which never exists independently of the ruling bloc. Linking the rise of capitalism to the rise of popular culture, he outlines how the former – by banning, re-educating and moralising – has historically worked to reform and transform popular culture in the interests of capital. For example, it has worked to regulate (always, of course, for the 'good' of the people) the demarcation between work and leisure time, the licensing hours of pubs, the amount of time we are legally required to stay in school. This means that while popular culture has at key moments resisted, revolted and opposed the ruling classes it is as much a site of appropriation and expropriation *by* the ruling classes.

This brings us to the crux of the problem with both definitions: they rely on a binary opposition between popular/not popular that is ultimately unsustainable. How many records exactly *do* you have to sell to be regarded as ‘popular’? Does the difference between authentic and inauthentic working-class experience depend on how much muck you have under your fingernails? Where do we draw the line? Hall’s view is that we can’t, that it is ‘necessary to deconstruct the popular once and for all’ (WTB: 469). In ‘Notes . . .’ Hall settles for a third definition of the popular that stresses ‘the relations which define “popular culture” in a continuing tension (relationship, influence, antagonism) to the dominant culture’ (NDP: 235).

According to Hall, popular culture does not have a fixed, intrinsic value or content inscribed into it, like the hallmark on a piece of jewellery: ‘[p]opular forms become enhanced [and degraded] in cultural value, go up [and down] the cultural escalator’ (NDP: 234). If impressionism was once an abstract, avant-garde art form struggling to get exhibited in the gallery, it now appears at home in Ikea stores and suburban living rooms throughout the Western world. It follows that if the process of evaluation (how we distinguish between high and popular art) is culturally contingent and shifts over time, so, too, do the contents of ‘the popular’.

At stake in all of this is much more than the vexed issue of artistic value. Hall’s main concern is with the futility of a descriptive account of popular culture which assumes the political meaning of a given object or activity can be guaranteed in advance as *either* a sign of incorporation (as our first definition suggested) *or* resistance (as our second definition suggested). The popular is neither a pure sign of resistance by the people or of total domination of the people. It is not the point at which the fight has been won or lost but, rather, a site of continual struggle and negotiation between the two. For Hall, popular culture is, as he demonstrates with reference to the Russian Marxist linguist Valentin Vološinov, ‘multi-accentual’ rather than ‘uni-accentual’.

In ‘Notes . . .’ Hall offers the example of the swastika, that potent emblem of Nazi Germany which was subsequently re-appropriated (and thereby re-accented) within the street styles of youth cultures in the 1970s and early 1980s, as a multi-accentual sign:

there it dangles, partly – but not entirely – cut loose from its profound cultural reference in twentieth-century history . . . This terrifying sign may delimit a range of meanings but it carries no guarantee of a single meaning within itself. The streets are full of kids who are not fascist because they . . . wear a swastika on a chain. On the other hand, perhaps they *could* be . . .

(NDP: 237)

Vološinov's theory allowed Hall to challenge essentialist ideas of class relating to popular culture, notably, the notion that the popular is an authentic, pure expression of the working class. The idea of multi-accentuality suggests there are no popular cultural forms or signs that 'belong' to a particular class and whose meaning can be guaranteed forever. Rather, the struggle depends upon the success or failure in giving popular culture 'a socialist accent', not as class versus class but the power bloc versus the people.

The indeterminacy that the notion of multi-accentuality invests the popular with, does not mean that as far as popular culture is concerned 'anything goes'. On the contrary, it is through the analysis of popular culture that the 'capacity to *constitute* classes and individuals as a popular force' (NDP: 238) becomes available. It is why Hall believes we all have a political stake in the popular. For Hall, the idea that popular culture has no intrinsic value or meaning is not a liberating conclusion to come to. If on the one hand it means 'no struggle can capture popular culture for our side or theirs' it also means 'there are always positions to be won in popular culture'. To argue that there is no guaranteed position on popular culture does not mean we should relinquish our stake in it, on the contrary it is what makes taking a position on it so important.

All of this has serious implications for how Hall believes we should approach popular culture. To search for what Hall, via Gramsci, calls an inventory (a fixed content) inside the popular is to provide an ahistorical, 'self-enclosed' perspective of popular culture that cannot engage (with) its political implications. As 'Notes . . .' teaches us, popular cultural forms are not *things* we can descriptively write off or embrace (i.e. evaluate) in that way, 'as if they contained within themselves, from the moment of their origin, some fixed and unchanging meaning or value' (NDP: 237). Rather, we need to historically

periodise popular culture, 'try to identify the periods of relative "settlement" – when not only the inventories of popular culture, but the relations between popular and dominant cultures, remain relatively settled. Then . . . to identify the turning points, when relations are . . . restructured and transformed' (PCS: 23). In short, any descriptive account of the inventories of popular culture will also need to be relational. (Hall's 'Popular culture and the state' (1986) provides an excellent example of this particular approach to popular culture.)

If it is true, as Hall suggests, that the popular is a key site at which hegemony is established and contested, then this is why Hall takes popular culture so seriously. It opens up the possibility of political intervention. By exposing the power relations, the tensions between opposition and resistance that *at any given moment* govern the popular, Hall's hope is to (however provisionally) 'shift the dispositions of power' (WTB: 468). Hall is careful to qualify this statement. Not only are the opportunities for such shifts extremely limited and carefully governed, making 'pure victory' impossible, the idea of a 'zero-sum game – our model replacing their model' (WTB: 468) merely returns us to the either/or binary model of the popular Hall works to deconstruct. Nevertheless one of the central strategies of Hall's thinking has been to enter into the struggle over the popular at specific moments during the postwar period.

'Notes . . .' was more than an attempt to pursue 'the popular' as a theoretical problem then, it was also part of an early attempt to wrestle with the 'so-called authoritarian populism' associated with Britain's Conservative government of the time (see Chapter 5). Thatcherism, Hall suggests, makes the popular a particularly troubling category in the early 1980s:

It is made problematic . . . by the ability of Mrs Thatcher to pronounce sentences like, 'We have to limit the power of the trade unions because that is what the people want'. That suggests to me that, just as there is no fixed category of 'popular culture', so there is no fixed category to attach to it – 'the people'.

(NDP: 239)

Hall's argument here is that the popular is something that has to be *made* rather than found.

## MULTI-ACCENTUALITY

Hall has referred to Vološinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1973) as a 'key text' (FAW: 295) in the development of the CCCS's thinking on ideology and culture. Multi-accentuality is used by Vološinov to refer to the way in which language produces different, even opposing meanings depending on how it is 'accented' by those who 'speak' it within a given social context. The line 'God save the Queen' means something very different depending on whether it is sung by the Sex Pistols, a church congregation or a football crowd. Meaning and value are not inscribed within language but constantly being reproduced as signs are articulated, dis-articulated and re-accented by different social groups at different historical moments. Hall's most frequently used example is the sign 'black' which has traditionally carried negative connotations within dominant culture. During the 1960s and 1970s black was dis-articulated from its derogatory, negative connotations and re-articulated as a positive, empowering sign – 'black is beautiful' – by African Americans and black Britons. A more recent example of this process of re-accenting has taken place in relation to the sign 'queer' which has traditionally carried negative connotations, but in the 1990s became a rallying sign in gay cultural politics.

Note: Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975), who many now take to be the real author of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, has been the focus of Hall's more recent discussions of popular culture in 'What is this "black" in black popular culture' (1992) and 'For Allon White: metaphors of transformation' (1993). Against the popular (mis)reading of Bakhtin's notion of the 'carnavalesque' as the inversion of high/low cultural hierarchies, Hall insists on the interdependence of high and popular forms. The manufactured division of these two binaries, he suggests, is linked to the maintenance of cultural hierarchies and the regulation of difference. This results in a fantasy/desire for the displaced low/Other, which Hall suggests may explain the 'fascination with difference' surrounding black popular culture (WTB: 466).

## A POPULAR PEDAGOGY: U203 AT THE OU

As it was taken up and taught by him and others at The Open University, Hall's Gramscian account of the popular in essays such as 'Notes . . .' was less an academic exercise, than it was an attempt to establish what he termed a 'popular pedagogy'. U203 was an interdisciplinary multimedia course broadcast by The Open University between 1982 and 1987. Taken by over 6,000 students during this period, the British cultural critic Anthony Easthope regards it as the most important institutional moment in British cultural studies since the CCCS. Something of the significance of the course can be registered in the disproportionate amount of debate and research within cultural studies circles it has generated (see Miller 1994). The course was co-produced by Hall with a team of teachers either directly or indirectly connected with the CCCS project, including Tony Bennett (the course leader), David Morley, Paul Willis and Janet Woollacott. While the collective working conditions favoured by Hall at the CCCS continued at the OU, Hall's institutional role as a teacher clearly shifted. Whereas at Birmingham, Hall taught postgraduates, at Milton Keynes he was working with undergraduates, many of whom did not have formal academic qualifications. Hall describes this as

an opportunity to take the high paradigm of cultural studies, generated in this hothouse atmosphere of Centre graduate work, to a popular level . . . If you are going to make cultural studies ideas live . . . you have to translate the ideas, be willing to write at *that* more popular and accessible level. I wanted cultural studies to be open to that sort of challenge. I didn't see why it wouldn't 'live', as a more popular pedagogy.

(FDI: 501)

While U203 presented students with a variety of different theoretical positions, it was the Gramscian reading of the popular, exemplified in Hall's 'Notes . . .' that emerged as a dominant position. (See Tony Bennett's 'Introduction: popular culture and "the turn to Gramsci"' for an excellent overview of this approach at the OU.)

There is then, no single transhistorical ‘theory’ of the popular in Hall’s work. Hall’s interventions on the popular shift in conjunction with the particular historical moment he is engaging. For instance, while in the postwar 1950s Hall argued for greater attention to the marginalised sites of the popular, in the postmodern 1990s Hall asks whether popular culture, now fetishised and incorporated within dominant culture, reveals a dubious desire for the ‘margins’ of black popular culture (see WTB). Such apparent shifts in position are not a contradictory flaw in Hall’s thinking, but a perfect illustration of his theory of the popular, outlined above, that there is always a double stake in popular culture, no guaranteed once and for all position.

## **SUMMARY**

Popular culture in many ways represents the horizon of Hall’s thought. This chapter has offered a chronological assessment of some of his most influential attempts to think and theorise that category. Hall first came to popular culture, not through academic research, but through the New Left. His sense there, that popular culture played a formative, rather than secondary or reflective role in social and political change has remained at the centre of his thinking ever since. While in his earlier work Hall tends to view popular culture as a thing invested with meaning, since the 1980s he has spoken of the need to deconstruct the category of the popular ‘once and for all’. Within this context the popular becomes a site of unguaranteed political struggle between dominant and subordinate culture at a given historical moment. The popular is the point at which power relations are negotiated and contested rather than predetermined in advance.





# ENTER CULTURAL STUDIES

Chapter 1 opened with a consideration of Hall's earliest writing on popular culture with the New Left, the movement through which Hall claims he 'entered' cultural studies. This chapter traces the key theoretical debates in cultural studies as they emerged during Stuart Hall's fifteen years (1964–79) at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). While the CCCS and cultural studies are by no means Hall's 'key ideas', he has, nevertheless, had a major impact on how they have been translated and understood. Not only is his name synonymous with the project of cultural studies in Britain; the research, theories and practices advanced during his CCCS years continue to be regarded as exemplary in terms of Hall's thinking as a whole.

Two essays by Stuart Hall have been especially influential in terms of subsequent interpretations of the CCCS and British cultural studies: 'Cultural studies and the centre' (1980) and 'Cultural studies: two paradigms' (1980). Together, these pieces provide an important institutional and intellectual framework within which to contextualise Hall's thinking in the rest of this book. They reflect on the beginnings of cultural studies and the pre-history of the CCCS. They trace the key theoretical debates that the Birmingham Centre both inherited and departed from as it moved from a conception of culture as 'the

best that had been thought and said' to culture as 'a whole way of life'. They explore the divisions that conventionally framed understandings of cultural studies during the 1970s in terms of the so-called culturalism/structuralism divide. Finally, they pursue the move beyond this binary division through the 'turn' to Gramsci.

Published in 1980, shortly after Hall's departure for The Open University, 'Cultural studies and the centre' and 'Cultural studies: two paradigms' were written from a significant vantage point, at the close of what would prove to be the most influential period in the

## THE CCCS

The CCCS was established as a postgraduate research centre at the University of Birmingham in 1964, with the intention of inaugurating 'research in the area of contemporary culture and society: cultural forms, practices and institutions, their relation to society and social change' (CML: 7). Richard Hoggart was the CCCS's founding director and, partly on the strength of *The Popular Arts*, he appointed Hall as a research fellow in its first year. Hall replaced Hoggart as acting director of the CCCS in 1968, a position he held until his departure in 1979.

During Hall's time there, the CCCS consisted of no more than three staff members, two research fellows and around forty postgraduate students (CML: 1980: 7). Nevertheless, most commentators agree that the work it produced at that time had, and continues to have, a major impact on the genesis and development of the field in both Britain and abroad. The Centre's collectives produced a prodigious body of research, published initially in the form of stencilled papers and in the CCCS journal, *Working Papers in Cultural Studies* and, from the mid-1970s, in a series of co-edited books which included trail-blazing texts such as *Resistance through Rituals* (1976) and *Policing the Crisis* (1978) examined in Chapter 4.

During the 1980s, the CCCS struggled increasingly to survive as an autonomous Centre and in the late 1980s it was forced to become a department of Cultural Studies offering undergraduate courses. This had a dramatic impact on the nature and capacity of its research and, in 2002, the University of Birmingham made the controversial decision to close the department following a fall in its research ratings.

CCCS's history. While each essay carries a different emphasis on, respectively, the theoretical ('Cultural studies: two paradigms') and the institutional ('Cultural studies and the centre') developments at the CCCS, they are considered alongside one another (rather than consecutively) below because their subject matter overlaps and repeats itself significantly.

## **ABSOLUTE BEGINNINGS: FOUNDATIONS OF CULTURAL STUDIES**

Writing on the emergence of cultural studies from within the context of the CCCS, Stuart Hall has said that the 'search for origins is tempting but illusory': there are 'no absolute beginnings' (CSAC: 16). If the establishment of the CCCS in Birmingham in 1964 marks an historic turning point in the foundation of the field, then Hall has stressed that cultural studies was actually initiated elsewhere, in earlier political movements (e.g. the New Left) and subject areas (e.g. English studies, history and sociology). While the CCCS constitutes one kind of institutional origin, what Hall calls its 'original curriculum' comprised a diverse range of writings first published a decade earlier.

Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), along with *Culture and Society* (1958) and *The Long Revolution* (1961) by Welsh literary critic Raymond Williams, and *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) by Marxist historian E.P. Thompson, are regarded as immediate precursors of cultural studies by Hall. These texts not only informed his early writings, they formed, as Hall notes, the 'caesura out of which . . . "Cultural studies" emerged' (CS2P: 20). Collectively the contributions of Hoggart, Williams and Thompson provided a basis with which to 'break' from earlier traditions of thinking about culture established in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Specifically, Hoggart, Williams and Thompson offered Hall and the CCCS a less elitist account of culture than that presented within the 'culture and civilisation' tradition (see Chapter 1). As Williams puts it in *The Long Revolution*, 'culture is a description of a particular way of life which expresses certain meanings and values *not only* in art and learning *but also* in institutions and ordinary behaviour'

## CULTURALISM

A term coined in 1979 by Richard Johnson (Hall's successor as director of the CCCS) to describe some of the shared critical assumptions of Hoggart, Williams and Thompson (see Johnson 1979). Culturalism is a label applied retrospectively and, therefore, should not be understood as a self-conscious movement or coherent theoretical position. While culturalism challenged the idea that culture was 'the best that had been thought and said', its departure from the 'culture and civilization' tradition was by no means absolute. Notably, Hoggart and Williams reproduce many of the assumptions of Leavis and, therefore, are sometimes called 'left-Leavisites'. For example, *The Uses of Literacy* – an affectionate, if nostalgic account of working-class communities in northern England before and after the Second World War – expresses anxieties about the corruption of the people by emergent popular forms like magazines and juke-boxes. According to Hall, Hoggart continues the culture and civilization tradition 'while seeking in practice, to transform it' (CS2P: 18). Similarly Williams's *Culture and Society* – a study of literary history focusing on the period between 1750 and 1950 – adopts the 'close reading' approaches associated with Leavis and concentrates mainly on high cultural forms, even as it includes a less exclusive definition of culture as a 'whole way of life'.

While culturalism's departure from the culture and civilization tradition was ambivalent then, what it *did* offer was a less exclusive, more democratic understanding of culture. In doing so it placed an emphasis on what Hall terms 'creative and historical agency' – the power of the people to express and determine their own feelings and actions. Culturalism is a 'humanist' position in the sense that it identifies human experience as the central *agent* in creative and historical processes. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* – a 'history from below' of the origins and formation of working-class culture between 1790 and 1830 – signals this accent on agency in its very title. The working classes were not simply *made* by history but took part in its *making*.

(57, my emphases). Embedded within this statement is a particular theory of culture that is shared by Hoggart and Thompson: culture *expresses* meanings. More, these cultural expressions can be found in 'ordinary behaviour', not just 'art and learning'. (Williams' phrase 'culture is ordinary' has since become a slogan for the standpoint of early cultural studies.) This shared assumption, that culture is a form of expression that flows from the experiences of the people is what characterises ('even if not adequately or fully' as Hall points out) the early work of Hoggart, Williams and Thompson as 'culturalist'.

Culturalism best characterises the early work of Stuart Hall and the CCCS in the 1950s and 1960s. Hall's New Left work and his first book, *The Popular Arts* (see Chapter 1) were undoubtedly culturalist in their logic. *The Popular Arts*, for instance, privileges agency; the 'originality' and 'personality' of the individual performer in folk art over and against a de-personalised and derivative mass art. However, the main insight of culturalism, that culture is *expressive* and can be used to 'read off' the lived experiences of particular classes and communities was, along with the humanist faith in agency that informed it, increasingly drawn into question by Hall and the CCCS in the late 1960s.

Stuart Hall took over from Richard Hoggart as acting director of the CCCS in 1968, bringing a fresh theoretical outlook and energy to the Centre. This theoretical turn was stimulated in the late 1960s by the arrival of a new body of theory imported from continental Europe called 'structuralism'.

While the late 1960s are often identified as a turning point from culturalism to structuralism at the CCCS, there was no easy passage from one to the other. In 1978 E.P. Thompson's *The Poverty of Theory* was published, a savage attack on what he felt were the failings of structuralism. The publication was part of a broader intellectual dispute in which the culturalists accused the structuralists of retreating from history and politics into abstract theory and the structuralists accused the culturalists of idealising and simplifying political struggle by retreating from theory. Working in cultural studies in the 1970s frequently involved taking a side in relation to these two theoretical frameworks or 'paradigms'.

## STRUCTURALISM

Structuralism is concerned with the linguistic structures that underpin, enable and govern meaning. While its main principles can be traced back to Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* (1916), Hall and the CCCS's first encounter with structuralism came through the work of a diverse group of French intellectuals during the 1950s–70s (including Roland Barthes (see pp. 42–4) and Louis Althusser (see pp. 44–6)). By revealing that the relationship between language/culture and meaning is *constructed*, structuralism raised questions over the culturalist assumption that meaning is expressed or *reflected* through culture. Hall was among the first intellectuals to translate structuralist continental theory to a British context and he played a crucial role in its dissemination within the CCCS (see Hall DNP). 'Notes on deconstructing "the popular"' (see Chapter 1) reveals the impact of structuralism on Hall's work. For example, it argues that the popular is not an authentic expression of the people, but, via Vološinov (who was developing the insights of Saussure), is culturally constructed.

## CULTURAL STUDIES: TWO PARADIGMS

In 'Cultural studies: two paradigms', Hall provides one of the most nuanced, influential accounts of the so-called culturalism/structuralism divide. The real value of this essay is the way in which it refuses to take sides, revealing instead the insufficiency of either position on its own. In what is a characteristic feature of his work, Hall aims to show how a recognition of the limitations of, and links between, culturalism and structuralism present a more viable way forward for cultural studies.

'Cultural studies: two paradigms' begins with a detailed account of the early work of Hoggart, Williams and Thompson in order to identify one of the clearest points of difference between culturalism and structuralism:

Whereas, in 'culturalism' experience was the ground – the terrain of 'the lived' where consciousness and conditions intersected, structuralism insisted that 'experience' could not, by definition, be the ground of anything, since one

could only 'live' and experience one's conditions *in and through* the categories, classifications and frameworks of the culture. These categories, however, did not arise from or in experience: rather, experience was their 'effect'.

(CS2P: 29)

In short, where culturalism privileges 'lived' experience as the *agent* of social change, structuralism argues experience itself is socially constructed, an 'effect' of language and culture. Hall's point that experience is linguistically produced draws on one of the most influential implications of Saussurean structuralism, that language does not simply name a pre-existing reality, but rather constructs and *structures* that reality on our behalf.

Culturalism was, according to Hall, profoundly 'interrupted by the arrival on the scene of the structuralisms' (CS2P: 27). However his essay refuses a reductive reading of the culturalism/structuralism divide as if it refers to two discrete, coherent moments. Just as he suggested earlier that culturalism is in many ways an 'inadequate' label

## SIGNIFIER AND SIGNIFIED

Saussure viewed language as a system of 'signs'. Signs have two corresponding parts. The 'signifier' is the physical aspect of the sign, for example the group of letters 'c-h-a-i-r', the spoken word 'chair' or a one-dimensional 'iconic' representation of a chair as the letter 'h'. The 'signified' is the concept the signifier refers us to: a piece of furniture with four legs, a seat and a back. Saussure's crucial point is that while we depend on this relationship between signifier and signified to produce meaning, it is an *arbitrary* connection. Imagine hot and cold taps on a sink, one marked red, the other blue. There is no reason why the signifiers red and blue should refer us to the signifieds hot and cold, it is merely cultural convention. The colours red and blue are not *intrinsically* 'hot' and 'cold' and in different circumstances they might easily signify, respectively, 'Labour' and 'Conservative'. Hot taps could, in future, be marked blue and cold taps red if, as a community, we all agreed: it is the *difference* between red and blue that matters. Signs and the meanings they generate are *socially* constructed through difference rather than a matter of individual intention.



## LANGUE AND PAROLE

The idea that language determines our meaning (as a 'structure' we are born into and inherit rather than freely create) leads us to a second of Saussure's key distinctions concerning the terms 'langue' and 'parole'. Langue refers to the entire system of language from which we select, and within which we make specific utterances (parole). Although this system allows for a wide range of possible utterances, because it is not limitless, it also governs and controls those utterances. The plumber who one day starts to label all taps pink and orange is not likely to stay in work very long. It is very difficult to make an entirely 'individual' or 'personal' statement in this sense. We can only work within the rules of the system and this means inevitably reproducing the logic and values of that system.

for the diverse range of work carried out by Hoggart, Williams and Thompson, so too, here, he prefers to speak of 'the structuralisms' in the plural, rather than of a singular 'structuralism'. While today we tend to encounter 'structuralism' as a complete and unified 'theory' neatly packaged in lectures and introductory texts such as this one, it is important to remember that at the time Hall encountered it, structuralism was still an emerging set of positions, never a unified school of thought. Moreover, the CCCS never incorporated structuralism wholesale, but selectively, critically, and in phases.

'Cultural studies: two paradigms' breaks down structuralism into a series of 'representative instances' (CS2P: 29) which centre on the work of three figures whose work he sees as exemplifying the structuralisms encountered by the CCCS: Lévi-Strauss (1908– ), Roland Barthes (1915–80) and Louis Althusser (1918–90). He further distinguishes between the work of Lévi-Strauss and Barthes, which he associates with 'semiotic structuralism' and Althusser whom he associates with 'Marxist structuralism'.

## SEMIOTIC STRUCTURALISM

Together, Belgian structuralist anthropologist Lévi-Strauss and French literary critic Barthes provided the first structuralist encounter at the

CCCS. Lévi-Strauss interpreted the sign systems of 'primitive cultures', examining everything from kinship structures (e.g. *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*) to cooking (e.g. *The Raw and the Cooked*). Barthes on the other hand became famous for his exploration of the codes and myths structuring postwar French culture (see *Mythologies*).

## SEMIOTICS

Although Saussure first proposed 'semiology' as a scientific study of 'signs within society' at the start of the twentieth century, it was first taken up and practised within the work of figures such as Roland Barthes in texts like *Mythologies* (1957) and *Elements of Semiology* (1967). Semioticians like Barthes developed Saussure's findings, using language analogously to explore and 'read' a much wider range of cultural signs beyond the purely linguistic. In Barthes' *Mythologies* these included everything from wrestling and steak and chips to magazine and film images.

A crucial semiotic distinction made by Barthes is between denotation, or a sign's literal meaning and connotation, or a sign's associated meanings (see Chapter 3 for further discussion). One of Hall's favourite examples, taken from Barthes, is of an item of clothing; the sweater:

the photo-image of a sweater *is* (denotes) an object worn . . . In the connotative domain of everyday speech *sweater* may also connote 'keeping warm' . . . and thus by further elaboration 'the coming of winter' . . . But in the domain of the specialised discourse . . . of fashion, *sweater* may connote 'a fashionable style of *haute couture*', a certain informal style of dress, and so on. Set against the right background, and positioned in the domain of romantic discourse, *sweater* may connote 'long autumn walk in the woods'.

(DNP: 64)

Part of Hall's point here is that the literal (denotative) meaning of the sign depends for its connotations on the context in which it is produced: a sweater is perhaps more likely to connote 'unfashionable' within the specialised discourse of fashion today.

This extension of Saussurean linguistics to consider the signifying systems of the everyday world of rituals and objects is termed 'semiotics'.

Hall sees Barthes' *Mythologies* as a classic text in terms of the study 'of the intersection of myth, language and ideology' (ROI: 66). A significant part of semiotics' appeal for him was the way in which it exposed the relationship between culture and power in a way that allowed him to rethink Marxist notions of ideology. Culturalism, Hall points out in 'Cultural studies: two paradigms', had tended to neglect the category of ideology in favour of 'lived experience', whereas in structuralism, ideology was a central concept.

The turn to structuralism at the CCCS, therefore, coincided with a return to Marx. While Hall had first rejected deterministic versions of Marxism in the 1950s (see Chapter 1), during the 1970s his work returned increasingly to Marx's writings, discovering there a less deterministic account of the base–superstructure model. (Marx's most developed methodological text, *the Grundrisse*, forms part of the basis for Hall's rejection of deterministic theories of communication explored in 'Encoding/decoding' in Chapter 3 (see Hall 1974b and RED).) Hall was never a pure Marxist however, preferring instead what he famously calls a 'Marxism without guarantees', a critical Marxism that draws upon Marx while always seeking to question and move beyond him.

Hall's encounter with structuralism in the late 1960s and early 1970s allowed him to build upon his critique of economic determinism and false consciousness in the 1950s. If language and signifying systems do not transparently mirror the world, but determine its meaning on our behalf, it follows that culture cannot be reduced to a secondary reflection of the economic, nor can there be a 'true' consciousness outside of language and ideology. These important insights were carefully developed during the 1970s through the work of the Marxist structuralist, Louis Althusser (1918–90).

## MARXIST STRUCTURALISM

Hall describes Marxist structuralism as 'personified in the example of Althusser' (CSAC: 32). If Barthes and Lévi-Strauss were two of the

first structuralist imports to the CCCS, then French intellectual Althusser was one of the most influential. His structuralist re-readings of Marx in texts such as *For Marx* (1965), *Reading Capital* (1968) and *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (1971) gave his thinking a certain immediacy within a Centre working to develop a critical dialogue between the methodologies of structuralism and Marxism.

One of the most influential passages from Althusser on Hall appears in *For Marx*. In it, Althusser argues that ideology is not an illusory veil (false consciousness), but a 'system of representations' (images, myths, ideas or concepts) through which we live, in an imaginary way, our real conditions of existence. Our lived experience is 'imaginary' in the sense that it takes places within, and is mediated through, language and representation. By seeing ideology as a system of representations, Althusser stresses ideology's semiotic character. There is no 'true' ideology (implicit in Marx's notion of false consciousness). Language and signifying practices mean we *must* live our 'real conditions' in an imaginary way. Ideology, like language, works largely at the level of the *unconscious* for Althusser, an insight that is central to Hall's use of the term. For Hall ideology is most powerfully present in that which appears natural, unconscious, or just plain common-sense (see 'Common-sense' box, p. 67).

Althusser's argument was not that there is no 'real'. One of his key contributions was to reveal the way in which ideology works through material practices and institutions, what he called Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs): the family, religious organisations, the media. Rather, there is no 'real' uncontaminated by signification and ideology. One of the implications of this is that ideology becomes the very *site* of struggle, rather than a fiction (or false consciousness) to shrug off.

At the same time, it was precisely this idea of ideology as a site of struggle that Althusser failed to elaborate and which, according to Hall, stopped Althusserianism ever becoming a 'fully orthodox position' at the CCCS. One of the main gains of Althusserian structuralism for Hall was its move beyond the humanism of the culturalists: Althusser viewed 'experience' 'not as an authenticating source but as an effect: not as a reflection of the real but as an "imaginary relation"'. (CS2P: 29). However, Althusser also went too far

in this direction for Hall, reducing experience to the structure of signs and representations that ‘speak it’. This view offered little if any room for active struggle with the governing structure (langue). Where culturalism was flawed in its emphasis on the determining role of human experience, and classical Marxism was flawed in its emphasis on the determining role of the economy, Althusserianism was flawed in its emphasis on the determining role of language and ideology. As Hall argues, Althusser’s ‘structure’ appears ‘to be just another, larger, self-sufficient and self-generating “expressive totality”: all its effects are given in the structure itself’ (CSAC: 33). For Hall, Althusser gives too much weight to the system or structure, which denies agency, and the possibility of political intervention. We appear little more than passive components within Althusser’s ‘machine’: the potential for resistance or struggle remains ultimately undeveloped in his work.

## THE STRUGGLE OVER THE SIGN

Earlier in this chapter we considered the structuralist concept of the sign and the argument that language is not supplied transparently by the thing it describes (hot/cold), but is socially produced through signifying practices (red/blue). This theory led Hall to ask an important question. If ‘the world has to be *made to mean* then how do certain meanings get privileged over others?’ (ROI: 67). Hall is asking a question here about the relationship between language and power that emerges out of the dialogue between Marxism and structuralism outlined above, and which registers the ideological character of language. Language is ideological in the sense that it is through language that the struggle to make the world mean takes place and in language that certain meanings of the world become dominant/legitimate and others are rendered marginal/illegitimate. This struggle is never equal because certain groups and classes will always have more of a ‘say’, better access to the institutions (the media for instance) where meaning is secured than others. Nevertheless, the struggle is never one-sided. Language is not ‘uni-accentual’ as Althusser’s work seemed to imply, but ‘multi-accentual’ in Vološinov’s sense of the term (see ‘Multi-accentuality’ box, p. 31).

There were two important consequences of Vološinov's theory for Hall. First, it reintroduced the significance of *struggle* underplayed within Althusser. Second, it contributed to a questioning of essentialist views of class within traditional Marxism, which equated the ruling class with ruling ideas. If a given sign could no longer be said to belong intrinsically to a certain class or social group it followed there could be no guaranteed language in which a particular social group articulated itself. This point was illustrated by Hall in Chapter 1 through the sign of the swastika, which connoted something different within Nazi Germany of the 1940s and British youth styles of the 1970s. It becomes clear in this context that ideology is not rigidly determined in advance, but has 'a specificity and a pertinence of its own' (ROI: 82). In his seminal essay, 'The rediscovery of "ideology"' (1982), Hall notes that 'this lesson had to be learned the hard way' in the late 1970s when the British Conservative leader, Margaret Thatcher (see Chapter 5) came to power. This political event challenged the idea that the working classes were 'forever attached' to socialism and the Labour Party and exposed the 'limitations of a trade-union struggle which pursued economic goals exclusively at the expense of political and ideological dimensions' (ROI: 82).

Hall suggests Thatcher's electoral success has implications for the way in which socialists engage in the struggle between dominant and subordinate groups: 'What mattered was the way in which different social interests or forces might conduct an ideological struggle to disarticulate a signifier from one, preferred or dominant meaning-system and rearticulate it within another' (ROI: 80). Hall's line of argument is significant here for the way in which it recuperates certain culturalist positions in order to move beyond Althusser. Culturalism's privileging of agency, or human *activity*, offers a helpful perspective from which to problematise and extend structuralist logic. However, Hall does not retreat to the earlier culturalist position: he remains convinced that meaning and experience are constructed through signifying practices, while refusing to accept experience is nothing but the sum total of the governing structure of language.

In 'Cultural studies: two paradigms', Hall ultimately reveals how both culturalist and structuralist paradigms are, alone, 'insufficient'.

His conclusion refuses to offer an 'easy synthesis' (CS2P: 36) of the existing two paradigms, rather he proceeds by evoking the work of Antonio Gramsci (see Chapter 1) whose thought belongs to neither the culturalist nor structuralist camps but which shares important affinities with both.

## ARTICULATING THE STRUCTURALISM/ CULTURALISM DIVIDE

While chronologically Gramsci's work comes before Althusser's (Gramsci, in fact, influenced Althusser), their impact on Hall and the Centre tends to be presented in reverse order. In 'Cultural studies: two paradigms' then, the work of Gramsci is ultimately offered as a

### ARTICULATION

A term traditionally associated with Marx, Althusser and Gramsci, and which takes on a special resonance in the work of Stuart Hall. Hall once defined his use of the term as follows:

'articulate' means to utter, to speak forth, to be articulate. It carries that sense of language-ing, of expressing, etc. But we also speak of an 'articulated' lorry (truck): a lorry where the front (cab) and back (trailer) can, but need not necessarily, be connected to one another. The two parts are connected to each other, but through a specific linkage, that can be broken. An articulation is thus the form of the connection that *can* make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions.

(PA: 141)

Articulation implies a structured, but supple, relation between two or more apparently unconnected parts (e.g. the economic and the ideological) and is used frequently by Hall to avoid the reductionism and essentialism associated with deterministic versions of Marx. Hall's use of the term has been influenced by the Argentinian intellectual Ernesto Laclau and his book *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* (1977). Laclau uses articulation to argue that ideology, for instance, has 'no necessary class belongingness'; a phrase adopted repeatedly in Hall's writings.

means of articulating or coupling (rather than resolving) culturalism and structuralism, while exposing the limitations of both.

The founder of the Italian Communist Party, Gramsci was imprisoned by Mussolini's fascist regime in the 1920s. Although he spent the rest of his life behind bars, he continued to write profusely, producing a series of elliptical, enigmatic essays, many of which first appeared in English in 1971 in Hoare and Smith's edited translation, *Selection from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. (While Gramsci's seminal essay 'The modern prince' was first translated in 1957 and had an early impact on Hall, Hoare and Smith's excellent *Selection* prompted a more systematic reading of his work at the CCCS in the 1970s.) Gramsci's ideas in the 'Prison notebooks' are difficult to decipher conclusively, in part because Gramsci had to avoid censorship by the authorities. Nevertheless, one of the things Hall admires about Gramsci's writings are their 'conjunctural' quality, that is, Gramsci's ability to locate his thinking within a particular historical moment or set of conditions. It was Gramsci's preference for a specific, historically grounded account of class struggle *within* ideological formations that allowed the Centre to avoid the abstraction, formalism and ahistoricism of which structuralism is accused. The Gramscian notion of hegemony (see Chapter 1) as an ongoing process of ideological struggle allowed Hall and the CCCS to maintain the crucial culturalist accent on agency, without retreating into a naïve, 'heroic' humanism in which the individual is free of all structural constraint.

The totalising tendencies of Althusser's work on ideology underplayed the possibility of contestation and contradiction that is central to hegemony, with its constant tension between incorporation and resistance. This tension suggests an ongoing negotiation between dominant and subordinate groups, rather than ideology as something that is directly imposed from above. It was through Gramsci that Hall and the Centre were able to address, not just the limitations of Althusser, but of the structuralisms more generally. As we examine Hall's 'structuralist' turn in more detail in the next chapter, we won't find structuralism faithfully reproduced. What is important is how Hall develops structuralism and puts it to use.



## THEORETICAL NOISE AND 1968

As they were outlined by Hall in 'Cultural studies: two paradigms' and 'Cultural studies and the centre', the theoretical developments at the CCCS were not intended to offer an exhaustive account of the work that went on at Birmingham. By no means everybody at the CCCS followed the turn from culturalism to structuralism to Gramsci. Others were more interested in developing theoretical and methodological approaches relating to sociology and ethnography, for example (see CML: 73–116). Hall has since likened these various

### ORGANIC INTELLECTUALS

The term 'organic intellectual' was used by Gramsci in order to mark a distinction from 'traditional intellectuals' as 'an autonomous and independent social group' or class (see his essay 'The intellectuals' in Gramsci (1971)). Organic intellectuals are not detached in this way, and have a vital organising function within the society. As Hall defines it:

the 'organic intellectual' must work on two fronts at one and the same time. On the one hand, we had to be at the forefront of intellectual theoretical work . . . But the second aspect is just as crucial: that the organic intellectual cannot absolve himself or herself from the responsibility of transmitting those ideas, that knowledge . . . to those who do not belong, professionally, in the intellectual class.

(CSTL: 281)

While Hall has said the creation of organic intellectuals was an aspiration rather than an actual achievement of the CCCS, it nevertheless captures the spirit of its work and its alignment of research projects with emergent forces within society (a fact that signals the significance of the word *contemporary* in the CCCS title). The role of the organic intellectual was not, in any crude sense, that of the political activist or revolutionary (Hall has always denied the reduction of the CCCS to this status); intellectual work is a distinctive, specific practice. Nevertheless, organic intellectuals do seek to integrate intellectual practices within what Hall terms a 'wider, non-specialist and non-elitist sense' (CSAC: 46).

critical approaches at the CCCS to 'theoretical noise' (CSTL: 278), an image that suggests a multitude of competing voices in which no single line of argument was ever fully audible or accepted. The notion of theoretical noise also registers the specific, institutional context in which the abstract theories outlined above were played out and practised, reminding us that cultural studies at Birmingham amounted to much more than a linear progression through a series of internally coherent ideas.

Consider, for example, the year 1968, in which Hall took over from Hoggart as director of the CCCS and structuralism began to displace culturalism. This year represented more than a theoretical or institutional turning point at Birmingham. It was also the political moment in which students and workers in Europe and America took to the streets in protests, riots and demonstrations against the Vietnam War. It was a year that signalled a crisis of authority. Hall has stated that the events of 1968 had a major impact on the CCCS: 'from this rupture there emerged new kinds of questions about the "politics of culture" . . . which gave the work of the Centre a new relevance to the emergent contradictions in contemporary advanced societies' (CSAC: 26). The emphasis Hall places here on the relevance of research to contemporary society, underpins one of the central aims of the CCCS under his direction: the creation of 'organic intellectuals'.

Vietnam was the first televised war, and the Centre's research became increasingly concerned with the ideological role of the media at this time (see CML: 119). Media coverage of Vietnam helped question the idea of culture as expressive and the culturalist view of the people as the agents of social change. It emphasised the need to pay greater attention to the wider social and institutional structures through which the experience of the people is constructed (structuralism). Theory was more than an abstract issue at the Centre then. It was conjunctural; articulated in relation to wider historical and political shifts in contemporary society. As one of Hall's colleagues at Birmingham, Michael Green, has noted more generally in terms of the theoretical developments at the CCCS, at stake was more than a move 'from Hoggart to Gramsci, but also from Macmillan to Thatcher' (Green 1982: 77).

The political upheavals of 1968 also impacted on research practice at the CCCS. It was in the anti-authoritarian, anti-establishment climate of the late 1960s that the Birmingham Centre moved away from the traditional pedagogical hierarchies of higher education to establish collective research projects involving both staff and students. The research collectives represented a radical and remarkable attempt to develop a theoretical *practice* within an organisational context. In CSAC, Hall refers to the collectives as both a priority of the Centre and one of its ‘genuinely distinctive’ features:

In general, what has been involved here has been the attempt to make intellectual work more collective in the actual forms of its practising: to constitute research and groups of projects and studies around working collectives rather than serial groups of projects and intellectuals, carrying their very own thesis topics like batons in their knapsacks.

(CSAC: 44)

The Centre’s research groups worked across a wide range of areas, including popular culture, work, language, literature and the media. These were joined (and in some cases displaced) in the late 1970s, by collectives working on feminism and race. For example, in Autumn 1978 a new research collective known as the ‘Race and politics group’ was formed, drawing together those who would become key thinkers in the field such as Paul Gilroy, Hazel Carby, Pratibha Parmar, John Solomos and Errol Lawrence. Their highly influential text, *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain* (CCCS 1982), develops some of the key issues first put on the agenda by Hall *et al.* in the 1970s, including the relationship between race and class; the construction of black criminality, policing and authoritarianism. (For an exemplary extension of these CCCS debates, see also Paul Gilroy’s *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack* (1987).)

Clearly, then, there was never a single unified discipline called ‘cultural studies’ at the Centre, but a variety of different, often discrepant research projects and collectives. Hall has been the first to challenge the romantic idea of collective research as a harmonious or idyllic activity. Even as the collectives worked to democratise knowledge, he has pointed to the inevitable persistence of ‘hierarchies of

knowledge' (CSAC: 45). More recently, he has referred to the arguments, 'unstable anxieties and angry silences' (CSTL: 278) that were all part of the theoretical noise at the CCCS. The eruption of feminism onto the agenda of the CCCS in the late 1970s was a source of particular tension, placing Hall in an untenable position as both a feminist and a symbol of male authority (as the CCCS's director):

I was for it [feminism]. So being targeted as 'the enemy', as the senior patriarchal figure, placed me in an impossibly contradictory position. Of course, they had to do it. They were absolutely right to do it. They had to shut me up . . .

(FDI: 500)

It was the 'impossibility' of his position in this context that ultimately contributed to Hall's departure from the CCCS in 1979.

## HALL, THEORY AND PRACTICE

So far this chapter has considered Hall's main theoretical encounters during his time at the CCCS. But what do these encounters tell us about Hall himself as a theorist and thinker? This chapter closes by trying to identify the main characteristics of Hall's theoretical practice.

It has been said of Stuart Hall that 'he can hardly be classed as an original theorist' (Rojek 2003: 1). This would appear a fairly derisory assessment, not to mention one that is theoretically suspect given Hall's own questioning of origins and originality above. Nevertheless, it paradoxically offers a means of considering what is more positively 'un-original' about his theoretical approach. Stuart Hall is, to adapt one of the terms he uses in the analysis of youth subcultures, a *bricoleur* (see Chapter 4). Theorising, for Hall, typically involves borrowing materials from elsewhere and putting them to new or alternative uses. This is not an imitative or derivative gesture: such borrowings are never faithful to the original. In Hall's view 'the only theory worth having is that which you have to fight off, not that which you speak with profound fluency' (CSTL: 280). What is being outlined here is not a form of theoretical one-upmanship involving what Hall calls 'the trendy

recycling of one fashionable theorist after another, as if you can wear new theories like t-shirts' (PA: 149). It is less about ditching older theories in favour of more modish ones, than it is (to adapt another of Hall's key theoretical concepts), an attempt to *articulate* those theories.

Articulation, as a theoretical practice in Hall's writing, involves linking two or more different theoretical frameworks in order to move beyond the limits of either framework on its own. For example, at the centre of this chapter has been a discussion of Hall's displacement of the early theoretical assumptions of 'culturalism' through an encounter with the more recent 'structuralisms'. Within Hall's writings this displacement does not involve rejecting the former in order to proceed to the latter, but a coupling or articulation of the two in order to propose an alternative theoretical direction. This process of linkage is not fixed or final. (As we will see in later chapters, Hall moves away from the culturalism–structuralism bind.) Articulations can only be made under a specific set of circumstances or, to adapt one final theoretical concept used by Hall, at a particular historical *conjuncture*. Hall's theorising is conjunctural in the sense that it is always informed by and articulated as a response to, events at a particular moment.

Viewed together here the terms *bricoleur*, articulation and conjuncture are not just key concepts within Hall's theory, they also offer a means of thinking that theory *as practice*. According to Hall, theory is only useful when it has a practical purpose, when it is practised: 'I am not interested in Theory, I am interested in going on theorizing' (PA: 150). This distinction between 'Theory' (note the capital letter) and the verb 'theorizing' is crucial to an understanding of the spirit of Hall's work. Hall is not interested in a static, monolithic object of study called 'Theory'. He is interested in theory as intervention, as action. 'Theory', he has stated, 'is always a detour to something more interesting' (OAN: p. 42).

This chapter also aims to provide a detour or route to the more immediate contexts at which Hall practises theory, in terms of the media, subcultures, or race and ethnicity, for example. This detour should not be mistaken for a diversion, an attempt to get the theory out of the way before moving onto something more relevant. Theory for Hall is less a 'retreat into private languages' than it is an attempt

to 'bend language' in order to question 'common-sense knowledge' (CSAC: 46). Where a common-sense view of theory would regard it as an abstraction from the real, Hall sees theory as providing a language through which to challenge (common-sense) assumptions about the real. In short, theory is necessary to practice rather than a diversion from it.

Just as there can be no practical or useful understanding of culture without theory for Hall, there can be no theory of culture without practice. Theory is not something that is useful in itself, it does not produce 'its own internal validation' (CP: 26). While this chapter has focused on a *theoretical* turn from culturalism to structuralism within the CCCS, this shift was not validated by the theories themselves, but by wider social developments at the close of the 1960s. Moreover, the collaborative nature of research at the CCCS suggests any isolated account of Hall's 'key ideas' would not just be misleading, but forgetful of the very spirit in which that research was produced and practised. It would be to simply recycle Stuart Hall as the next new theorist on the fashionable t-shirt ('fcuk hall?').

## SUMMARY

This chapter has offered a key institutional (the CCCS) and intellectual (cultural studies at Birmingham) framework within which to contextualise Hall's thinking, *through* Hall's thinking within two essays. It has considered the 'beginnings' of cultural studies at Birmingham and the pre-history of the CCCS. It has traced the debates that the Centre both inherited and departed from as it shifted between a 'culturalist' and a 'structuralist' conception of culture. Finally, it has considered Hall's attempt to move beyond the so-called culturalist/structuralist divide by means of his critical engagement with Marxism and Gramsci in the 1970s.

In the second half of the chapter, these abstract theoretical developments were located within the institutional context of the CCCS and the historical context of 1968. The chapter closed with a consideration of theoretical practice, both collectively in terms of the Centre and then in terms of Hall's own approach to theorising.



## ENCODING/ DECODING

Arguably the single most widely circulated and debated of all Hall's papers, 'Encoding/decoding' (1973/1980) had a major impact on the direction of cultural studies in the 1970s and 1980s and its central terms remain keywords in the field. The essay is conventionally viewed as marking a turning point in Hall's and the CCCS's research, towards structuralism (see Chapter 2), allowing us to reflect on some of the main theoretical developments at Birmingham. Focusing on the communication processes at stake in televisual discourse, the essay challenges some of the most cherished views of how media messages are produced, circulated and consumed in order to propose a new theory of communication. Basically, where traditionally the meaning of the media message was viewed as static, transparent and unchanging throughout the communication process, Hall argues that the message sent is seldom (if ever) the one received and that communication is *systematically* distorted.

### **SENDER, MESSAGE, RECEIVER**

'Encoding/decoding' arises primarily from Hall's reservations about the theories of communication underpinning mass communications research.



## MASS COMMUNICATIONS RESEARCH

A body of research that became prevalent in the US after the Second World War and which was particularly influential in mainstream British sociology of the 1950s and 1960s. While sociology was an important influence within early British cultural studies, the CCCS could not reconcile its own research with the scientific models of American mass communications theory. Its concern was with the 'effects' of the media on society, which it measured through empirical studies (that is studies based on observation rather than theory) of individual behaviour. Mass communications research grew out of, and displaced, earlier work on the media by the Frankfurt School, a group of German Marxist intellectuals (including Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin and Max Horkheimer) who had migrated to America before the war and who saw the effects of the media in broadly negative terms.

Mass communications research (much of which was funded, tellingly, by commercial bodies wanting to know how to influence audiences more effectively through advertising) was much more upbeat and positivistic in its view of the media. It worked on the assumption that the media offered an unproblematic, benign reflection of society. Because America was a plural society, home to a diversity of cultural groups, it followed that this was reflected and reinforced through the media. The so-called 'pluralism' of the media was used in this context to herald the 'end of ideology' in democratic societies like America.

What was presented within mass communications research as unproblematically 'scientific' was exposed by Hall and the CCCS as profoundly ideological. 'Pluralism' is a culturally specific (ideological) value, as Hall notes with an acute sense of irony when he states that through mass communications research 'the American Dream had been empirically verified' (ROI: 61). 'Encoding/decoding' was primarily intended as a critique of mass communications research and its empirical claims.

'Encoding/decoding' opens with an account of the conventional model of communication to be found within mass communications research. This model moves in a linear fashion from the 'sender' through the 'message' to the 'receiver'. According to this model, the sender creates the message and fixes its meaning, which is then communicated directly and transparently to the recipient. For Hall, this communication process is too neat: 'the only distortion in it is that the receiver might not be up to the business of getting the message he or she ought to get' (RED: 253). As we will see, Hall is especially interested in the way different audiences generate rather than discover meaning.

Hall's essay challenges all three components of the mass communications model, arguing that (i) meaning is not simply fixed or determined by the sender; (ii) the message is never transparent; and (iii) the audience is not a passive recipient of meaning. Just because a documentary on asylum seekers aims to provide a sympathetic account of their plight, does not guarantee its audience will view them sympathetically. For all its 'realism' and emphasis on 'the facts', the documentary form still has to communicate through a sign system (the aural-visual signs of tv) that both distorts the intentions of producers and evokes contradictory feelings in the audience. Distortion is built into the system here, rather than being a 'failure' of the producer or viewer. There is a 'lack of fit' Hall suggests 'between the two sides in the communicative exchange' (E/D: 131), between the moment of the production of the message ('encoding') and the moment of its reception ('decoding').

This 'lack of fit' is crucial to Hall's argument. It occurs because communication has no choice but to take place within sign systems. The moments of encoding and decoding are also the points, respectively, of entrance into and exit from the systems of discourse. As we saw in Chapter 1, language does not reflect the real, but constructs or 'distorts' it on our behalf. So even at a very basic level, 'visual discourse translates a three-dimensional world into two-dimensional planes, it cannot, of course *be* the referent or concept it signifies. The dog in the film can bark but it cannot bite!' (E/D: 131).

While 'the discursive form of the message has a privileged position in the communicative exchange', communication is about more

## DISCOURSE AND THE REFERENT

The terms 'discourse' and 'the referent' in the quotation on p. 59 share an important relationship in Hall's work. 'Discourse' is a concept he borrows from the French intellectual, Michel Foucault (1926–84). Where Saussure and Barthes were interested in relatively small, isolated units of representation (language/sign systems) Foucault was interested in larger systems of representation (discourse); a whole cluster of narratives, statements and/or images on a particular subject that acquire authority and become dominant at a particular historical moment. As the emphasis on dominance and history here might suggest, 'discourse' appealed to Hall because it provided a more historically specific, politicised conception of representation than structuralism (which confined itself to the production of meaning) in terms of the production of knowledge and power.

Below (see pp. 62–4 and 68–70) we will consider '9/11' as a televisual discourse, that is, a body of representations (e.g. film footage, statements by authority figures, photographs, eye-witness accounts, reconstructions) depicting a particular historical event in the early twenty-first century. Like Foucault, Hall is interested in how discourse works to govern and empower certain understandings of a subject, while ruling out or delegitimising others. For Hall, it is important to note that Foucault is not saying there is no actual physical world outside discourse but, rather, that the real world only acquires meaning through discourse. The event '9/11' *did* happen; it was more than the sum of representations mobilised to describe it, however, as we will see, the event's *meaning* was discursively produced. Hall offers a more everyday example in his summary of an extract from Laclau and Mouffe: 'The round leather object which you kick is a physical object – a ball. But it only becomes a "football" within the context of the [discursive] rules of the game, which are socially constructed' (R: 45).

As Hall uses the term, discourse does not entail a forgetting of 'the referent', the physical world outside language that signs *refer* us to (the ball you kick; the dog that bites). Hall has been critical of Saussurean structuralism because: (i) it neglects the material world outside language; (ii) it views language at a particular moment (synchronically) and therefore ignores its historical (diachronic) dimension; and (iii) its 'formalism', along with its tendency towards 'abstraction' and high theory risks a retreat from politics.

than language and discourse for Hall, and structuralism, in isolation, does not satisfactorily explain the lack of fit between the moments of encoding and decoding for him. Hall is ultimately more interested in the *political* than the linguistic implications of media messages, a fact he foregrounds in the 1973 version of 'Encoding/decoding':

though I shall adopt a semiotic perspective, I do not regard this as indexing a closed formal concern with the immanent organisation of the television discourse alone. It must also include a concern with the 'social relations' of the communicative process.

(E/D73: 1)

Hall's concern with the social and political dimensions of communication is apparent from the very beginning of his essay, which proposes an alternative to the 'sender-message-receiver' model of communication based on Marx's theory of commodity production. This model comprises a number of what Hall terms 'moments' (such as circulation and distribution) but is primarily concerned with the points of production/encoding and consumption/decoding. Hall's appropriation of a Marxist vocabulary allows him to replace the linearity of traditional models of communication with a *circuit*. In this circuit the 'sender' has become a 'producer' and the 'receiver' a 'consumer'. Where to 'receive' has passive connotations in mass communications research, marking the end of the communication process, to consume is an *active* process leading to the production, or '*reproduction*' of meaning. Here Hall distances himself from the behavioural science of mass communications theory (where the viewer's response is 'like a tap on the knee cap' (E/D: 131), an instinctive reaction), from the language-centred abstractions of structuralism, and from the expressive view of culture in culturalism. Where the 'receiver' represented the end of the line in mass communications research, for Hall 'consumption determines production just as production determines consumption' (RED: 255). What is being proposed here is an *articulated* (see 'Articulation' box, p. 48) model of communication in which meaning does not reside at, nor can be guaranteed by, any particular moment of the circuit. The processes of production, circulation, and so on, may be both determined and

*determining* in relation to the other moments with which they are linked: 'no one moment can fully guarantee the next moment with which it is articulated . . . each has its specific modality and conditions of existence' (E/D: 128–9). Adopting an Althusserian vocabulary within this context, Hall suggests encoding and decoding are *over-determined*, *relatively autonomous* moments.

## OVER-DETERMINATION

A Freudian concept Althusser used to great effect in 'Contradiction and over-determination', an essay in *For Marx*. By over-determination, Althusser means there are a number of determining forces, not just the economic, but the ideological and the political. Althusser's notion of 'over-determination' implies a number of linked or *articulated* determinations. This breaks with the mechanistic move from base to superstructure associated with 'deterministic' versions of Marx.

## RELATIVE AUTONOMY

A term that proved especially influential in the work of Hall and the CCCS. 'Relative autonomy' implies that ideology has a degree of freedom from the economic. Determination is present in this model, but only in the 'last instance'. Althusser argues that while the economic always determines the superstructure in some way, it is not necessarily dominant.

In order to illustrate these abstract theories of articulation, this chapter will consider in more detail the specific moments of encoding and decoding, using media coverage of '9/11' as an example.

When the images of two aeroplanes crashing into the World Trade Center were transmitted to a global audience on 11 September 2001, the meaning of the event seemed abundantly clear to all. North America had become the tragic victim of a terrorist attack. The sense of tragedy surrounding the event was highlighted in media coverage showing the traumatised reaction of audiences in Europe and America as they received the news. However, and in stark contrast to these scenes of mourning, the media also screened footage of people in

Palestine apparently celebrating the news. Such opposing reactions by different audiences to media coverage of the same event, suggested the collapse of the twin towers had no single meaning. Among other things, 'Encoding/decoding' sheds light on why divergent readings of the same media event occur by exploring the ideological role of the media and the extent to which it governs meanings and gives rise to alternative ones.

## ENCODING

Camera crews were present at the World Trade Center in New York some fifteen minutes after the first plane hit the North Tower. The second strike and its aftermath were broadcast live on television giving the event a certain immediacy as it unfolded before our eyes. Nevertheless, the meanings '9/11' generated did not spontaneously flow from that moment of encoding in isolation. The coverage was also overdetermined by the larger circuit of communication within which it was articulated. For instance, despite its chaotic, unprecedented feel, the production of '9/11' drew upon the pre-existing routines and rules set in place by what Hall calls 'institutional structures of broadcasting'. These included, as one commentator notes

contacting institutions to obtain access to relevant sites and persons, interviewing, attending press conferences, and using certain kinds of documentary sources. The contingencies of the news format – meeting deadlines and obtaining 'facts,' pictures and quotations from specific categories of people (eyewitnesses, authority figures) . . .

(Karim 2002: 102)

In addition to these material structures, the encoding of '9/11' was shaped by journalistic discourses on 'violence, terrorism, and Islam' that had been circulating in the West for 'the last three decades' (E/D: 102).

Within this context it is possible to make sense of Hall's point that encoding is the point of entry into the discursive realm of communication, as well as a 'moment' constructed by the material context of production in which it occurs. For Hall encoding is the

crucial moment at which ‘the institutional-societal relations of production must pass under the discursive rules of language . . .’ (E/D: 130):

A raw historical event cannot, *in that form*, be transmitted by, say, a television newscast. Events can only be signified within the aural-visual forms of the televisual discourse. In the moment when a historical event passes under the sign of discourse, it is subject to all the complex formal ‘rules’ by which language signifies. To put it paradoxically, the event must become a ‘story’ before it can become a *communicative event*.

(Karim 2002: 129)

The news cannot be given to us in the form of a pure or ‘raw’ event, but is subject to the ‘formal rules’ (Saussure’s *langue*) of the governing system of language. While clearly television news is not literally ‘language’, the fact that it is a highly coded, or ‘conventional’ discourse makes the analogy a productive one. Desks, formal dress codes and postures, for instance are all ‘signs’ within television news used to convey or ‘signify’ values such as ‘authority’, ‘trustworthiness’, ‘seriousness’ and ‘objectivity’. Similarly, the individual news ‘item’ does not provide a window onto the actual historical event, but must *transform* it into a ‘story’. Disasters, scandals and murders cannot appear ‘in that form’, but must be produced discursively, that is *encoded* (placed within a set of codes or system of signs), before they can ‘mean’ or signify. For all its apparent immediacy, what viewers of the ‘9/11’ coverage saw that day was not the unreconstructed event, but an ‘aural-visual’ *discourse*: the selective combination of carefully edited amateur video, eyewitness accounts and reporters’ narratives in order to produce a ‘story’.

## DECODING

In order for the encoded ‘message form’ to generate meaning and ‘have an “effect”’ (E/D: 130) it must be decoded by the viewer. Hall suggests that televisual discourse does not contain an intrinsic meaning embedded there by its producer (although as we have seen the production/encoding process works to secure and determine its meaning

in important ways). Rather, it is the act of viewing that releases its signifying potential. It is at the moment of decoding, then, that the television message acquires 'social use or political effectivity' (E/D: 130).

For Hall, decoding is the most significant, but most neglected aspect of the communication process. He suggests this neglect is due to the fact that televisual discourses use 'iconic' signs.

## ICONIC SIGNS

American philosopher Charles Peirce (whose *Speculative Grammar* (1931) is cited in 'Encoding/decoding') made a distinction between 'indexical', 'symbolic' and 'iconic' signs that became influential within semiotics. An 'iconic sign' is a visual sign that closely resembles the object it refers to (the referent), such as a photograph.

Iconic signs tend to resist conscious decoding, according to Hall, because they reproduce the codes of perception used by the viewer:

This leads us to think the visual sign for 'cow' actually *is* (rather than *represents*) the animal, cow. But if we think of the visual representation of a cow in a manual on animal husbandry – and, even more, of the linguistic sign 'cow' – we can see that both, in different degrees, are *arbitrary* with respect to the concept of the animal they represent. The articulation of an arbitrary sign – whether visual or verbal – with the concept of a referent is the product not of nature but of convention . . .

(E/D: 132)

Following Saussure, Hall highlights the arbitrary nature of the sign, the fact that though the relation between signifier and signified and between visual signs and 'things' seems natural, it is, in fact, conventional.

Hall goes on to associate the confusion of the culturally constructed sign with a naturally given or universal referent with the confusion in linguistic theory between 'denotation' and 'connotation'.

While noting that the distinction between 'denotation' and connotation is false (in reality *all* signs are connotative, no matter how 'literal' they seem) Hall suggests the distinction does have analytical



## DENOTATION AND CONNOTATION

In the final chapter of *Mythologies*, 'Myth today', and in *Elements of Semiology*, Barthes elaborates on the terms 'connotation' (a sign's associated meanings) and 'denotation' (a sign's literal meanings). At the denotative level there is a general agreement about the meaning of a sign. At the connotative level however, the 'language' of its advertising reveals associations that are marked by class and by ideology and which we may either agree or disagree with (see 'Semiotics' box, p. 43). It is for this reason that ideology operates mainly at the level of connotation for Barthes.

value. Where at the denotative level, ideological meaning *appears* relatively fixed, the connotative level is a significant site of ideological intervention and contestation because its 'fluidity of meaning and association can be more fully exploited and transformed' (E/D: 133). Hall announces at this point that language is 'multi-accentual' (see 'Multi-accentuality' box, p. 31): 'the sign is open to new accentuations and . . . enters fully into the struggle over meaning – the class struggle in language' (E/D: 133). Multi-accentuality has important implications for decoding because if we accept Vološinov's theory then the 'reception' of the television message is likely to be more contested than it first appeared. Audiences can no longer be seen as passively absorbing the fixed meanings planted there by the producer, 'decoding' must necessarily involve a struggle over meaning which is dependent upon the social position of the viewer. In this context the 'already constituted sign' of the producer is 'potentially transformable into more than one connotative configuration' (E/D: 134) by the consumer.

Hall is concerned here with what he calls the 'polysemic values' of the televisual sign: its ability to signify more than one thing, to carry a variety of potentially conflicting meanings. Meaning is multiple rather than singular: the 'work' of the audience is not to discover a true, core meaning which has been embedded at the heart of the message, rather the audience generates meaning with a degree of 'relative autonomy'. This is why Hall's consumer is also a producer.

What Hall is not saying here is that the television message can mean anything we want it to mean. Moreover, the finite number of

meanings the televisual message is capable of generating are ‘*not* equal among themselves’ (E/D: 134) and therefore it would be a mistake, Hall insists, to confuse polysemy with ‘pluralism’ (which implies free, democratic choice). Society constructs a ‘dominant cultural order’ (E/D: 134) that generates what Hall terms ‘preferred meanings’.

## PREFERRED MEANINGS

Hall’s notion of dominant or ‘preferred meaning’ allows him to address the *political* implications of polysemic signs, which have ‘written in’ (E/D: 134) to them, a variety of ‘social meanings, practices,

### COMMON-SENSE

A term used by Gramsci to refer to the supposedly ‘spontaneous’ assumptions and beliefs of different social groups. Where a *common-sense* view of ‘common-sense’ might regard it as a positive attribute, Gramsci suggests it is a mode of conformist thinking, signalling consent to the dominant order. It must therefore be questioned and replaced with ‘good sense’. To suggest something is common-sense is to place it beyond question (‘this is how things are’), to present that which is cultural and specific as natural and universal. Common-sense then clearly performs an important ideological role in relation to the maintenance of *hegemony*, as Hall notes:

It is precisely its [common-sense’s] ‘spontaneous’ quality, its transparency, its ‘naturalness’, its refusal to be made to examine the premises on which it is founded, its resistance to change or correction, its effect of instant recognition . . . [that] . . . makes common-sense, at one and the same time, ‘spontaneous’, ideological and *unconscious*.

(CMIE: 325)

In ‘Encoding/decoding’, Hall suggests media messages accrue a common-sense status in part through their *performative* nature. Through the repeated performance, staging or telling of the narrative of ‘9/11’ (and others like it within the media) a culturally specific reading is rendered not simply plausible and universal, but common-sense.

and usages, power and interest' (E/D: 134). Preferred meanings rely upon 'common-sense' or 'taken-for-grantedness' and reflect the 'dominant cultural order', which imposes and validates 'its classification of the social and cultural and political world' (E/D:134).

Meaning and interpretation are organised hierarchically for Hall: dominant meanings and readings will, therefore, reflect the dominant cultural order at an institutional, political and ideological level. Television news coverage of '9/11' worked to secure a dominant or preferred meaning of the event as a 'terrorist' attack on the 'civilised' world. 'Terrorism' and 'civilisation' were encoded and (presumably frequently) decoded as common-sense terms within these discourses. Nevertheless, they are clearly not value-free or 'innocent' labels and carry the ideological imprint of the dominant cultural order in the West. Alternative, if subordinate, accounts of '9/11' did appear in which America's less than 'civilised' foreign policy was cited in relation to the attack. Here, the US was interpellated as 'terrorist' and the 'terrorists' as freedom fighters or anti-imperialists.

The ideological struggle over signifiers such as 'terrorist' reveals, as Hall puts it, that 'preferred meanings' are neither 'univocal nor uncontested' (E/D: 134):

In speaking of *dominant meanings* then, we are not talking about a one-sided process which governs how all events will be signified. It consists of the 'work' required to enforce, win plausibility for and command as legitimate a *decoding* of the event within the limit of dominant definitions in which it has been connotatively signified.

(E/D: 135)

Following Gramsci, Hall suggests here that culture and ideology are not external structures imposed upon us from above in a one-sided fashion, but sites of constant struggle and negotiation within which we are caught. If in the West the 'preferred' meaning and reading of '9/11' was of a 'tragic' event, it was a 'signified' that was not set in stone or uncontested. The news images of Palestinians apparently celebrating the collapse of the twin towers powerfully exposed that 'tragedy' was not an intrinsic or fixed meaning of the event. The twin towers emerged as polysemic, or multi-accentual signs following

'9/11', connoting, on the one hand, advanced democratic civilisation and, on the other, oppressive neocolonial capitalism.

For Hall, 'preferred meanings' are always contested and open to transformation in this way. The term ultimately reveals encoding and decoding as 'an asymmetrical and non-equivalent process' in which 'the former can attempt to "pre-fer" but cannot prescribe or guarantee the latter, which has its own conditions of existence' (E/D: 135). What is more, the lack of 'fit', or 'necessary correspondence' (E/D: 135) between the moments of encoding and decoding has little, if anything, to do with personal or individual 'misunderstanding' (although Hall concedes literal misunderstandings do occur) and everything to do with 'systematically distorted communication'.

Partly in order to 'deconstruct the common-sense meaning of "misunderstanding"', Hall closes his essay by outlining three hypothetical positions from which decodings might be made. These positions were developed from Frank Parkin's *Class Inequality and Social Order* (1971), but avoid the economic determinism of Parkin's work.

- 1 *The dominant-hegemonic position*: where the viewer decodes the message in terms of the codes legitimated by the encoding process and the dominant cultural order. This would be an example of 'perfectly transparent' communication: the viewer who watches dominant European or American news coverage of '9/11' and draws the common-sense conclusion that the event is nothing more than a terrorist attack on the 'civilised world'.
- 2 *The negotiated position*: a contradictory position where the viewer has the potential to adopt *and* oppose the dominant televisual codes. 'It accords the privileged position to the dominant definitions of events while reserving a right to make a more negotiated application to "local conditions"' (E/D: 137). Hall gives the example of a worker's response to reports of a pay freeze. The worker may agree such a freeze is in the national interest and therefore adopt the dominant-hegemonic position. However, this may have little bearing on her decision to strike at shop-floor or union level. Alternatively, this would be the British Muslim viewer who responds to news of '9/11' by condemning the 'terrorist attack' on America, while protesting against the

construction of Islam as 'uncivilised' and the subsequent racial abuse directed at Western Muslims.

- 3 *The oppositional position*: 'One of the most significant political moments' (E/D: 138) for Hall, where the viewer recognises the dominant televisual codes and opposes them. Continuing his example from above, Hall imagines the viewer who hears reports of the wage freeze but decodes every reference to 'national interest' as 'class interest'. Alternatively, in terms of the '9/11' example, recent news reports have suggested that British Muslims believe the so-called 'war against terrorism' led by the Bush administration is a 'war against Islam'. This is an actual instance of oppositional reading.

The three different positions outlined above are best understood as part of a continuum across which viewers move, rather than separate, static points of view that the audience take up or reject once and for all. So Hall speaks of the 'oppositional position' as the moment 'when events which are normally signified and decoded in a negotiated way begin to be given an oppositional reading' (E/D: 138). Just because an audience sympathises with a public sector strike in its opening week does not guarantee support the week after.

Another point to make about Hall's positions is that they don't refer to the 'personal' (mis)readings of isolated viewers. For Hall, they are ideological positions concerning particular social *groups*. The examples used by Hall to illustrate his model indicate that he is thinking in Marxist/class terms ('the workers'). However, Hall is clear that these positions can never be simply reduced to class: as the '9/11' example suggests, social groups might be defined in terms of religion, ethnicity as well as age, sexuality, and so on.

Finally, it should be noted that Hall's positions are *hypothetical*, they are not intended as prescriptive templates for studies of actual audiences. Hall has been the first to point out in this context, that they 'need to be empirically tested and refined' (E/D: 136). The most influential of these 'tests' and 'refinements' have been carried out by one of Hall's former students, David Morley (see Morley 1980, 1986 and 1992). Morley's research emerged from a media group project at the CCCS (1975–7) on the British television show *Nation-*

*wide*, a popular early evening magazine programme broadcast by the BBC. Morley tested the hypothesis of dominant, negotiated and oppositional readings by screening an episode of the show to different audiences grouped in terms of class, occupation, race, and so on. This 'ethnographic' approach revealed that audience responses are highly contradictory and are not rigidly determined by class or social position.

However, Morley has questioned readings of this work which locate it as a critique of Hall's, or at the moment when the encoding/decoding model begins to 'break down'. (Morley is primarily concerned with limitations of Parkin, not Hall.) Here, Morley is keen to distinguish his work from cultural studies critics like John Fiske and John Hartley (1978) who suggest that decodings float free of determining factors such as class. Nevertheless, his work does demonstrate convincingly that class (or other factors such as race and gender) do not directly determine audience responses: there is no guarantee that a working-class audience will produce oppositional readings of a party political broadcast by the Conservative Party, for instance.

## **BETWEEN CULTURALISM AND STRUCTURALISM**

It was noted in the introduction to this chapter that 'Encoding/decoding' is conventionally seen as marking a turn from culturalism to structuralism. This gives us the opportunity to consider both how Hall *put into practice* the theoretical positions outlined in Chapter 2 and to reflect upon the location of his work in relation to the so-called 'culturalism/structuralism divide'. Certainly, Hall's paper is theoretically sophisticated and self-conscious in a way that distinguishes it from the pre-CCCS work of *The Popular Arts* (see Chapter 2) and the culturalist perspectives of Hoggart, Thompson and Williams. Structuralism and semiotics provide Hall with a more convincing and more radical vocabulary with which to consider media discourse in 'Encoding/decoding'. It allows him to argue, for instance, that the 'language' of televisual communication constitutes rather than reflects the world and therefore 'systematically distorts' what appears to be 'perfectly transparent'.

However, if Hall's essay signals a turn away from a traditionally anti-theoretical culturalism, it remains suspicious of theory with a capital 'T'. On the one hand, Hall adopts a structuralist perspective while stressing that his is not a closed formal concern with signs. Moreover, Hall's privileging of the moment of decoding and his emphasis on the audience's active role in the production of meaning signals his culturalist faith in human agency.

'Encoding/decoding' practises what is preached in 'Cultural studies: two paradigms' (see Chapter 2) in that it exposes the inadequacy of either paradigm on its own. The structuralist suggestion that language/discourse is a self-generating machine is drawn into question by the notion of negotiated and oppositional readings. Meanwhile, the 'naïve humanism' of culturalism is avoided through Hall's insistence that 'experience' itself is constituted through language, that such readings are part of a 'struggle in discourse' (E/D: 138).

The emphasis on 'struggle' here is central to Hall's essay and ultimately signals the impact of Gramsci. The concepts of 'hegemony' and 'common-sense' allow Hall to move beyond the binaristic stranglehold: *either* culturalism *or* structuralism. 'Encoding/decoding' argues that televisual discourse plays a key ideological role in reproducing and securing, by *consent* rather than force, the values and meanings of the dominant cultural order. However, these dominant or preferred meanings are always open to *contestation* and transformation as they are made to signify otherwise. The media do not express ideology in this context, rather the media becomes a site of ideological struggle. These theoretical observations provide the seeds for Hall's most elaborated account of media practices in *Resistance through Rituals* and *Policing the Crisis*, the focus of the next chapter.

## SUMMARY

Hall published a number of influential structuralist accounts of the media during his time at the CCCS on everything from the semiotics of newspaper photography (1972a), and the construction of 'deviance' in the media (1974) to accounts of British postwar photo-news magazine, *Picture Post* (1972a) and the television documentary programme, *Panorama* (1976). However, it was 'Encoding/decoding' that had the greatest impact on subsequent cultural studies research. The key ideas of Hall's essay might be summarised as follows:

- 1 The media message is systematically distorted by both the signifying frameworks through which it operates and the social relations between, for example, producer and consumer.
- 2 The moments of encoding (production) and decoding (reception) are privileged (though relatively autonomous, overdetermined) moments within the life of the media message, the points at which meaning is both produced and reproduced.
- 3 While the media message always works to 'prefer' certain meanings and readings in line with the dominant cultural order, it is not uni-accentual and is, therefore, capable of generating a range of alternative meanings.
- 4 Hall illustrates the multi-accentual character of the media message with reference to three hypothetical reading positions: the dominant-hegemonic position, the negotiated position and the oppositional position.





## RACISM AND RESISTANCE

After leaving the pub on 5 November 1972 an Irish labourer, Robert Keenan, set off home through the streets of Handsworth, an area of concentrated Asian and African-Caribbean settlement in inner-city Birmingham. On his way, Mr Keenan was stopped by three youths of mixed ethnic background aged between 15 and 16. He was dragged to a piece of nearby wasteland, beaten repeatedly and robbed of 30 pence, a set of keys and some cigarettes. The boys responsible were later arrested and given a combined custodial sentence of 40 years. The ‘mugging’, as the press subsequently referred to it, attracted widespread local and national media attention. It also attracted the attention of Stuart Hall and the CCCS.

Two of the most influential collaborative projects published during Hall’s time as director of the Birmingham Centre – *Resistance through Rituals* (1976) and *Policing the Crisis* (1978) – were shaped by this event. While on the surface, *Resistance* and *Policing* are very different texts – the former is ostensibly a study of white youth subcultures, the latter an investigation into the crisis concerning mugging – there are good reasons for viewing them together below. Both books emerge out of the same project (the mugging project was initiated part way through the subcultures project and was the biggest single influence on *Resistance* (RTR: 6)). Moreover, *Resistance* and *Policing*

represent different responses to a number of shared cultural and economic conditions and concerns that had become prevalent in 1970s Britain. Crudely put, both texts investigate the reasons behind the rise of *moral panics* in the seventies. These panics resulted in the construction of scapegoats or *folk-devils*, which were primarily associated with youth subcultures (*Resistance*) and black immigrant settlers (*Policing*). *Resistance* and *Policing* both argue that such panics had little to do with the actual activities of black Britons and white youth, but were in fact *displacements* of a deeper set of problems and anxieties within contemporary Britain. These anxieties are situated in both *Resistance* and *Policing* in terms of a specific reading of postwar Britain and the shift from a postwar culture of *consensus* and consent, to one of social and economic *crisis* and authoritarian coercion. Finally, both texts consider the significance of subculture and mugging as potential forms of *resistance* for white and black cultures themselves.

Moral panics, folk-devils, displacement, the shift from consensus to crisis, resistance: respectively, these will be the main subjects of this chapter. As such a list suggests, while *Resistance* and *Policing* were both informed by the Handsworth case, the subject of these projects was much broader than that single event.

*Policing the Crisis* focuses on the 13-month period between August 1972 and August 1973, the point of peak anxiety over mugging. During this period the Handsworth case was just one of sixty separate incidents covered by the media when muggings reportedly increased by 129 per cent. This statistic alone would appear to justify the escalating panics of the period and the call for tougher sentences it prompted. However, *Policing* reveals that not only did the statistic have no empirical basis (there was no such legal category as mugging, therefore mugging rates were impossible to measure), but that crime figures were falling rather than rising in the run-up to the mugging panic and that sentences had become longer, not more lenient. Given that the response to mugging was ‘*out of all proportion to actual threat offered*’ (PTC: 16) Hall *et al.* ask the question, what was all the panic about?

Hall *et al.* employ the term ‘moral panic’ in both *Resistance* and *Policing* in order to consider how race, youth and crime became such potent metaphors of wider social anxiety in postwar Britain.

## MORAL PANICS

The emergence of a number of distinctive youth subcultures in the postwar years – the teddy boys of the 1950s, the mods and rockers of the early 1960s, the punks, skinheads and rastas of the late 1960s and 1970s – prompted a strong social and moral backlash. They were associated with the decline of traditional family values and the rise of juvenile delinquency, permissiveness and crime. Youth subcultures were identified by those in authority – parents, teachers, the press, courts, the police – as responsible for the breakdown of society; they became scapegoats for a wider set of social problems. In a famous study of mods and rockers, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1972), the British sociologist Stanley Cohen used the term ‘moral panic’ to describe this social reaction. His definition of the term remains the definitive one:

A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests . . . Sometimes the panic is passed over and forgotten . . . at other times it has more serious and long-lasting repercussions and might produce such changes as those in legal and social policy or even in the way society conceives itself. (Cohen 2003: 1).

In recent years, moral panics have been generated in relation to the rave scene and drug consumption, the AIDS epidemic, genetic experimentation and asylum seekers. Cohen's book was just one of a broader set of theories of deviance upon which Hall *et al.* drew in *Resistance and Policing*, such as Jock Young's notion of the police as ‘amplifiers’ (Young 1971). See Hall's essay, ‘Deviance, politics and the media’ (1974) for more details.

In particular, the term is used to consider the spiralling social anxieties surrounding youth and race between the 1950s and 1980s as individual ‘episodes’ of panic became associated with a ‘more serious and long-lasting’ problem requiring the intervention of the law. Hall *et al.* refer to this process as a ‘signification spiral’, a term used to describe what they see as the convergence and binding together of

discrete moral panics into a larger single anxiety. In *Policing*, for example, Hall *et al.* chart the progression from discrete panics surrounding mods and rockers in the early 1960s to the larger, more systematic law and order campaign against mugging in the 1970s. 'Signification', here, is used to foreground that what is at stake is not the spiralling out of control of anxiety-inducing *events*, but an acceleration and escalation in how those events are *signified* within, say, the press. The process of amplification involved in moral panics relates to how black and white youths are *labelled* rather than to youth cultures themselves. For example, the Handsworth case was not initially referred to by the police or courts as a mugging, though it was subsequently identified as such within media coverage.

In the opening section of *Policing*, Hall *et al.* pursue what they call 'the career of a label' (mugging) in order to consider the implications of this labelling process. Their argument is not that mugging was simply a mythical construction of the media; they insist 'muggers *did* mug, that mugging *was* a real social and historical event'. What they question, however, is the idea that 'when all is said and done, muggers mugged, the police picked them up, and the courts put them away, and that is that' (PTC: 186). If the crime called mugging had seemed to appear on Britain's streets almost spontaneously at the start of the 1970s, the mugging label itself had a much longer symbolic history or career. Not only was it imported to Britain from North America, where it had been in common use since the 1940s, the American usage was, in turn, influenced by an earlier form of street crime in nineteenth-century England called 'garrotting'. Mugging was not simply a transparent label for a pre-existing reality in this context (a mugger mugs and the media report the mugging), it is a signifier that derives a major source of its symbolic resonance from its earlier connotations, notably American fears about racial tensions and urban unrest. The media labelling of the Handsworth youths as muggers cannot be detached from the already established racial connotations of that label.

*Policing* is not merely interested in a formal or linguistic account of the signifier mugging. Even as it foregrounds the symbolic nature of the panic around mugging, it stresses this panic had real material effects: increasing arrests, more police in black neighbourhoods, stiffer sentences. By focusing on the labelling of mugging, however,

Hall *et al.* are able to 'pose the problem . . . in its most paradoxical form: could it be possible – historically plausible – that a social reaction to crime could precede the appearance of a pattern of crimes?' (PTC: 181). For example, in the same way that the installation of a motorway speed camera will 'produce' more speeders, the setting up of an anti-mugging squad might be said to produce more muggers. More specifically, the targeting of black areas and black pedestrians was likely to produce more *black* muggers. For Hall *et al.* this does not prove black youths are more likely to be muggers, all it establishes is that racialised modes of policing will, as *Policing* puts it, 'amplify' and 'frame' the role of blacks as muggers.

## PRIMARY DEFINERS

A term used to refer to the way in which the media look *first* to authorities (politicians, professors, senior management) for news items. By doing this the media aim to offer authoritative and impartial perspectives but ironically and unwittingly reproduce 'existing structures of power' (PTC: 58). The 'primary definitions' forwarded by figures of authority represent more than an opinion, they frame the subsequent debate and what may or may not be said in relation to it. As Hall once noted:

It is very rare indeed to see a programme where blacks themselves have defined the problem as they see it. Now it matters a great deal whether studio discussions are based on the premise that black people constitute a problem for Mr Enoch Powell, or that Enoch Powell constitutes a problem for black people.

(Hall 1974a: 98)

Even as the media seek to 'balance' primary definitions with secondary ones (from a black 'representative' for example) the ideological tone of the debate has been set. The problem has already become one of numbers rather than of Enoch Powell (see 'Powell and Powellism' box, p. 84). In crime reporting, this imbalance – which is built into media balance – is exaggerated: regardless of whether the criminal is prepared or available to offer a competing perspective, it is viewed as illegitimate by the media.

Like the police, the media play a key role in the framing and amplification of crime, unlike the police though, they do not 'serve' the state and should not be seen as a simple extension of the ruling bloc. Part two of *Policing* 'grounds' its discussion of the media by offering an account of the Handsworth case and its representation within the local and national press. Exploring everything from newspaper headlines to editorials and letter pages, Hall *et al.* account for differences in reportage in terms of the media's relative autonomy while noting 'the presence of a highly structured . . . set of *ideologies about crime*' (PTC: 136) across them. There is no 'conspiracy theory' to be rooted out and the problem will not go away by, for instance, replacing 'racist' broadcasters with black ones. The reason for the 'fit' between dominant ideologies and those of the media is not a matter of conscious intention but is embedded in the very (unconscious) *structures* of news production. Here, Hall *et al.* develop some of the arguments presented in 'Encoding/decoding'. They consider, for example, how news is encoded through 'organisational factors' (such as the arrangement of news by topic and event), 'news values' (the unwritten rules which influence journalists when selecting and ranking what will 'make the news') and the use of 'primary definers'.

## DISPLACEMENT: 'RACISM AND REACTION'

Moral panic, we have seen, involves the identification of folk-devils or scapegoats onto which internal social anxieties are displaced in order that they can be dealt with. The keyword for Hall here is 'displacement'. Displacement is a Freudian concept describing how repressed anxieties and desires are handled and 'resolved' at the level of dreams and the unconscious. In order to render our deepest fears and forbidden desires 'safe' they might be projected, or displaced on to other things or condensed into symbols that work through association. As Hall *et al.* suggest in *Resistance*, it is through moral panic that 'dominant culture . . . seek[s] and find[s] . . . the folk-devils to people its nightmare' (RTR: 74).

Moral panics are not simply nightmares however; they are also fantasies. Folk-devils are deeply ambivalent enemies, the (displaced) objects of both fear *and* desire. As Hall *et al.* argue, if the postwar boom

was generally seen as desirable ('you've never had it so good'), the permissive, consumer culture it gave rise to was also perceived as a threat to the dominant status quo and traditional values. The ambivalence of displacement explains why Mick Jagger (a rock star who in the 1970s exemplified permissiveness through his 'sex and drugs' lifestyle), could be 'flown by helicopter, virtually straight from the Old Bailey to meet venerable figures of the Establishment to discuss the state of the world' (RTR: 74). Similarly, when Britain's most famous racist comic Bernard Manning categorically states he is not racist, pointing to his love of Indian food, there is nothing (more) contradictory about his claims: racism works unconsciously through both desire and loathing. In order to illustrate what these theories of displacement might bring to an understanding of the mugging incident with which this chapter began, we will now turn to consider some of Hall's formative thinking on moral panics in terms of race and racism.

Reflecting on his early work on race in the 1970s, Hall has recalled the CCCS's discovery that racism works

rather more like Freud's dreamwork than anything else. We found that racism expresses itself through displacement, through denial, through the capacity to say [like Bernard Manning] two contradictory things at the same time, the surface imagery speaking of an unspeakable content, the repressed content of a culture.

(RCC: 15)

Hall develops this position in 'Racism and reaction' (1978), an essay originally written for the Commission for Racial Equality, but which also provides an excellent, distilled introduction to the central debates of both *Resistance* and *Policing*.

'Racism and reaction' is an account of British racism and moral panic in the postwar period. However, it begins by tracing these panics back to the late 1500s. Citing Queen Elizabeth I's recommendation that blacks be expelled from Britain's shores as food shortages and a rising population started to threaten the country with famine, he argues the projection of internal material problems on to an 'external' presence – race – is by no means new to British society.



His example, which signals the presence of thousands of blacks in Britain in the sixteenth century as a result of the slave trade, also allows him to insist that 'race' is not an external problem to have arrived only recently with the onset of postwar immigration. Rather, it is an internal feature, *constitutive of* 'Britishness': 'It is in the sugar you stir; it is in the sinews of the famous British "sweet tooth"; it is in the tea-leaves at the bottom of the next "British" cuppa' (RAR: 25). Hall's loaded extended metaphor allows him to foreground what he terms 'the outside history that is inside the history of the English . . . There is no English history without that other history' (OAN: 49). Tea and sugar were imported to Britain from colonial plantations in South Asia and the Caribbean respectively. They were commodities that carried with them the burden of slavery, conquest and colonisation and which helped fuel Britain's rise into a dominant and wealthy imperial power. Britain's economy, as well its culture (the British cuppa as 'national' institution) were not simply generated from within according to this inside-out history.

Hall goes on to argue that the beginnings of postwar British racism reside in the systematic denial of this (internal) overseas history; by turning what is inside, out, it installs a series of binary oppositions between 'us' and 'them', 'self' and 'other', 'inside' and 'outside'. Racism, he argues works through a 'profound historical forgetfulness . . . a kind of historical amnesia, a decisive mental repression' (RAR: 25) involving the displacement of its colonial history. However, on its own Britain's imperial past cannot adequately account for what is distinctive about domestic racism following postwar black settlement in the UK. One of the main arguments of 'Racism and reaction' is that racism is culturally and historically specific rather than naturally occurring and universal, multiple rather than singular in its forms. This leads Hall to a more specific analysis of British society and racism since the 1940s. The sugar and tea of Hall's 'British cuppa' were not just metaphors for the trade in the precious commodities of empire, they were also metaphors for the postwar importation of cheap labour from the Caribbean (like sugar) and South Asia (like tea).

Charting the postwar period of black immigration and the deterioration of 'race relations' across it, the essay describes the labour shortages after the war that encouraged Britain to open its doors to

its colonies and former colonies through the Nationality Act of 1948. These doors, Hall suggests, were 'lubricated' by the economic boom of the 1950s and resulted in a brief period of optimism surrounding black/white assimilation. In 1958, however, the emergence of a 'home-grown' racism became apparent through the race riots that took place in Notting Hill, a white working-class area of London that had become home to a substantial black population. Hall quotes *The Times* editorial linking the riots to other forms of anti-social youth culture, identifying them collectively as 'a strand of our social behaviour that an *adult* [Hall's emphasis] society could do without' (RAR: 28). The Notting Hill riots generated significant media attention, Hall suggests, partly because they were sparked by white teenagers (the teddy boys) and therefore condensed early moral panics about youth *and* race.

The 1960s saw racism become a much more pervasive, institutionalised feature of British culture. In 1962, 1968 and 1971 a series of Immigration Acts were introduced specifically designed to reduce the influx of black settlers. Rising racial intolerance was registered at the level of popular politics in this decade, reaching its pinnacle in the anti-immigration speeches of Enoch Powell.

Powellism, according to Hall, represented more than a response to race, it articulated a wider sense of fear and foreboding following the events of 1968. This was the year of student rebellion, protests against the Vietnam War, the rise of militant black power movements in the US. What Powell called the 'enemy within' was not a direct reference to black immigration; it expressed a more pervasive, paranoid sense of crisis facing the social order and authority in the aftermath of 1968. Nevertheless, this crisis was 'largely thematised through race. Race is the prism through which the British people are called upon to live through, then to understand, and then to deal with the growing crisis' (RAR: 30). By the 1970s, as economic recession set in, Britain's black communities came to bear the brunt of high levels of unemployment and black British youth found itself disproportionately jobless. Moreover, the law and order society that emerged as a popular response to the general sense of crisis identified by Powellism, saw blacks increasingly criminalised by the state; the target of stop and search campaigns that were identified as a means of

## POWELL AND POWELLISM

Powellism takes its name from the Right-wing politician Enoch Powell (1912–98), but needs to be understood as more than simply ‘about’ his ideas. Powellism refers more broadly to a dominant ideological force in the late 1960s and 1970s which eventually became absorbed into the more ‘acceptable’ face of ‘Thatcherism’ (see Chapter 5). If Powell-the-man was perceived to be too extreme for mainstream party politics, his positions were taken up again and again within both Conservative and Labour Party politics and policies (via the Immigration Acts of 1968 and 1971, for instance). Powellism, for Hall, signals the ‘formation of an “official” racist policy at the heart of British political culture’ (RAR: 30). In famous speeches such as ‘Rivers of blood’ (1968), Powell makes a direct link between black immigration and impending disorder. Of mugging, Hall *et al.* also note in *Policing*, that it is ‘a criminal phenomenon associated with the changing composition of the population of some of Britain’s larger cities’ (PTC: 327). Crucially for Hall, Powellism is about much more than ‘racism’. It is about how the ‘crisis’ of authority post-1968 became condensed around the *imagery* of race.

policing the crisis. Alongside this rising tide of white racism, Hall charts the shift in mood among black settlers who were initially keen to ‘fit in’, but who became increasingly politicised and organised communities of resistance in the late 1960s and 1970s.

Hall’s history of British racism and moral panic helps explain how incidents such as the mugging case with which we began, took on such significance at the start of the 1970s. It suggests there may well have been wider structural reasons why blacks turned to mugging at the start of the 1970s (for example, as a response to unemployment, or as a politicised form of resistance). It also suggests why mugging, which appeared out of the blue as a site of moral panic at the start of the 1970s, generated the levels of anxiety it did at that particular time (for example, recession, Powellism, the rise of popular racism, the feeling that the US crisis might soon arrive in the UK). According to Hall, moral panic becomes the ideological form of racism because:

It deals with those fears and anxieties, not by addressing the real problems and conditions which underlie them, but by projecting and displacing them onto the identified social group. That is to say, the moral panic crystallizes popular fear and anxieties which have a real basis and by providing them with a simple, concrete, identifiable . . . social object, seeks to resolve them.

(RAR: 33)

According to Hall, the signifiers of moral panic – whether it be youth, race or a condensed image of the two – are not the ‘real’ source of the crisis, but rather the externalised symptoms of deeper internal problems. Like bad psychologists, when those in authority (e.g. the government) try to ‘treat’ these symptoms (e.g. muggings) rather than the underlying conditions that give rise to them, the cure will be at best temporary. At worst, conditions will fester and deteriorate (e.g. escalating moral panics).

So, if the folk-devils of moral panic are not the source of the crisis but merely its ‘signifiers’ or ‘bearers’, what are the ‘real’ problems? Hall suggests they conceal? While the term ‘moral panic’ goes some way to explaining *how* folk-devils became such powerful signs of the times, they do not help us understand *why*. What are the actual anxieties they stand in for and what purpose or function do they serve at any given historical moment?

In order to answer these questions, both *Resistance* and *Policing* had to develop and move beyond the methodological approaches traditionally associated with the term moral panic. These methodological approaches were based upon what is known as the transactional or labelling approach (i.e. folk-devils as the ‘labels’ for moral panic) used within conventional sociological theories of deviance. Hall *et al.* value the transactional approach because it recognises that things like mugging do not simply happen, they are not just spontaneous events but *culturally constructed processes*, labelled and made to signify within the media, for example. At the same time, Hall *et al.* argue mugging cannot be entirely explained in terms of how the public react to and label it: it has a ‘real basis’. This is where Hall *et al.*’s work departs from the transactional approach of Cohen’s moral panic, combining it with what they term a ‘structural’ or historical approach. According to *Resistance* and *Policing*, moral panics were more than an ever-present

(and therefore ahistorical) ‘pure construction of the media’: larger structural forces needed to be accounted for, including historical shifts in class formation, ideology and hegemony. It was this recognition that led to a distinctive reading of postwar British politics in *Resistance* and *Policing* in terms of a move from what they describe as a culture of consensus and consent to one of crisis and coercion.

## FROM CONSENSUS TO CRISIS

In *Resistance* and *Policing* Hall *et al.* outline three common-sense categories underpinning ideology in the early postwar years:

- 1 *Affluence*: the postwar boom and the rise of the ‘teenage consumer’.
- 2 *Consensus*: the broad ‘agreement’ across political parties and the electorate on new postwar formations, such as the welfare state, aimed at uniting British society across classes by providing ‘a common stake in the system’ (RTR: 21). Consensus was also used to describe the belief in a shared national view and the end of social conflict.
- 3 *Embourgeoisement*: the erosion of the working class and reunification of British society around middle-class values.

Through these three terms, Hall *et al.* seek to demonstrate that while there was a ‘real basis’ in the postwar economic boom, it had not produced the classless society many commentators claimed it had. Their argument is founded on a recognition that social inequality is a structural feature of capitalism, essential to its smooth running, rather than something that it could cure: in order to generate profit, capitalism has no alternative but to exploit the many for the benefit of the few. As in Hall’s New Left essay (‘A sense of classlessness’) considered in Chapter 1, classlessness is understood as an ideological *sense*, rather than a matter of fact. While affluence, consensus and embourgeoisement were by no means conjured from thin air (the welfare state was indisputably a piece of social reform within consensus politics) they were also ideological categories: consensus politics assumed class differences had been overcome when they were alive and well.

According to *Policing*, the 'traditionalist consensus' was organised around a set of related *themes and images* – respectability, work, discipline, the family, the law, Englishness, and so on. Such common-sense images constituted the 'organising elements' of consensus and helped 'cement' the society. Common-sense, we know from the previous chapter, presents itself as the natural, 'gut feeling' of the people, but actually signals the subordinate culture's consent to the dominant order.

As all of this might suggest, Hall *et al.*'s reading of postwar change has its basis in Gramsci's theory of 'hegemony'. Terms like affluence are by no means innocent, descriptive terms but ideological categories used to secure hegemonic domination and dismantle working-class resistance by generating 'spontaneous consent'. The ideological myths of affluence, consensus and embourgeoisement upon which hegemony had been established in the early postwar years were exposed in the 1960s and 1970s as unemployment began to rise, wages remained static and consensus values were visibly shattered through the counter-culture of the late 1960s. The ruling class could no longer lead by consent, it had to maintain authority more directly through *coercion*: leading by force. This drift in postwar society from hegemonic consent to coercion is central to an understanding of the 'crisis' in hegemony and the birth of a 'law and order' society described in *Resistance and Policing*.

What Hall *et al.*'s reading of the postwar period questions is the idea that race and youth subcultures and the 'deviant' rituals associated with them are the source of moral panic, or the origin of a crisis in authority. On the contrary, we might argue the labelling of moral panics provides a convenient if not crucial means of *maintaining* state hegemony because it 'provide[s] the basis . . . for cross-class alliances in support of "authority"' (PTC: 177). This is most notably the case, they suggest, when the state enters a period of 'crisis'. Part three of *Policing the Crisis* offers a carefully historicised Marxist analysis of the British state and its transformation over the postwar period. Put crudely, this transformation involves a turn away from the 'successful' state hegemony of the early postwar years (ruling mainly by 'consent'), to the 1970s which saw a crisis of hegemony, the 'exhaustion' of consent and a move to more 'authoritarian'

forms of leadership. Within this context, the reasons behind the excessive response to mugging by the police, the courts and the media begin to make sense. Viewed within the context of the collapse in state hegemony, mugging is not an isolated event external to British society, something that can be projected on to those others, the 'folk-devils', but 'the sugar you stir'. It is a symptom of the crisis internal to British society. Not only that, it provides a means of managing that crisis, by legitimising and popularising an authoritarian response:

the 'moral panic' appears to us to be one of the principal forms of ideological consciousness by means of which a 'silent majority' is won over to the support of increasingly coercive measures on the part of the state, and lends its legitimacy to a 'more than usual' exercise of control.

(PTC: 221)

The move from consent to coercion is, Hall *et al.* suggest, partly determined by growing economic crisis, rising unemployment and the recession which was at its height in the 1970s. Using Marx and the Marxist theories of Althusser and Gramsci, Hall *et al.* expose the crisis surrounding mugging as principally a 'crisis of and for British capitalism: the crisis specifically, of an advanced industrial capitalist nation, seeking to stabilise itself in rapidly changing conditions on an extremely weak, post-imperial economic base' (PTC: 317). What began as specific studies of subcultural style or mugging in *Resistance* and *Policing* became part of a much larger political project which Hall takes up in his subsequent writings on 'Thatcherism' and 'New Times' (see Chapter 6).

Crucially, what the structural accounts of the shift in postwar British politics in *Resistance* and *Policing* make clear is that hegemony is not simply given, it is a site of continuous struggle. 'It has to be won, worked for, reproduced, sustained' (RTR: 40). The relationship between dominant and subordinate culture is not fixed once and for all, but rather it is based on an ongoing process of resistance, incorporation and negotiation. In the remainder of this chapter we will consider this process of resistance and struggle as it is explored in *Resistance* and *Policing*.

## **RESISTANCE THROUGH RITUALS: 'REVOLUTIONARY' AND 'RITUAL' RESISTANCE**

*Resistance through Rituals* is a diverse collection of essays on youth subcultures, not just of the white working classes as is often suggested (though this is its primary focus), but also of the middle classes, blacks and women. (Our focus in this chapter is on the long theoretical introduction co-written by Hall: 'Subculture, cultures and class'.) The distinctiveness of youth subcultures was conventionally explained at the time *Resistance* was published (1976) in terms of the debate over affluence, consensus and embourgeoisement outlined above. For example, youth was read in relation to the new levels of affluence, the rise of the teenage consumer and mass communications (e.g. the birth of commercial television in the 1950s). Within such accounts there was a sense that youth occupied a merely imitative, passive relationship to these developments. As the foregrounding of the term resistance in Hall *et al.*'s project suggests, *Resistance through Rituals* represents a major departure from this view.

### **SUBCULTURE**

Often vaguely defined within contemporary cultural studies, subculture carried a quite precise, carefully delimited meaning within *Resistance*. The book defines the term relationally in terms of a double articulation with, on the one hand, the 'parent culture' and, on the other, 'dominant culture'. Parent culture does not literally refer to the family, but to the class culture in which youths find themselves. For example, the parent culture of the hippies is the middle class, while the parent culture of the skinheads is the working class. Subcultures are a smaller, distinctive (sub)group within a parent culture, but also a part of it. The double articulation of youth to both the parent culture and dominant culture (i.e. the ruling bloc) is a crucial distinction for Hall *et al.* It opposes the common-sense construction of youth within the media as essentially classless, a reading that neglects the politics and power relations of subcultures that *Resistance* seeks to address.



Hall *et al.*'s Gramscian understanding of hegemony as a site of continuous struggle, rather than as something guaranteed once and for all, implies resistance has, and *must have*, an important role to play in youth subcultures. However, as *Resistance through Rituals* argues, it also modifies how we think about resistance. Resistance is not necessarily simply a matter of the working classes showing more commitment and solidarity by uniting and rising up to seize control. This revolutionary image of working-class struggle is just one possible mode of resistance; what Gramsci would call a 'war of manoeuvre'. It involves a complete inversion of the fixed power structures separating dominant and subordinate cultures. However, if, as Gramscian hegemony suggests, such power structures are never fixed or secured eternally then it becomes necessary to identify other forms of resistance based on continuous negotiation and struggle, what Gramsci would call a 'war of position'. Rather than trying to identify revolutionary resistance and associating everything else with 'incorporation', as the traditional Marxist critic might, Hall *et al.* argue:

We must try to understand, instead, how, under what conditions, the class has been able to use its material and cultural 'raw materials' to construct a whole *range* of responses. Some . . . form an immense reservoir of knowledge and power in the struggle of the class to survive and 'win space'. Even those which appear again and again in the history of the class, are not fixed alternatives (reform vs. revolution), but *potential* historical 'spaces' used and adapted to very different circumstances in its tradition of struggle.

(RTR: 45)

Unlike revolutionary resistance, which tends to work by rejecting or overturning, ritual resistance is about using and adapting. Such forms of resistance are not necessarily going to 'revolutionise' class structures in the sense of a straightforward inversion; they are *potential* forms, 'not given but made' (RTR: 44). The emphasis in this passage on how raw materials and spaces are *made*, *used* and *adapted* suggests a particular form of cultural activity: *bricolage*.

It is through the adoption and adaptation of particular styles, spaces (local, neighbourhood territories like the street corner, or deserted playgrounds where youths gather and rituals are performed) and

## **BRICOLAGE**

A term used by Claude Lévi-Strauss to describe how 'primitive' societies respond to and reorganise the everyday world around them. *Bricolage* involves taking the raw materials we have to hand and putting them to alternative uses by adapting and combining objects through improvisation to create new meanings. In his book on *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979), Dick Hebdige sees the subcultural youth as a kind of *bricoleur*. Referring to mods, for example, he notes how 'the motor scooter, originally an ultra-respectable means of transport, was turned into a menacing symbol of group solidarity' (Hebdige 1979: 104). A more general example of youth bricolage is to be evidenced in the way school uniforms are worn by pupils. Among other things, the school uniform is intended to embody institutional belonging, uniformity, an obedience to the rules, discipline and authority. However, it is ritually adapted by students in ways that symbolically break those rules and contest uniformity. Shirts are untucked, buttons undone, 'regulation' clothing is combined with leisure wear or accessorised, piercings are exposed, hair worn too long, skirts worn too short, and so on.

objects (the safety pin of the punk, the docs of the skinhead) that a collective group consciousness is formed. These instances of bricolage are a means of *negotiating* (as opposed to overcoming) class difference. The working-class teddy boy's 'borrowing' of the upper-class Edwardian dress codes made fashionable again by Savile Row in the early 1950s was part of a contestation over, and refusal of, the cultural values attached to class styles. Similar processes are at stake in contemporary youth styles. With their connotations of wealth, celebrity and success, the overt display of designer labels, or the Beckham haircut is, for many British youths from the poorest inner cities, a means of negotiating a subordinate class experience.

Where Hall *et al.* argue journalism has tended to fetishise youth culture, focusing on the specific objects and materials associated with it, *Resistance* is more interested in how these objects are put to use, borrowed, transformed and translated. The things associated with youth subculture don't make style, it is how they are worn, 'the

activity of stylisation' that makes style (RTR: 54). It is through stylisation that things are disarticulated from their dominant meanings and rearticulated in new contexts. The class connotations of a suit are not embedded within it, as the working-class mod's appropriation of such attire suggests. The 'given' or natural use of things is subverted and transformed through this process. The safety pin with its apparently innocent connotations of childhood came to mean something very different when placed with the context of the piercings and bondage gear of the punk. Of course, this process cuts both ways: the subversive style of the punk, generated through the rejection of conventional codes of 'beauty', has, since the 1970s been reappropriated by the fashion industry: the 'repulsive' styles associated with it are now adorned by catwalk models.

Hall *et al.*'s arguments, here, are clearly informed by structuralism and the semiotics of style: 'Commodities are, also, cultural *signs*. They have already been invested, by the dominant culture, with meanings, associations, social connotations' (RTR: 55). How these signs are re-signified (through exaggeration, isolation, combination and modification) and what they come to reflect, are crucial here. Out of the borrowed bits and pieces taken up by these subcultures a subversive style is made possible.

## STYLE: A SUBCULTURAL SOLUTION?

As with revolutionary resistance, ritual resistance is treated as just one possible form of class struggle and Hall *et al.*'s account of it is by no means utopian or celebratory, as some critics suggest. Ritual resistance remains a process of ongoing negotiation rather than a 'solution' to class: there is no way in which it can be said to resolve issues such as unemployment, poor wages or educational inequality. In this sense, it is also mainly a *symbolic* struggle 'fated to fail' (RTR: 47). Subcultural styles and rituals can only be used to negotiate or live through subordinate class experience, they cannot resolve it or provide a solution other than in an imaginary way. Here Hall *et al.*'s use of Gramscian hegemony is combined with Althusser's notion of ideology as an 'imaginary relation' to real conditions of existence. They argue the subcultural solution to class is a 'hope' or 'nostalgia' rather than a concrete reality. They note, for example the nostalgia of the skinhead:

Thus, in the resurrection of an archetypal and 'symbolic' . . . form of working-class dress, in the displaced focussing on the football match and the 'occupation' of the football 'ends', Skinheads reassert, but 'imaginarily', the values of a class [the parent culture] . . . to which few working-class adults any longer subscribe: they re-present a sense of territory and locality which the planners and spectators are rapidly destroying: they 'declare' as alive and well a game which is being commercialised, professionalised and spectacularised.

(RTR: 48)

Following Phil Cohen (1972), who follows Althusser, Hall *et al.* see youth subcultures as resolving their real conditions of existence, 'magically' (i.e. in an illusory manner), through an imaginary relation to those conditions (see Chapter 2, pp. 44–6).

## **POLICING THE CRISIS: VIOLENCE AND THE BLACK 'COLONY'**

Both politically and intellectually, *Policing the Crisis* was written in the spirit of an 'intervention' (PTC: x) and asks to be read on this level. It emerges from the sense of 'outrage' felt by its authors following the harsh sentencing of the Handsworth youths in 1973. While the bulk of the text is concerned with accounting for the exaggerated response to such crimes, the final section of *Policing* turns to consider the politics of mugging itself. By contextualising the mugging act in terms of the deepening economic crisis within Britain's black working-class communities, the communities 'most exposed' during the recession (PTC: 331), Hall *et al.* tentatively return to the issue of resistance raised within *Resistance*.

It is no coincidence that policing the crisis becomes synonymous with policing the blacks at a time of economic decline: it is central to the common-sense logic of racism that blacks are the cause of rising unemployment ('they steal our jobs') and increasing economic burden ('they scrounge from the state'). At the same time, economic decline was *responsible* for the rise of black crime, producing as it did an increasingly wageless black community and, with it, certain forms of criminal activity as alternative forms of survival. Systematic racism, Hall *et al.* argue, has not simply placed the black community at the

bottom of the pile, as the hapless victims of what they term a structure of 'secondariness'. It is through racism that this community has 'come to consciousness' both in terms of their race and class, allowing it to develop strategies of resistance and struggle. Hall *et al.* explore black youth as a doubly positioned 'class fraction' (PTC: 389) both of the white working class and part of a wider history of Caribbean and colonial labour – a position signalled earlier through Hall's metaphor of the sugary brew of the British cuppa. Any political response to the subordinate position of blacks in Britain must attend to both these histories and their complex interconnection. Mugging, in this context, is not merely a *symptom* of economic decline, it might also be read as a *reaction* to racism:

Without hailing crime as a resolution to the problem of the secondariness of the black working class, it requires only a moment's reflection to see how acts of stealing, pickpocketing, snatching and robbing with violence, by a desperate section of black unemployed youth, practised against white victims, can give a muffled and displaced expression to the experience of permanent exclusion.

(PTC: 391)

Note how black criminal acts, here, are described as 'displaced expressions'. Just as racism works unconsciously, so, too, do the politics of mugging. *Policing* does not offer a romantic reading of the mugger as a kind of racialised Robin Hood, intent on reversing the wrongs of racism and capitalism. Nevertheless, mugging, they suggest, does signal a kind of political unconscious – a return of the repressed conditions of racism and crisis. The question of 'violence' raised within the context of this passage is a significant one and is linked in *Policing* to the revolutionary writer on Algerian independence, Frantz Fanon.

Quoting Fanon, Hall *et al.* note that violence is a social practice that 'binds the colonised "together as a whole", as well as, individually, freeing "the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inactions"' (PTC: 384). While the potential of this view of violence for an interpretation of mugging is clear, it nevertheless remains undeveloped in *Policing*. Violence is also seen as ultimately degrading and disabling by Hall *et al.*, directed as it is against the

## FANON (1925–61)

Frantz Fanon was born in the Caribbean and came to Europe as a volunteer to fight in the Second World War. After studying psychiatry in France he went to the French colony of Algeria where, on seeing the brutality of the colonial regime, he deserted the oppressors in order to fight with the oppressed. Although he died before Algeria gained independence, he is viewed by many as the founding father of post-colonial resistance movements. This reputation is based on his writings produced in the lead-up to, and during, the struggle for independence, notably *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). The form of resistance with which Fanon is most frequently associated is violence, a position he develops in *The Wretched of the Earth* (see the opening section, 'Concerning violence'). 'Decolonisation is always a violent phenomenon', says Fanon, a means of uniting the various sections of the oppressed group divided by colonisation and a means of restoring dignity and self-respect.

white working classes and therefore exploiting those already worst off under capitalism (the victim in the Handsworth mugging was a labourer). Hall *et al.* refuse to idealise or celebrate mugging as a kind of heroic form of resistance, seeing it as an extremely complex, ambiguous event. For instance, on one level it could be read as a marker of a 'quasi-political consciousness' (PTC: 391), an active refusal to work. On the other hand, it needs to be recognised that in the late 1970s there is 'hardly any work left for young black school-leavers to refuse' (PTC: 391). *Policing* ultimately refuses to offer solutions to the predicament it outlines. Mugging is not the answer; at best it signals the need for 'forms of political struggle amongst blacks adequate to the structures of whose contradictions they are the bearers' (PTC: 393). While *Policing* is perhaps most often remembered for its early diagnosis of Thatcherism and its basis in Powellism, its suggestive reading of mugging as a proto-political formation is equally prescient. Three years after its publication the prolonged period of 'race riots' that started in Brixton represented, on one level, a more organised, collective and sustained form of violent struggle in the streets.

## SUMMARY

In Chapter 2 we considered the New Left's exploration of the impact of the postwar economic boom on working-class culture of the 1950s. *Resistance* and *Policing* developed this analysis into a broader account of white and black working-class youth subcultures as they emerged over the next two decades. Both texts adopt the same methodological approach, combining transactional and structural readings of postwar British culture. The transactional approach allowed a reading of youth and race as the folk-devils of moral panic; the structural approach allowed an historical analysis of the postwar years in terms of the move from a culture of consent to one of coercion. A combination of these two approaches revealed that what appeared to be discrete moral panics over youth subcultures or mugging, were, in fact, the displaced metaphors of the same, deeper ongoing crisis within British society. Finally, this chapter considered Hall *et al.*'s re-working of the concept of resistance to explore how subcultural groups (white and black British youth) responded to this crisis. Resistance, it was suggested, does not provide a magical solution to the crisis, but a proto-political means of negotiating it.

## THATCHERISM AND 'NEW TIMES'

In 1979 – one year after the publication of *Policing the Crisis* – the Conservative Party's leader Margaret Thatcher became British Prime Minister. The crisis of capitalism confidently outlined in that book and the shift from a culture of consent to an authoritarian 'law-and-order' society it prompted, began to look increasingly prescient in the context of the 'iron times' that followed her election victory. Between 1979 and 1983 (the period of the first Thatcher government) Britain's Gross Domestic Product fell by 4.2 per cent, industrial production by over 10 per cent, manufacturing by 17 per cent. Over the same period unemployment rose by a record 141 per cent to over three million. By 1986 and the close of Thatcher's second term in government (1983–7) Britain had become a net importer of goods for the first time since the industrial revolution. Nevertheless, the Conservative Party secured a third term in office, making Thatcher one of the most popular leaders of the postwar period. How do we explain this apparent disjunction between the statistics of the Thatcher governments (1979–90) and its prolonged period of popularity?

Writing in the aftermath of Thatcher's third election victory in 1987, Hall offers the following response to this question:

People don't vote for Thatcherism, in my view, because they believe the small print. People in their minds do not think that Britain is now a wonderfully



blooming, successful economy. Nobody believes that, with 3½ million unemployed, the economy is picking up . . . What Thatcherism as an ideology does, is to address the fears, the anxieties, the lost identities, of a people. It invites us to think about politics in images. It is addressed to our collective fantasies, to Britain as an imagined community, to the social imaginary. Mrs Thatcher has totally dominated that idiom, while the left forlornly tries to drag the conversation round to 'our policies'.

(GAS: 167)

In contrast to conventional accounts of the Thatcher governments, which concentrate on economic policies, Hall argues it is at the level of images that the Conservative Party secured victory through the 1980s. Imagery as opposed to policy is what he feels best characterises 'Thatcherism' and its political success. This may seem a fairly obvious point to make within today's media-dominated culture of spin doctors and political PR work, where party image is everything. However, it is worth noting that when Margaret Thatcher came to power her main political opponent was Labour leader Michael Foot, a man who was caricatured by the British press in 1981 as the fictional scarecrow, Wurzel Gummidge. Moreover, by imagery here, Hall is not thinking merely of presentation, but *ideological representation*.

'Thatcherism' was a term Hall coined (a 'dubious distinction' he has wryly commented) in order to elaborate on the prevailing cultural and ideological forces associated with (but not necessarily confined to) the Thatcher governments. Through the late 1970s and 1980s, Hall channelled his intellectual energies into producing an ongoing critique of Thatcherism. This commentary was first published as a series of essays in the socialist monthlies *Marxism Today* and *The New Socialist* and subsequently collected in two volumes: *The Politics of Thatcherism* (1983) and *The Hard Road to Renewal* (1988). What follows is an outline of Hall's contribution to the Thatcherism debate over a decade Hall sees as marking 'a historic turning-point in postwar British political and cultural life' (HRR: 1).

Hall was not simply concerned in these essays with accounting for what made Thatcherism so successful. His ultimate aim was to ascertain what conditions had given rise to Thatcherism and what the Left might learn from those conditions. In spite of three election victories,

Thatcherism, he argued, was not an inevitable outcome, but a particular response by the Right to global changes in capitalism and culture. Thatcherism had succeeded because it grasped something of these changes (albeit cack-handedly as the statistics above reveal), while the Left had simply turned its back on them. In October 1988, a controversial project was launched by Hall in conjunction with a number of other Left intellectuals under the banner 'New Times'. New Times was an attempt to build upon and move beyond Hall's earlier critique of Thatcherism to propose an alternative political agenda for the Left that faced up to these historic changes in capitalism. In the second part of this chapter we will consider the New Times project in conjunction with the key debates on post-Fordism, postmodernism and subjectivity (terms explained below) that informed it.

## THATCHERISM

If, as Hall suggests, part of Thatcherism's success resided in its ability to make us think politics in images, then the Falklands War (1982–3) undoubtedly represented the pinnacle of its symbolic achievements. During her first three years in power, the British Prime Minister had failed to reverse Britain's economic fortunes and deliver it from recession as promised. In these early days, the loyalty of her country and even her cabinet was far from secure. Things changed dramatically in 1982 however, when the Thatcher government led Britain into war with Argentina to secure the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands. In pure economic terms, the war hardly seemed a shrewd political move, costing in excess of three billion pounds – a sum the country could ill afford given the statistics with which we opened. The islands themselves, situated 8,000 miles from Britain in the South Atlantic, were by no means the jewel in the crown of Britain's beleaguered postwar empire – environmentally inhospitable and inaccessible, their commercial value was dubious at best.

However, to make such an argument was, within the context of Thatcherism, to miss the point. The Falklands War was not justified by Thatcher in economic terms, but (like the Bush–Blair war on Iraq in 2003) on the grounds of moral principle. These moral principles were articulated through a series of images in which the British past

became subject to what Hall terms ‘a highly selective form of historical reconstruction’ (ESB: 71):

I [Mrs Thatcher] know you will understand the humility I feel at following in the footsteps of great men like . . . Winston Churchill, a man called by destiny to raise the name of Britain to supreme heights in the history of the free world.

(ESB: 71)

Through the image of Churchill, Thatcher evoked Britain’s earlier ‘principled’ battle against Nazi Germany and along with it connotations of the nation’s past imperial greatness: Britain as a bulldog breed that could once more rule the waves. The nostalgic language of empire within which Thatcher couched the Falklands campaign was resoundingly popular with the British electorate. Before the war the Conservative government had slumped to third place in the opinion polls, after the war it led the polls by 20 per cent.

Hall refuses the comforting view that such a lead was down to the votes of the Tories and yuppies alone; it was also down to the support of black and working-class voters – those groups Thatcherism had demonstrated most hostility towards. In *The Hard Road to Renewal* (1988), Hall quotes figures from the time revealing that over half of British manual workers were in support of Mrs Thatcher. How had Thatcherism managed to win the consent of those it seemed simultaneously to construct as the folk-devils of society? Was it simply an extreme case of false consciousness? As we have already seen in previous chapters, Hall is not convinced by this top-down view of ideology in which the dominant culture pulls the wool over the eyes of the people. Hall suggests the success of Thatcherism does not lie in its capacity to produce a totalising, watertight, or 100 per cent convincing ideology with which to deceive the masses. On the contrary, what the terms of Hall’s inquiry persistently reveal is a stress on Thatcherism’s essentially *contradictory* character.

In his Falklands essay, ‘The empire strikes back’ (Hall 1988a [1982]), Hall draws attention to the anachronism of Thatcherism’s representation of the war as what he terms the return of ‘a great armada’ in the ‘nuclear missile age’. While he views Thatcherism’s Falklands imagery as entirely consistent with the main strands of its ideology at the time: traditional (moral) values, Englishness, patriotism and patri-

archy, he also describes the project of this ideology more generally as one of 'regressive modernisation'. Through this oxymoron, Hall indicates the way in which Thatcherism's vision of the future is founded upon and legitimated through a backward looking, nostalgic turn to the past. For example, it combines, or articulates liberal free market discourses with conservative themes such as nationhood and empire. As Hall puts it, regressive modernisation describes 'the attempt to "educate" and discipline the society into a particularly regressive version of modernity by, paradoxically, dragging it backwards through an equally regressive version of the past' (HRR: 2).

## **AUTHORITARIAN POPULISM**

The first chapter in *The Hard Road to Renewal* is an extract from the penultimate chapter of *Policing the Crisis* exploring 'the new authoritarianism of the right' (HRR: 28) and its 'populist' orientation. In the essays that follow, Hall adopts the term 'authoritarian populism' in order to describe what he sees as one of Thatcherism's defining characteristics.

The term develops Greek Marxist intellectual Nicos Poulantzas's (1937–80) notion of 'authoritarian statism' in *State, Power, Socialism* (1978) to describe the shift away from a culture of consent to an authoritarian politics geared towards coercion in the 1970s. As Hall uses it, authoritarian populism was also, in part, an attempt to develop Gramsci's notion of hegemony (as ruling by consent). What was distinctive about Hall's description of authoritarianism was a recognition of how it was 'harnessed to' and 'legitimated by' an appeal to populist discontents, such as the 'moral panics' surrounding immigration, youth culture or mugging. Authoritarian populism does not mobilise 'the people' through its 'popularity' alone (Hall is careful to distinguish between 'popular' and 'populist' in this context) but through its ideological appeal to 'the fears, the anxieties, the lost identities, of a people' (GAS: 167). In terms of the Falklands War, for example, the populist appeal to a national revival was harnessed through a play on Britain's fears about its increasingly marginal status following the collapse of empire and the lost centrality of Englishness. Alternatively when Thatcherism took a tough, authoritarian stance on homosexuality following the AIDS epidemic of the late 1980s, it did so through a populist appeal to traditional family values.

For Hall Thatcherism's success rests in its ability to *articulate* 'contradictory discourses within the same ideological formation' (HRR: 10). This condensation and coupling of contradictory discourses found its most memorable expression in what Hall phrases Thatcherism's 'authoritarian populism'.

The authoritarian aspect of Thatcherism's populism helps explain why Hall regards it, not as hegemonic, but as a hegemonic *project*, that is, striving to be hegemonic, to lead by consent, but having to resort to coercive measures.

What Hall took from his recognition of the contradictory nature of Thatcherism was that traditional class alliances had, themselves, become unstable and contradictory. He exposed that there was no such thing as a unified working class to be rescued. While some on the traditional Left have been critical of this position, regarding it as an abandonment of 'economic realities' and 'class' issues, Hall argues his is less an abandonment of class, than a recognition of the break-up of traditional class alliances: '[t]his means that a politics which depends on "the" working class being, essentially and eternally, either entirely "Thatcherite" or the entirely revolutionary subject-in-waiting is simply inadequate. It is no longer telling us what we need to know' (HRR: 6–7).

Hall's position here represents an extension of his much earlier critique of economic determinism (see Chapter 1) dating back to the 1950s. If the economic 'base' determines the 'superstructure' in any straightforward sense, why are those who appear economically worst off under Thatcher still voting for her? As Hall puts it with a sharp sense of irony in 'The empire strikes back': 'Oh, economic determinism – three million unemployed equals a 100 per cent swing to Labour – where art thou now?' (ESB: 69).

Hall is of the opinion that the Left must learn from these lessons of Thatcherism. The analysis of Thatcherism's ideological discourses represents only half of Hall's project in *The Hard Road to Renewal*, a text that is equally committed to debating the 'crisis' in which it leaves the Left and, most important of all, what the Left might do about it. Hall presents his readers with two stark alternatives. The Left can either continue to appeal to a revolutionary class consciousness, or it can wake up to changes in contemporary politics and culture and work

to re-imagine the new times in an alternative manner to the Right, but in a way that has popular (democratic) appeal.

## NEW TIMES

The first step down the hard road to renewal involves learning from, rather than capitulating to Thatcherism. The essays published in *The Hard Road to Renewal* were an attempt to understand Thatcherism's 'populism', not so that the Left might reproduce or copy its logic, but so that it could enter into the hegemonic struggle over what became known by Hall *et al.* simply as New Times. The New Times project was launched in September 1989 through *Marxism Today*, the journal in which many of its articles first appeared. *New Times: the Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s* (1989) – which contains two articles and an introduction by Hall – is a collection of these essays in a revised, updated form. Edited by Hall and Martin Jacques (the editor of *Marxism Today*), *New Times* should not be read as a coherent 'manifesto', or as a fully-formed position or orthodoxy. It draws together a body of work-in-progress produced by a diverse range of intellectuals speaking from different, and often differing perspectives.

Conceived as a whole though, Hall *et al.*'s New Times project might best be understood as an attempt to force the Left to 'move with the times' (NT: 12) and face up to historic shifts in economics, culture and society in the last third of the twentieth century. Thatcherism's skilful appropriation of these so-called 'new times' is explored against the Left's reluctance to let go of past times. The new times, Hall *et al.* argue, are not intrinsically *of* the Right, it is simply that Thatcherism has adapted its politics and policies more successfully in conjunction with them. Hall *et al.* insist on a distinction between Thatcherism and world change in this context. To move with the times is not to move to the Right, or to abandon socialism, but to *reclaim* these times *from* the Right, for socialism. It is to give the new times an alternative and more progressive 'shape and inflexion' (NT: 15) than they have received so far on the Right.

So what exactly then does 'new times' mean? Hall's reference to inflexion above suggests an indebtedness to Vološinov (see Chapter 1) and the idea of the multi-accentual sign. If the linguistic sign new

times has, under Thatcher, come to appear uni-accentual, carrying only one set of meanings, then Hall sees it as a sign whose meaning must be disarticulated from the dominant discourses of the Right and re-articulated in terms of the Left. The new times do not have a fixed and final signified from which we might 'read off' a singular prescriptive definition. Meaning is not embedded in them, but socially produced by those who articulate and accent them. If anything, new times refers to a contested sign, a site of continued struggle that is neither intrinsically progressive nor regressive, of the Right or of the Left.

New times does not simply refer to a struggle over ideas however, it also registers an historical shift to which those ideas are a response. This means the term cannot mean anything we want it to. In 'The meaning of New Times' (1989), Hall suggests the metaphor registers a number of changes taking place in contemporary society. These changes, he says, are associated with a series of 'posts', principally, post-Fordism, postmodernism and post-identity, or what he prefers to term the 'revolution of the subject'.

## FORDISM AND POST-FORDISM

The term Fordism was coined by Gramsci in the 1930s (see his essay 'Americanism and Fordism' in Gramsci (1971)). It refers to the assembly-line methods of production first used by Henry Ford to make the Model-T Ford car in the early years of the twentieth century and, more generally, to 'the era of mass production' (NT: 117) and the organisation of labour associated with it. Ford introduced routine working practices structured around a five-dollar, eight-hour working day. His automated production lines allowed him to 'convey' jobs to a static work force focusing on discrete parts of the assembly process in a manner that dramatically increased production levels. His methods drew upon Frederick Taylor's findings in *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911) which demonstrated the productivity benefits of breaking down work tasks according to time and motion studies that standardised and improved the efficiency of working practices (what is termed 'Taylorism'). As Gramsci recognised however, Fordism did not simply have implications for the work place, but created new ways of 'living and of thinking and feeling life'.

As Ford had intended it, the relatively generous working hours of his work force would give them time to enjoy the mass-produced commodities they assembled. Fordism was, therefore, closely associated with the emergence of a new mass consumer culture in the postwar years. More generally, the social effects of Fordism (e.g. fragmentation, the alienated, solitary worker, functionalism) have been linked to the cultural production of modernist movements at the start of the twentieth century. Edvard Munch's painting, *The Scream* is a classic modernist expression of the alienated and isolated individual, for example. In addition, the fragmented, broken surfaces of the cubist paintings of artists like Picasso, or the functionalism of modernist architecture, devoid of all decorative flourishes, appear very much in tune with Fordism.

While Fordist modes of production began in America in 1914, they were at their most pervasive in Western industrial societies between 1945 and 1973. Fordism was associated with the growth and stabilisation of the capitalist economy following the Depression of the 1930s. However, as recession hit again in the early 1970s, Fordism seemed less and less viable as the solution to the inherent and contradictory fluctuations of capital. Superficially at least, the 'solution' of Fordism, namely its emphasis on rigidity, on routine and on uniform, standardised forms of production and consumption, also turned out to be its problem. Fordism was not flexible enough to handle the increasingly diverse and unstable demands of the global market place.

Post-Fordism emerged out of the recession of the early 1970s and is associated with the decline of traditional industries and industrial methods of production (e.g. car manufacture in Britain) and the rise of the service sector (e.g. financial services such as insurance, pension and loan companies). It is associated with the emergence of new technologies and high-tech industries no longer constrained by locale (like ship building was to ports), but competing globally as well as locally and nationally. The global nature of post-Fordism is partly the product of what Marxist geographer David Harvey terms 'time-space compression'. Cheaper transport costs along with the rise of satellite communications and, more recently, the internet, have made the world, in the words of one telecommunications giant 'a smaller place'.



One of the effects of time-space compression, Hall suggests, is that the nation-state finds itself, as he puts it, 'in trouble'. The nation, the dominant space within which Western industrial societies have organised themselves, is threatened by the transnational character of globalisation: it loses its earlier sense of unified self-sufficiency and becomes ever more interdependent and integrated. The decentring of the nation-state is not simply an economic effect of the post-Fordist flow of capital (with its lack of concern for national frontiers). The growing awareness of environmental issues since the 1970s has contributed to a global consciousness whereby we are forced to register the fall-out of (Fordist) industrial pollution in the form of global warming and pollution. Hall gives the example of the winds that carried radiation leaking from the failed nuclear reactor at Chernobyl in Russia to Western Europe and which 'did not pause at the frontier, produce their passports and say, "Can I rain on your territory now?"' (LG: 25). Within the context of such economic and ecological global changes, Hall suggests, we are forced increasingly to recognise the nation as an 'imagined community'.

The intensified technological innovation associated with post-Fordism has displaced the more rigid practices of Fordism. For example, the work place is no longer so geographically tied to the major urban industrial centres, or for that matter, to the industrial West, for its raw materials and market. Business is increasingly mobile, able to locate itself in more 'remote' spaces: silicon valleys, the sweatshops of South East Asia, or the virtual (web) sites of cyber-

## IMAGINED COMMUNITY

A term coined by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (1983). The nation is a modern formation in Western societies. It displaced and worked to bind together or subsume, older forms of collective identification: tribal, religious, regional, and so on. The term imagined community is used as a means of signposting the constructedness of the nation and its (imaginary) claim to unity and coherence. The nation is a *symbolic* community constructed not only out of concrete boundaries, laws and institutions, but out of representations, images and narratives like those mobilised by Thatcher during the Falklands War.

space. Equally, working practices are no longer so confined to particular places (the home worker displaces the factory worker) and times (24/7 displaces 9 to 5). Consumer products are also more diverse: Fordism's 'economies of scale' (manufacturing the same product in bulk to cut production costs) have been displaced by what David Harvey (1992: 155) calls 'economies of scope'. Economies of scope are characterised by greater variety and the rise of the 'one off', the designer label, or 'limited edition'.

Such increases in flexibility should not be simply equated with a new freedom from capitalist constraints (although some critics certainly do this). For example, 'flexibility' has brought with it a rise in part-time contracts and the casualisation of labour, threatening long-term job security. It has also eroded the power of trade unions, a key feature of the collective working environments associated with Fordism. Globalisation retains and even extends unevenness and inequality; it is US-led and regulated by the most 'advanced' industrial societies who continue to share an exploitative relationship with the poorest countries in the world.

## THE GLOBAL POSTMODERN

Just as Fordism was associated with a cultural dominant (modernism), so is post-Fordism (postmodernism). As Hall notes:

Some cultural theorists argue that the trend towards greater global interdependence is leading to the breakdown of *all* strong cultural identities and is producing that fragmentation of cultural codes, that multiplicity of styles, emphasis on the ephemeral, the fleeting, the impermanent, and on difference and cultural pluralism . . . what we might call *the global post-modern* . . . The more social life becomes mediated by the global marketing of styles, places and images, by international travel, and by globally networked media images and communications systems, the more identities become detached – disembedded – from specific times, places, histories and traditions and appear 'free-floating.'

(QOCI: 302)

The sense of a shared or common collective identity, of 'cultural belongingness' becomes increasingly difficult to maintain within the

## POSTMODERNISM

In the quotation on the previous page (QOCI), Hall draws together some of the buzzwords of postmodernism: eclecticism or multiplicity of styles, the ephemeral, difference, the networked society, dislocation, the free-floating subject. However, postmodernism as a more general condition is (perhaps necessarily) more difficult to define. Nevertheless, the British cultural critic Peter Brooker makes a helpful distinction between three different uses of the term: 'postmodernity', 'postmodernism' and 'post-modern theory' (Brooker 1999):

- 1 'Postmodernity' signals the historical dimensions of postmodernism as something which emerges following the Second World War, that is, after or post-'modernism' which dominated the early decades of the twentieth century (see above). It is associated with transformations in Western capitalism characterised by the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism.
- 2 'Postmodernism' refers to the cultural condition associated with this period and the particular styles in both art and everyday life relating to it. For example, postmodern architecture is characterised by its eclecticism, its bringing together within a single building or set of buildings the styles of different periods: Renaissance, Georgian, modernist, and so on.
- 3 'Postmodern theory' refers to the theoretical debates associated with postmodernism, notably the French ex-Marxist intellectuals Jean-François Lyotard (who is associated with the rejection of 'grand' or totalising narratives such as History, or Religion); Jean Baudrillard (who is associated with the term 'simulation', or the idea that representation has become more real than the real) and the American Marxist Fredric Jameson (who is associated with a reading of post-modernism through terms like depthlessness, pastiche and fragmentation). The debates of postmodern theory are bound up more generally with structuralist and poststructuralist theory (see 'Difference and *différance*' box, p. 120) and French thinkers such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan.

new (postmodern) times. Hall addresses how globalisation disrupts 'the relatively "settled" character' (Hall 1996: 2) of traditional cultures and collectivities structured around ideas of nationality, race, class and gender. The use of the word 'relatively' here is significant. Hall is not arguing that we have moved from a time of stable, unified identities to unstable plural ones but, rather, that identities have become *increasingly* unsettled; a fact that helps explain why Thatcherism's contradictory authoritarian populism succeeded where the traditional Left, with its faith in unified collective identities, had not.

## **POST-IDENTITY OR THE REVOLUTION OF THE SUBJECT**

Together, post-Fordism and the theories associated with postmodernism help explain why the 'revolution of the subject' is so central to Hall's 'New Times' essay. The decline of older Fordist modes of production is associated with the decline of traditional communities, clocking on at the same factory, living in the same neighbourhood, drinking in the same pub. The result of this is that 'collective social subjects' – bound together by 'class or nation or group become more segmented and "pluralised"' (MNT: 119). Post-Fordism re-aligns the subject in new ways as high-tech industries, email, the internet, and so on 'network' people in increasingly dispersed, diverse ways that are no longer necessarily constituted by locale or nation but which unfold globally. Moreover, postmodern notions of subjectivity suggest it is not just collective identities that have become divided and unstable, that such divisions and instabilities are 'inside' us, defining us as subjects.

## **POST-EVERYTHING?**

In spite of his attention to post-Fordism and postmodernism in essays like 'The meaning of New Times', Hall argues they are not 'entirely satisfactory' as explanatory categories for changes in contemporary society. In an essay published in the same year he notes 'Now that, in the postmodern age, you all feel so dispersed, I become centred' (MS: 44). Hall reflects ironically here on the implications of postmodern theories of the decentred subject for his own subjectivity as a

## THE SUBJECT

'The subject' is a term used in postmodern and poststructuralist theory in place of terms like 'identity' and 'the individual' which privilege a view of 'the self' as, in Hall's terms, 'whole, centred, stable . . . or autonomous' (NT: 120). For Hall, the self is internally fragmented, incomplete, multiple and is produced and positioned – that is *subjected* to and determined within – discourse. This decentred view of identity is crucial to postmodernism, but belongs to a broader twentieth-century debate which underpins so much of Hall's thought in the 1980s and 1990s. Hall conventionally maps this debate in terms of five representative figures: Karl Marx (who described ideology as 'false consciousness'); Sigmund Freud (who exposed the workings of the unconscious); Ferdinand Saussure (who implied we are 'spoken by' language); Jacques Lacan (who revealed how identity is premised upon misrecognition and absence) and Michel Foucault (who viewed the self as both the subject of, and *subjected* to, discourse). Finally, beyond these 'Great men', Hall's theories of the subject were profoundly influenced by the new social movements of the late 1960s, particularly feminism (see Chapter 6).

Caribbean migrant *already* decentred through diaspora. In doing so he also raises questions over postmodernism as a universal condition. 'Who is he talking about?' he asks of Lyotard 'he and his friends hanging out on the Left Bank [the haunt of postwar Parisian intellectuals]?'. In a similar vein he has defined postmodernism as 'how the world dreams itself to be "American"' (PA: 132). Hall's problem with postmodernism has partly to do with its failure to attend to its own specificity and internal contradictions as a Western discourse that makes universalising claims. It is significant that of the postmodern theorists he refers to, only the Marxist intellectual Fredric Jameson is cited approvingly in his 'New Times' essay. Following Jameson, Hall pursues the "cultural logic of capital" in which contemporary culture is relentlessly material . . . And the material world . . . profoundly cultural' (NT: 128). (Jameson called this logic 'postmodernism' in his famous essay entitled 'Postmodernism or the cultural logic of late capitalism' (1984).)

For Hall, post-Fordism and postmodernism are, perhaps, best seen as *tendencies* that are uneven and contradictory, rather than marking an absolute break. (Think about the difference between the 'post' of postmodernism and the 'new' of New Times in this context: the former suggests something is over, the latter implies something has just started to emerge.) As Hall notes, the standardised products of a global chain like McDonald's are, in many ways, the epitome of Fordism. Similarly, while post-Fordism has global implications it is still rooted in advanced Western societies. Hall's New Times work is not rigidly determined by the debates on post-Fordism and post-modernism then. He is of the opinion that we are not, as he puts it, 'post-everything'.

Hall's position is that 'we tend to think about globalization in too unitary a way' (LG: 23). In contrast to the general assumption that globalisation leads to homogenisation, Hall argues that its effects have, in fact, been highly contradictory. For Hall, globalisation involves both homogenisation *and* the creation of new differences/fractures; it involves, as he puts it repeatedly, going 'local and global at the same moment' (LG: 27). There has been no straightforward erosion of the nation-state then: on the contrary, globalisation has contributed to the return of a defensive and exclusionary nationalism in many countries. Globalisation involves what Hall terms a 'double-movement'. On the one hand, we have the break-up of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and, on the other, connected to it, the rise of ethnic conflict and nationalism within locations once subsumed within a broader collectivity. Hall sees this paradoxical process exemplified in the project of Thatcherism and its production of an increasingly narrow, imperial notion of Englishness through events like the Falklands War. 'When Thatcherism speaks, frequently asking the question, "Are you one of us?" Who is one of us? . . . the numbers of people who are not one of us would fill a book' (LG: 26). So the rise of globalisation has, in many cases, produced a defensive return to national identity which, as we have seen, is a key feature of Thatcherism's 'regressive modernisation'.

What makes Hall's account of the new times distinctive is the way in which he takes up the issues of globalisation raised by the debates of post-Fordism and postmodernism in order to view them alongside

the acceleration in mass movements and migrations across the globe. While in relation to Britain, we have already seen there were migrant communities since Elizabethan times (see Chapter 4), the past few decades have seen a rapid growth in such movements (partly as a result of the time-space compression outlined above). It is not just the rise of a transnational global economy that has disrupted the unified notion of nationhood in this context, but also the postwar migrations of labour that coincide with it. As Hall notes, 'one has to remember that Englishness has not only been decentred by the great dispersal of capital to Washington, Wall Street and Tokyo, but also by this enormous influx [of migrants]' (LG: 24).

Global capitalism, Hall notes, has not simply incorporated the cultural differences opened up by these new migrant communities, it has had to work with, through and around them. For example, Hall argues that modern advertising is still, in some ways, based on the 'powerful, dominant, highly masculinist, old Fordist imagery, of a very exclusive set of identities. But side by side with them are the new exotics' (LG: 31). For example, in the UK recently, McDonald's screened television ads featuring bhangra music to sell their new range of fast food Indian snacks. Chicken tikka, big mac and fries are very much a sign of the times in Britain currently, where Indian ethnicity has become the latest fashion, a fact which multinational companies have been quick to pick up on. Some of the most pedestrian and 'provincial' products available, from John Smith's bitter to the Cadbury's chocolate ads that appear before British soap opera *Coronation Street*, have been repackaged and made over with an 'Indian' slant to them. Hall does not confuse this new attention to difference with a utopian multiculturalism. As he says 'I am not talking about some ideal space in which everybody says, "Come on in. Tell us what you think. I'm glad to hear from you"' (LG: 35). Modern advertising may work through difference but that difference also gets absorbed into the dominant culture, while at once concealing the unevenness of global culture. As Hall stresses, it is important to remember 'they are not eating the exotic cuisine in Calcutta. They are eating it in Manhattan' (LG: 33).

At the same time, Hall notes how Britain's migrant communities in Britain and elsewhere have also come into representation during

this period, telling the story of globalisation from a local perspective, through literature, music, film, painting, photography and so on. These narratives, Hall states, suggest ‘another place to stand in, another place to speak from’ (LG: 35). His ‘The meaning of New Times’ essay closes by considering how these local politics of identity, as ‘*new* forms of ethnicity’, present an alternative to the regressive identity of Englishness associated with Thatcherism:

The new times seem to have gone ‘global’ and ‘local’ at the same moment. And the question of ethnicity reminds us that everybody comes from some place – even if it is only an ‘imagined community’ – and needs some sense of identification and belonging. A politics which neglects that moment of identity and identification – without, of course, thinking of it as something permanent, fixed or essential – is not likely to be able to command the new times.

(MNT: 133)

The imagined community proposed here is very different from the one Hall associates with Thatcherism in the opening sections of this chapter. The new subjects of New Times emerge out of a recognition of *difference* (i.e. of the specific contexts out of which we all – not just people with a different complexion – speak) rather than homogeneity. They are local (i.e. particular), global and transnational rather than national. They are culturally and historically constructed *positions* rather than fixed, or natural essences. It was this view of identity-as-ethnicity, formulated here in opposition to Thatcherism’s narrow identification with Englishness, that became prevalent in Hall’s subsequent writing on black British and diaspora culture and which is the subject of the final chapter.

## **POSTSCRIPT: NEW TIMES AND NEW LABOUR**

Hall insisted during the 1980s that the renewal of the Left could not involve thinking and acting in the same way ‘only more so, harder, and with more “conviction”’ (HRR: 11), but that it had to begin by learning from the lessons of Thatcherism. Since 1997, New Labour under Tony Blair appear to have learned those lessons only too well.



The re-branded, re-packaged Labour Party has proved itself to be acutely, even obsessively, aware of the importance of entering into the ideological struggle over image and imagery that was central to Thatcherism's success. According to Hall, however, this struggle has been less an attempt to re-articulate the new times for the Left, than it has been to re-occupy the old terrain of the Right. A decade before Tony Blair became British Prime Minister, Hall *et al.* wrote of the danger 'that the Left will produce, in government, a brand of New Times which in practice does not amount to much more than a slightly cleaned-up, humanised version of that of the radical Right' (NT: 16). Not for the first time, Hall's remarks on contemporary British politics appear prophetic in hindsight. In his 1998 essay 'The great moving nowhere show' (a title that alludes to his earlier 'The great moving Right show' (1979)) Hall argued that at:

global and domestic levels, the broad parameters of the 'turn' which Thatcherism made have not been radically modified or reversed. The project of renewal thus remains roughly where it did when *Marxism Today* [the magazine in which the *New Times* debates unfolded] published its final issue. Mr Blair seems to have learned some of the words. But, sadly, he has forgotten the music.

(GMN: 14)

## SUMMARY

This chapter began by highlighting the disjunction between Britain's bleak economic outlook under Mrs Thatcher and the successes of the ideological project Hall calls Thatcherism. Through the example of the Falklands War, we noted some of the key elements of Thatcherism's ideological imagery: Englishness, imperial nostalgia, patriarchy, moral values. Hall's central argument in relation to this imagery is that Thatcherism is a contradictory project characterised by 'regressive modernisation' and 'authoritarian populism'. We considered the implications of contradictory Thatcherism for thinking about class as an increasingly unstable formation which the Left had failed to understand.

In the second part of the chapter we considered Hall's New Times project and its call for the Left to move with the times. Hall suggests Thatcherism was actually a response to a wider global crisis in capitalism and that there is nothing intrinsically Thatcherite about the new times. Through an exploration of post-Fordism and postmodernism we examined Hall's views on globalisation and its implications for politics and political identities. Where Thatcherism's response to globalisation was to retreat into a narrow exclusionary vision of English identity, Hall proposes a more progressive politics of identity-as-ethnicity in response to the new times.

Finally, it should be noted that Hall's work on Thatcherism and New Times has proved to be his most controversial so far, receiving criticism from an array of Left intellectuals, including Sivanandan (1990), Hirst (1989) and Jessop *et al.* (1998). The most frequently cited example of this criticism comes from Jessop *et al.* who have two main problems with Hall's project. First, they feel that it gives far too much emphasis to the ideological aspects of Thatcherism granting it a greater authority and coherence than it actually had. Second, and related to this, they argue that it underplays the economic conditions of Thatcherism. Hall offers a robust response to these critics in his introduction to *The Hard Road to Renewal*.



## THE REAL ME

In the previous chapter we saw Hall considering the implications of the new times for an alternative politics of identity emphasising difference over homogeneity, the local and transnational over the national, contingent ‘positions’ over pure, fixed origins. These issues of identity became the linchpins of Hall’s research during the late 1980s and 1990s when he published around a dozen articles on the subject. In these essays Hall moves away from the more specific concerns raised in response to Thatcherism to pursue the metaphors of ethnicity (already flagged up at the end of Hall’s ‘New Times’ essay) and diaspora within a broader post-colonial and multicultural context. Ethnicity, diaspora, the post-colonial and the multicultural: these intersecting concepts are explored, in turn, below in terms of a range of Hall’s essays including ‘New ethnicities’ (1988), ‘Minimal selves’ (1987) and ‘When was the “post-colonial”?’ (1996). First, though, we need to consider further a fifth concept introduced in the previous chapter that is central to the first four: identity.

### **IDENTITY POLITICS AND THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY**

The position on identity that Hall takes at the end of ‘The meaning of New Times’ is not simply a political alternative to that embraced

by Thatcherism. It is also part of a more radical attempt to think beyond the structures associated with traditional 'identity politics'. The notion of 'identity politics' emerges in the late 1960s and 1970s and is associated with new social movements in North America and Western Europe such as the women's liberation movement and the rise of black consciousness. A traditional identity politics defines itself in terms of an absolute, undivided commitment to, and identification with, a particular community; a group which presents a united front through the exclusion of all others. Phrases such as 'it's a black thing', 'it's a gay thing', 'it's a women's thing', carry the traces of a traditional identity politics in that they imply a group identity that is unified through exclusion. This kind of identity politics, based on an unbending solidarity, has many strengths and was particularly successful in placing black, women's and gay rights on the political agenda. Nevertheless, such an identity politics also has built into it certain problems. Take, for example, the women's liberation movement and the feminist politics associated with it. In the early 1980s, black feminists began to challenge this politics which relied upon the implicit assumption that all women were the same while either suppressing internal differences, or presenting them as Other. Within this context white feminists (they were no longer simply 'feminists') were accused of using 'woman' as a universal category, a process which involved forgetting the cultural specificity of their own speaking positions as *white Western* women. Essays such as Hazel Carby's 'White woman listen! Black feminism and the boundaries of sisterhood' (1982), or the special issue of *Feminist Review* 'Many voices, one chant: black feminist perspectives' (Amos *et al.* 1984) boldly register the differences silenced within earlier feminist discourse.

On one level, Hall's work of the late 1980s and 1990s needs to be read as an attempt to rethink (not reject) this older notion of identity politics. In a sense, Hall's work has always displayed a certain scepticism about politics committed to singular, homogeneous, unified identities such as 'the' working class, or 'the' black community. However, it is only in the late 1980s – and in line with the theoretical developments on subjectivity outlined in the previous chapter, that he seeks explicitly to define a new politics of identity:

[The] recognition . . . of the impossibility of 'identity' in its fully unified meaning, does, of course, transform our sense of what identity politics is about. It transforms the nature of political commitment. Hundred-and-one percent commitment is no longer possible . . . Looking at new conceptions of identity requires us also to look at redefinitions of the forms of politics which follow that: the politics of difference, the politics of self-reflexivity, a politics that is open to contingency but still able to act. The politics of infinite dispersal is no politics at all.

(MS: 117)

Hall's politics of identity centres on three specific terms to which he repeatedly returns in essays of this period: *difference*, *self-reflexivity* and *contingency*. The politics of *difference* involves a recognition of the 'many' within the 'one' and a rejection of clear-cut binary oppositions that rigidly divide diverse communities into discrete unities: black/white, straight/gay, male/female. Differences are no longer externalised, but *internal* to identities (both group and 'individual'). *Self-reflexivity* involves foregrounding the specificity of the position from which we speak: we can no longer assume a natural, universal speaking position in this context. *Contingency* involves a sense of dependency on other events or contexts, of recognising the political positions we take up are not set in stone, that we may need to re-position ourselves over time and in different circumstances. If the women's liberation movement was a progressive movement within one set of circumstances (see above), it was also a regressive movement within another.

These three terms – difference, self-reflexivity, contingency – are central to an understanding of Hall's alternative politics of identity and will be fleshed out in relation to specific examples below. First, though, it is crucial to recognise Hall's final point in the quotation above that alone they are insufficient. 'A politics of difference', he insists must be *still able to act*, the 'politics of infinite dispersal is no politics at all'.

## DIFFERENCE THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Difference, self-reflexivity and contingency are no innocent terms, but are derived from postmodern and poststructuralist theory which

## DIFFERENCE AND *DIFFÉRENCE*

Difference is the key concept in Hall's work on identity. His use of the term is carefully positioned in relation to, and derives much of its significance from, Jacques Derrida's (non)concept of *différance*. In terms of structuralism we have seen that language is a system of differences with no positive terms. The meaning of the signifier 'hot' is secured and made distinctive in terms of what it is *not*: cold. Derrida's notion of *différance* exploits the 'play' of meaning in the French original which means both 'to differ' and 'to defer'. Derrida's *différance* underpins the logic of poststructuralism. Because meaning is not entirely present in the signifier 'hot', which derives its meaning from elsewhere in the chain of signification ('cold') language creates an endless deferral of meaning. Where structuralism allowed meaning to be fixed through a series of oppositions, meaning is always somewhere else for Derrida. We never arrive at the final signified which is perpetually postponed, deferred, slipping beyond our grasp.

is, in turn, associated (particularly by Marxist critics) with the abandonment of politics. This helps explain Hall's qualifying remark above. Difference, Hall has insisted on more than one occasion, must be *capable of making a difference*.

In his writings on identity, Hall is careful to distance himself from those poststructuralists (not Derrida, necessarily) who have used *différance* to mean the 'infinite postponement of meaning' (CID: 397) or to celebrate the 'formal playfulness' of texts at the expense of their political positions. Hall has spoken of 'loosening the moorings' (CP: 33) in this context, a metaphor which neatly captures his sense that identities are not firmly anchored or fixed to the spot, but are not entirely free-floating either.

In his essay 'Minimal selves', Hall uses the grammatical image of the sentence in an extended metaphor that indicates his *différance*, that is his difference from *and* dependence on Derrida (for whom language is always primary):

Is it possible for there to be action or identity in the world without arbitrary closure – what one might call the necessity to meaning of the end of the

sentence? Potentially, discourse is endless: the infinite semiosis of meaning. But to say anything in particular, you do have to stop talking. Of course every full stop is provisional . . . It's not forever, not totally universally true. It's not underpinned by infinite guarantees. But just now this is what I mean; this is who I am . . . Full stop. OK.

(MS: 45)

Where a certain brand of postmodernism might emphasise the endless deferral ('infinite semiosis') of meaning as it moves from position to position, sentence to sentence, for Hall it is crucial to remember that meaning is generated when it 'stops'. This (full) stop is never final or fixed, always arbitrary and contingent, but such positionings remain necessary to any politics of identity. This is why self-reflexivity, contingency and difference alone are not enough for Hall: 'there has to be a *politics of articulation*', a means of linking or bringing together individuals to form new alliances. (Hall's theory of identity is also based on an articulation, a bringing together of Derridean deconstruction, Gramscian hegemony and the work of Laclau and Mouffe.)

Where in traditional identity politics such alliances were formed through an emphasis on unity and the suppression of difference, Hall prefers the idea of "'unities"-in-difference' (MS: 45). In this context, identity is not nomadic, endlessly wandering or deferred; on the contrary it recognises that:

every identity is placed, positioned, in a culture, a language, a history . . . It insists on specificity, on conjuncture. But it is not necessarily armour-plated against other identities. It is not tied to fixed, permanent, unalterable oppositions. It is not wholly defined by exclusion.

(MS: 46)

In short then, while the vocabulary of difference/*différance* that Hall uses to rethink identity would seem to locate his work within a broader developing theoretical debate over postmodern subjectivity in the 1980s and 1990s, this would be to neglect its conjunctural character. Hall's primary concern within his essays on identity is not with keeping abreast of the latest theoretical trends, but with identifying and trying to explain certain historical shifts he sees taking place



within the culture of the Caribbean and black British diaspora. In order to demonstrate Hall's theories in practice now, we will consider one of Hall's most influential statements on identity, ethnicity and diaspora: 'New ethnicities' (1988).

## NEW ETHNICITIES

Where the term 'race' is usually associated with physical, or biological differences in such things as skin and eye colour, 'ethnicity' describes social or cultural differences that are not necessarily visible or grounded in nature. As it is used in 'New ethnicities', ethnicity is an anti-essentialist term, an attempt to understand the cultural construction of difference, rather than difference as a biological or racial marker that is fixed in our genes. 'The term ethnicity acknowledges the place of history, language and culture in the construction of subjectivity as well as the fact that all discourse is placed, positioned, situated, and all knowledge contextual' (NE: 446). It is this understanding of ethnicity that allows Hall to offer a re-reading of a major category of difference – 'black' – not as a racial marker, a matter of pigmentation or skin colour, but as an historical and discursive 'positioning' that has shifted (and is therefore *contingent*) over history. More particularly, it allows him to locate 'black' within the British context at a significant historical conjuncture as an identity formation that is *presently shifting* from one position or context to another. 'New ethnicities' begins by tentatively describing this shift in terms of two moments that are overlapping rather than consecutive, but which viewed together indicate the re-positioning 'black' as a label of identification. The first moment saw the emergence of the term 'black' in Britain as:

the organising category of a new politics of resistance, amongst groups and communities with, in fact, very different histories, traditions and ethnic identities. In this moment, politically speaking, 'The black experience', as a singular and unifying framework based on the building up of identity across ethnic and cultural difference between different communities, became 'hegemonic' over other ethnic/racial identities.

(NE: 441)

In order to understand this first moment it is necessary to know that while the label 'black' was imported from the US and shared many of its American connotations, it also has a quite specific context (position) and meaning in Britain where it has historically referred to African, Caribbean and South Asian communities. These different communities articulated themselves through the singular term black, a positive identification (particularly apparent in 1970s' slogans like 'black is beautiful' and 'black power') that displaced earlier ones such as 'immigrants' and 'coloureds'. This investment in a unified black community is a concrete example of the traditional identity politics outlined earlier. It places an emphasis on unity rather than difference, while reversing the oppositional logic of racism through the construction of an essentially good black subject and an essentially bad white subject. Hall is not dismissive of this politics; on the contrary, he argues that historically it has been, and *continues to be*, a necessary fiction in the struggle against racism in postwar Britain. Nevertheless, it remains a fiction, and one that, rather than deconstructing the polar structures of racism, reproduces them by inverting their logic. Because black tends to operate as a universal, *racial* signifier in this moment, it fails to see its own constructedness (it is not *self-reflexive*), the positions out of which it emerges and from which it speaks.

The second moment (which emerges roughly from the mid-1980s) Hall describes as 'the end of the innocent notion of the essential black subject':

What is at issue here is the recognition of the extraordinary diversity of subjective positions, social experiences and cultural identities which compose the category 'black'; that is, the recognition that 'black' is essentially a politically and culturally *constructed* category which cannot be grounded in a set of fixed trans-cultural or transcendental categories and which therefore has no guarantees in nature.

(NE: 443)

This second moment suggests a shift in the positioning of 'black' from a traditional identity politics predicated on *unity* to one that is closer to the second politics of identity outlined earlier by Hall and which is predicated on *difference*. This is a politics of identity that is both

*self-reflexive* (in that it is founded on the *recognition* that ‘black’ is essentially constructed) and *contingent* (in that it cannot be grounded in a set of *fixed categories*). In the first moment black was a ‘hegemonic’ term. That is, it operated through, while concealing a set of power relations between certain identities: it saw particular ethnicities *become dominant* over others.

To put this in concrete terms, ‘black’ as it was used in the 1970s and early 1980s tended to privilege African-Caribbean over South Asian ethnicities, male and masculinist gender positions over female and feminist ones and ‘straight’ over queer sexualities. ‘Black’ in this first moment depended on the *subordination* of certain speaking positions in order to forge a positive and coherent identity politics. The work of reggae musician and poet, Linton Kwesi Johnson is closely associated with this first moment in Britain. His poems were often performed at black demonstrations and protests and work to provide a communal, ‘representative’ black voice that is united in opposition to a wider white racist culture. For example, ‘It dread inna Ingran’ was a poem first performed in Bradford at a protest to free George Lindo, a Jamaican wrongly convicted of armed robbery in the 1970s. It speaks of the solidarity of the black community in the face of white hostility:

rite now,  
African  
Asian  
West Indian  
an Black British  
stan firm inna Ingran  
(Johnson 2002: 25)

The poem was part of a larger body of cultural production articulating positive black identification across a range of ethnicities in the 1970s. Nevertheless, and without wanting to dispute the radical political importance of the hegemonic, collective black identity mobilised through such work, this was often at the expense of other speaking positions. For example, Johnson’s poem was eventually published in the collection *Ingran is a Bitch*, a title that adopts an empowering,

racially oppositional rhetoric that simultaneously denigrates women, white *and* black. It speaks in an aggressively male, masculinist register that relies upon the suppression of alterity.

From the mid-1980s we find an increasing proliferation and recognition of these subordinate identities and the erosion of 'black' as a natural, fixed identification. It is no coincidence then that 'New ethnicities' cites the work of Hanif Kureishi – a British-born South Asian artist of dual heritage (Pakistani father, English mother) famous for his foregrounding of queer sexualities – as exemplary in terms of this shift. Before we consider Kureishi's work and its relationship to the shifting identity politics outlined above, we first need to consider the debates around representation in relation to which Hall's two moments are (discursively) positioned.

## THE BURDEN OF REPRESENTATION

Hall's thoughts on the shifting politics of identity in 'New ethnicities' are not based on anthropological studies of actual 'flesh-and-blood' people but arise out of a consideration of black British film in the 1980s. First and foremost then, his is an account of ethnicity as it is *produced within* representation. This does not make his account of identity any less 'real'. For Hall there is no understanding of identity outside of culture and representation, a fact he sometimes makes explicit through his use of the phrase '*cultural* identity'.

'New ethnicities' describes representation as a 'slippery character' and the essay puts into operation various meanings of the word. For example, it distinguishes between the more conventional, 'mimetic' notion of representation and a more radical postmodern version. In the first, books, films and so on are understood as *re-presentations*, that is, reflections or reproductions of the real world 'outside' them. In the second, there is nothing outside discourse. At stake here is the end of representation as such: there is nothing beyond discourse which books and films might be said to represent. Hall offers an alternative to these two extremes: there *is* a real world outside representation but we can only make it signify and 'mean' through representation. Moreover, representations are not reflexive but *constitutive* and therefore have a real, material impact. So, for Hall, it is not by chance that

historically black culture in Britain has appeared marginal and inferior. It has been constituted or constructed as such through the dominant regimes of representation adopted and 'normalized' by institutions such as the media (NE: 441). Within these representations the black experience is either absent or, when it does appear, stereotypical in character (e.g. *The Black and White Minstrel Show*). Blacks tend to be the objects (produced by) rather than subjects (the producers) of representation in this period.

The major contribution of Hall's essay is the connection it establishes between these dominant modes of representation and the first and second moments of identification outlined above. 'Culturally', he argues, the construction of a hegemonic, or unified black identity 'formulated itself in terms of a critique of the way blacks were positioned as the unspoken and invisible "other" of predominantly white aesthetic and cultural discourses' (NE: 441). Hall is making a link here between the marginal status of blacks to the dominant modes of representation and the construction of a *representative* black experience. 'New ethnicities' might be read as an exploration of the tension between representation as a process of artistic depiction (e.g. making a film) and representation as a form of delegation (speaking *for* the entire black community as a 'representative'). Because the opportunities 'to come into representation' were so few and far between, there was a certain *burden* placed on black artists to be representative and speak for the whole black community. Equally, there was a pressure to counter the 'negative' representations of blacks within mainstream culture with 'positive' black representations. These burdens of representation – very much in evidence in the work of Linton Kwesi Johnson – are entangled with a traditional identity politics in terms of their emphasis on black unity rather than difference and on the empowering, positive aspects of that identity.

The second moment involves a shift from the 'struggle over the relations of representation to a politics of representation itself' (NE: 442). This shift involves a move from the mimetic view of representation to the view that representation plays a constitutive role in the construction of 'black' identity. There is a tendency in the representations of the first moment to try to 'tell it how it really is'. This is evident in the desire to 'document' the plight of the black community

witnessed already in Johnson's work. In a similar context, black British film critic Kobena Mercer has noted how realism was the dominant genre of the first black film makers of the 1970s, who used the documentary tradition to 'correct' black stereotypes circulated within the mainstream media (Mercer 1988, 1994; Mercer and Julien 1988). These realist forms of representation implicitly assume there is an authentic, 'true' black subject 'out there' to be rescued from the lies and fictions of racist society.

A politics of representation, on the other hand, proceeds with the recognition that 'black' is a discursively produced category constructed through representation, not something that is outside it, and that it is the duty of representation to render as authentically as possible. Black films of the 1980s such as *Handsworth Songs* (1987) and *Territories* (1984), which are both cited in 'New ethnicities', exemplify this shift. Both take documentary footage circulated within the white mainstream media and, rather than replace it with a more authentic documentary as happened in the earlier tradition, deconstruct it by 'cutting-and-pasting' the footage to produce fragmentary narratives, or juxtaposing it with dissonant music. The effect is to denaturalise the footage in order to expose the limits of the white documentary tradition. At stake here is a mode of representation that privileges quotation, pastiche and fragmentation in order to draw into question the very idea of 'the real', to reveal the constructedness of 'black' and the differences dominant representations of blackness have concealed. In doing this such films display a recognition of the relationship between representation and power while seeking to contest those powers by revealing the fictions on which they are based.

Where the struggle in the first moment involved a reversal of oppositional differences, 'putting in the place of the bad old essential white subject, the new essentially good black subject' (NE: 444), the second moment emphasises the internal differences that cross and complicate the supposedly unified category 'black' and recognises as fictional the idea that all blacks are 'good' or all the 'same'. Here, the oppositional logic of the first moment unwittingly repeats the binary them-and-us logic of racism, showing complicity with the racist stereotype that 'they all look the same'. The second moment seeks to deconstruct the logic of racism by exposing its basis in representation

and therefore the position from which it speaks. This reveals the universalising, transcendental tendencies of dominant Western discourses (such as the documentary tradition) which claim to speak for all while emerging from specific contexts. Ethnicity does not just refer to black people in this context. If 'white' or 'English' have traditionally been transcendental categories they now must recognise themselves as ethnically marked (see Dyer 1997).

## **CHEERING FICTIONS: *MY BEAUTIFUL LAUNDRETTE***

In its closing paragraph, Hall's essay cites Hanif Kureishi's film *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) as exemplary of the shift in the politics of black representation taking place in the mid-to-late 1980s:

*My Beautiful Laundrette* is one of the most riveting and important films produced by a black writer in recent years . . . precisely for the reason that made it so controversial: its refusal to represent the black experience as monolithic, self-contained, sexually stabilised and always 'right on' – in a word, always and only positive.

(NE: 449)

The film tells the story of a gay relationship between the white working-class Johnny and the budding Asian entrepreneur Omar within the context of the homophobic and racially intolerant culture associated with Thatcherism in the mid-1980s. What is radical about *My Beautiful Laundrette* is its refusal to take sides, the way it disrupts the conventional binarisms associated with the first moment of representation by refusing to subscribe to the orthodox equation between good black/bad white subjects. For instance, by presenting some Asians as chauvinistic, materialistic businessmen capitalising on an exploitative enterprise culture, as 'drug dealers, sodomites and mad landlords', the film refuses a positive, 'right on' version of black culture. For example, it confidently shatters the 'expected' narrative of Asians as the *victims* of an uncaring Thatcherism. More generally the film's handling of South Asian ethnicities, of queer sexualities and of aspirational middle-class culture all disrupt the hegemonic represen-

tation of 'black' in the first moment as African-Caribbean, as male and masculinist and as working class. In an essay tellingly entitled 'Dirty washing' (quoted in 'New ethnicities'), Kureishi speaks of the need to move beyond the 'cheering fictions' associated with the first moment: 'the writer as public relations officer, as hired liar . . . a serious attempt to understand Britain today . . . can't apologise or idealize. It can't sentimentalize and it can't represent only one group as having a monopoly on virtue' (NE: 449). The second moment of representation provocatively evoked here by Kureishi in the mid-1980s has become increasingly popular within contemporary British Asian film and television. Meera Syal *et al.*'s *Goodness Gracious Me!* (1996) and *Anita and Me* (2002), Gurinder Chadha's *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993) and *Bend it Like Beckham* (2002), and Ayub Khan's *East is East* (2000), all prefer to satirise British Asian culture rather than defend or idealise it. In different ways each of these films also embraces the new politics of identity signalled in Hall's 'New ethnicities', highlighting the internal differences and contingent positions of a community which is no longer self-contained or monolithic.

This is not to say the artists of this second moment are somehow 'better', or more complex. The burden of representation has, in some ways, become lighter for this new generation of artists, who through the advent of institutions like Channel 4 have gained increasing access to the dominant modes of cultural expression. Hall's work of the 1980s and 1990s has been quick to register this shift, which also helps to explain a shift in his own thinking. Where previously Hall's work on 'race' had tended to focus on the issue of blacks as the product, or object of media discourses (as in *Policing the Crisis*), from the mid-1980s it tends to focus more specifically on the aesthetics of black cultural production itself, particularly photography and film (see Hall 1984 and 1993, and Hall and Bailey 1992, for example).

## DIASPORA AESTHETICS

Hall's recent focus on the aesthetics of black cultural production does not indicate a retreat from politics. As the account of Hall's work on the politics of representation above should indicate, aesthetics and politics are interdependent issues. Among other things 'New



ethnicities' proposes two moments in the politics of identity and both are bound up with issues of representation. The first moment (identity politics) is characterised by a realist aesthetic and the second (the politics of identity) by a postmodern aesthetic. As we have seen in this chapter, though, Hall is suspicious of the totalising claims of postmodernism and 'New ethnicities' ultimately signals the difference and cultural specificity of the forms in which it is interested through the concept of diaspora.

In 'New ethnicities', Hall uses diaspora as a metaphorical rather than a literal concept to foreground an anti-essentialist notion of identity and representation that privileges journey over arrival, mobility over fixity, routes rather than roots. As he puts it elsewhere: 'diaspora does not refer us to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all cost return, even if it means pushing other people into the sea' (CID: 401). Rather, Hall uses diaspora to signal an aesthetic that

## BLACK BRITISH FILM

Hall's most recent thinking on identity, diaspora and the new politics of representation in black British cultural production has been highly influential in relation to a new generation of young black photographers and film makers during the 1980s and 1990s. Hall was involved with film workshops such as Sankofa in the 1980s, a collective that brought together Isaac Julien, Martina Attille and Maureen Blackwood, among others.

As Isaac Julien recalls, 'Stuart was an active supporter of the Ethnic Minority Arts Committee of the Greater London Council, who funded Sankofa originally. In particular he had argued for the support of the black arts in London'. Hall's thinking had an impact on the making of Sankofa's *The Passion of Remembrance*, a film Hall discusses in 'New ethnicities'. Later films like *Looking for Langston* incorporate voice-overs by Hall, while in *The Attendant*, Hall makes a cameo appearance. Hall's impact on the black arts in Britain is not limited to the 1980s however, but dates back at least as far as his involvement with the London-based Caribbean Artists Movement (CAM) in the late 1960s and 1970s.

## DIASPORA

'Diaspora' has its roots in the Greek word 'diaspeiran', 'dia' meaning over or through and 'speiren' meaning sow or scatter. As this etymology suggests, diaspora places an emphasis on movement and migration over soil and settlement. While until relatively recently diaspora was used quite specifically to refer to the dispersal of the Jews, it has become an increasingly diasporic concept, referring to a range of global migrations (black, Asian, Caribbean, Irish, African, etc.) and travelling concepts (routes, crossings, borders). Hall uses it both literally (e.g. to refer to the specific composition of the Caribbean diaspora community (see Hall 1975 and 1978)) and metaphorically (e.g. to refer to the radical impurity of black cinematic forms). Either way, his use of the term tends to evoke a tension with the notion of nation and national identity as something pure, self-contained and unified. When he says 'The Caribbean is the first, the original and the purest diaspora' (Hall 1995: 6), he is registering the exemplary character of the Caribbean as a diaspora community born out of global migrations from elsewhere, through the ironic use of a nationalist rhetoric of origins and purity.

he sees as increasingly prominent in cinematic representations by Caribbean and black British artists, an aesthetic that foregrounds difference, hybridity, blends and cross-overs. At the same time, Hall has put clear water between his use of the term and the celebratory reading of diaspora offered within some accounts of postmodernism and post-colonialism where the migrant is a cosmopolitan nomad. In contrast to the rootless nomadic subject, Hall qualifies his position by noting that even diaspora discourse is *placed* and, as we have already seen, his notion of new ethnicity foregrounds the positionality and contextuality of diaspora identities rather than a 'free-floating' subject. Equally significant is the political context in which he uses diaspora vocabularies in 'New ethnicities' as an alternative to the nation-centred 'hegemonic concept of "Englishness" which, under Thatcherism, stabilizes so much of the dominant political and cultural discourses' (NE: 447).

## THE POST-COLONIAL AND THE MULTICULTURAL

This chapter closes with a brief account of some of the main developments in Hall's thinking since the mid-1990s. Published in 1996, 'When was "the post-colonial"?: thinking at the limit' appears in many ways a logical direction for Hall's work to take. Not only do his writings on diaspora and identity discussed above refer us to some of the key figures (from Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire to Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak) associated with 'the post-colonial', it is within post-colonial studies that this work on identity has perhaps been most influential. However, the essay is ultimately less a post-colonial analysis than it is an attempt to analyse 'the post-colonial' as a *concept*.

At its most literal, the post-colonial seems to refer to the period *after* formal colonisation has ended. For example, India went from being a colonial to a post-colonial country in 1947, following independence from the British empire. However, as Hall explains, the problem is that more often than not the term 'doesn't mean what it obviously means' (Hall 1999: 1). If we live in a period after colonialism, then what about neocolonialism? Why do so many post-colonial critics rarely stray from colonial discourse? Is the US post-colonial? In short, where and when (note the tense of Hall's title) exactly, is/was 'post-colonial'?

It is within this context that Hall works, not to *define* the term, but to explore and 'clarify' what it has meant and what it might mean in future. 'The post-colonial' is placed in inverted commas, both to register a broader sense of the term's indeterminacy within the academy and to signal his use of it as a concept 'under erasure'. This is a deconstructive, Derridean move that allows Hall both to indicate the limits, silences and problems with the concept, and suggest there is no other better term available.

Hall's intervention comes at a specific moment within the history of post-colonial studies, a fact that is only acknowledged obliquely in the essay but which is helpful to an understanding of it. It appears following the rapid institutionalisation of the field during the early 1990s (a trajectory paralleled by cultural studies) which provoked a critical backlash against many of the concepts and theories of its main

practitioners. One of the main accusations was that post-colonial studies lacks political foundation, preferring instead a celebratory aesthetics of hybridity and diaspora. 'When was the "post-colonial"?' might be read on one level as a defence of the political possibilities of 'post-colonial'. More generally, though, the essay seeks to clarify the meaning of the post-colonial concept to consider what are the term's historical and geographical 'limits' (where does it begin and end?) and, more importantly, how the field *delimits* or divides up the world.

For example, the essay begins by recapping the 'case against' the post-colonial via the work of three prominent critics in the field. Ella Shohat and Anne McClintock criticise the term for its imprecision, its blurring of the boundaries between coloniser/colonised and colonial/post-colonial, for instance. The effect of this, they suggest, is that the term loses its specificity and becomes universalised. In addition to these criticisms, Arif Dirlik accuses post-colonialism of being a 'celebratory', poststructuralist discourse that neglects the workings of capital and relies upon a discursive understanding of identity. Meanwhile, all three criticise the field for marketing the margins in a way that makes them complicit with, rather than critical of, the 'centre'.

Hall responds by arguing that while such criticism needs to be taken seriously, it nevertheless relies upon a nostalgic call for a return to 'real' politics, 'hard' facts and a clear division between 'us' and 'them'. What is useful about the 'post-colonial' concept, Hall suggests, is the way it moves away from a binaristic understanding of difference to a sense of *différance* that disrupts oppositional limits like here/there, then/now. The difference between anti-colonial and post-colonial struggle involves a shift from 'one conception of difference to another' (WWP: 247). If the terms of Hall's analysis here seem to embrace poststructuralism at the expense of Marxism, it is worth noting that he also couches his argument in Gramscian terms, suggesting that Shohat *et al.* risk retreating from a 'war of position' to a 'war of manoeuvre' (WWP: 244) by exchanging contingent positionalities for a fixed and final position. This retreat, Hall suggests, fails to learn from the lessons of the recent past, which has shown the folly of binaristic thinking. Responding to Shohat's call for 'clear "lines

in the sand” between (post-colonial) goodies and (Western) baddies’ within the context of the Gulf War in 1993, Hall argues the war actually represented a ‘classic’ post-colonial event, precisely because it eroded such lines. The Gulf War demanded a recognition of the atrocities of the US against the Iraqi people in defence of oil *and* Saddam Hussein’s atrocities against his own people.

This is not the same as arguing that the post-colonial is any time or any place and Hall concedes the point that there *is* a universalising tendency in the concept and a need to discriminate and delimit: clearly if the US, Britain and Jamaica are all ‘post-colonial’ then they are not so in the same way. In this sense, we need to attend to the unevenness of the term and be explicit about the level of abstraction we intend when using it (WWP: 245). Discrimination in the use of the term ‘post-colonial’ should be descriptive rather than evaluative. This involves recognising that colonisation, like decolonisation, is a global *process*, rather than something that simply unfolds overseas. In this context, Hall provocatively challenges current trends in the field by suggesting the concept *should be* universalising (which is not to say universal), that is, capable of abstraction. The post-colonial allows us to re-think colonialism ‘as part of an essentially transnational, trans-cultural “global” process [that] produces a decentred, diasporic or global re-writing of earlier nation-centred imperial narratives. “Global” here does not mean universal, but it is not nation – or society – specific either’ (WWP: 247).

The intricate theoretical arguments of ‘When was the “post-colonial”?’ have been taken in a more obviously pragmatic direction in Hall’s most recent work as a member of the Runnymede Commission on ‘The future of multi-ethnic Britain’ (see *The Future of Multi-ethnic Britain: The Parekh Report* (2000)). The Parekh Report was part of a broader body of research conducted by Hall between 1998 and 2000 on what he has termed ‘the multicultural question’. Hall argues that while multiculturalism seems a tired, overused category, rethought, it ‘contain[s] the seeds of a major disruption in our normal common sense political assumptions’ (TMQ: 1). Hall points to the conjunctural significance of multicultural debates in terms of, for instance, the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, the rise of racial tensions in the UK and Europe and the celebrations surrounding the Windrush

anniversary in 1998. In doing so, he reveals that the multicultural remains an unresolved, contradictory question. On the one hand, there is what Hall terms a 'multicultural drift' as Britain's black and Asian communities become an increasingly visible feature of national life, imagined in transient New Labour slogans like 'Cool Britannia'. On the other hand, Hall refers to the return of the kind of 'common sense policing' that he associated with Thatcherism: tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime.

Hall proceeds, as he does with 'post-colonial', by placing multiculturalism 'under erasure'. He uses the word 'adjectivally' in order to describe the cultural formations and political dilemmas that are a consequence of the emergence of heterogeneous societies. In doing so, he distances himself from the 'substantive' use of the term (multiculturalism) to refer to the various postwar policies developed to 'manage' multicultural societies. Returning to the debates on globalisation he first raised a decade earlier (see Chapter 5), Hall argues that difference, as much as homogeneity, is what characterises contemporary society. The multicultural is not a policy decision, a life-style choice, or a version of hybridity 'where life is nothing so much as a Scandinavian smorgasbord (help yourself)', but an 'inevitable process of cultural translation' (TMQ: 6).

**SUMMARY**

In this chapter we have considered Hall's move beyond traditional 'identity politics' in order to address an alternative 'politics of identity'. Where traditional identity politics involves 100 per cent commitment to, and identification with, a particular cultural group or collective, Hall's politics of identity stresses difference, self-reflexivity and contingency. Focusing on Hall's 'New ethnicities' essay, this chapter has illustrated how these different notions of identity have been articulated within a black British context. Hall's essay identifies a shifting burden of representation within black cultural production across the postwar period, from a mimetic realism privileging 'authenticity' to a more self-reflexive mode of representation that foregrounds the constructedness of identity. Through a consideration of the work of Linton Kwesi Johnson and Hanif Kureishi, we pursued the correspondence between a shift in the politics of identity and a shift in the politics of representation. Finally, this chapter considered some of Hall's most recent contributions to debates on post-colonialism and multiculturalism.

# AFTER HALL

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In two substantial collections of essays on Hall, *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (Morley and Chen 1996) and *Without Guarantees: In honour of Stuart Hall* (Gilroy *et al.* 2000), Hall's impact on the formation and development of cultural studies has been substantially documented. *Stuart Hall* gathers a selection of key writings by, and interviews with, Hall alongside a range of valuable essays that extend, or critically reflect upon his thinking. This text remains the single most important and ambitious document of Hall's contribution so far, making it essential reading for students of Hall/cultural studies.

*Without Guarantees* (Gilroy *et al.* 2000), is an equally illuminating collection of new essays 'in honour' of what the editors refer to as 'an inspirational figure for generations of academics'. Including pieces by Gayatri Spivak, James Clifford, Doreen Massey, Judith Butler, Wendy Brown, Henry Giroux and Sean Nixon, the book is a testament to the important influence Hall has had on some of the key critical thinkers of the postwar period. Associated respectively with post-colonial studies, cultural anthropology, geography, feminism, political science, education and sociology, these thinkers also indicate the significant impact of Hall's thought beyond cultural studies.

Both essay collections are edited by, and contain contributions



from, former students of Hall, who retired from The Open University in 1997 following a teaching career spanning four decades. Hall's legacy is, perhaps, most immediately tangible in the younger generation of colleagues and graduate students he taught and worked with at the CCCS and OU. Many of these – including Lawrence Grossberg, Chas Critcher, Paul Willis, Paul Gilroy, Angela McRobbie, Dick Hebdige, Iain Chambers, Hazel Carby, Charlotte Brundson, Tony Bennett and David Morley – are, today, internationally renowned scholars. All have played a major role in helping to set the agendas for the next generation of cultural studies work in both Britain and overseas. While it would be a mistake to reduce the diverse positions of these thinkers to a single influence, the extent to which Hall's central concerns in areas such as popular culture, race, ethnicity, youth culture, the media and popular culture have been picked up and extended by them is undeniable.

*Without Guarantees* and *Stuart Hall* contain contributions from over a dozen countries, registering something of the international scope of contemporary cultural studies and Hall's increasingly significant reputation outside Britain (see Stratton and Ang (1996) for an excellent account of these issues). The rapid institutionalisation of cultural studies during the 1980s and 1990s and its emergence as a major academic discipline in the UK and overseas (particularly in the US and Australia) has been accompanied by a substantial reassessment of the field and its key theories and thinkers. Through these accounts, something like an orthodox history of cultural studies has emerged in which phrases like 'the Birmingham school' and 'British cultural studies' (which Hall, as a diasporic intellectual, notes is an 'awkward signifier') risk imposing a false unity and coherence on the subject. Within such orthodox histories of the field, Stuart Hall tends to be granted a foundational centrality, an exemplary significance, becoming at times nothing less than a metonym for the career of cultural studies as a whole. As one critic puts it, cultural studies is 'given peculiar clarity by [Hall's] own biographical as well as intellectual origins' (Inglis 1993: 81). While there are good reasons for such evaluations of Hall's contribution, they do conceal an increasingly hostile dispute between academics in recent years over the state and status of cultural studies and, by implication, of Hall himself.

## CULTURAL POPULISM

A term that is often vaguely defined, but which tends to be used in derogatory assessments of contemporary cultural studies and what is perceived to be its celebratory, uncritical take on popular culture (see Frith and Savage 1993). Specifically, the term has been used in relation to Hall's New Times project to argue that it places too much emphasis on consumption and risks complicity with Thatcherism (see McRobbie 1996 for a useful assessment of these critiques). By far the most sophisticated and convincing discussion of cultural populism so far appears in Jim McGuigan's *Cultural Populism* (1992) which uses the term in the spirit of 'sympathetic critique' rather than outright attack and regards Hall as its 'most eloquent and credible exponent' (see pp. 33–42).

For some, Hall functions as a kind of guarantee; the political proof in the pudding of cultural studies, a sign of its past commitment and credentials. For others, Hall's work has given rise (even if only indirectly through his influence) to a depoliticised mode of cultural analysis that lacks empirical or sociological rigour, amounting to little more than a celebratory form of 'cultural populism'. The voices in this second camp have become particularly emphatic of late as a backlash against the institutional 'success' of cultural studies has emerged.

In 1998, David Morley recorded some of the harshest criticism levelled at cultural studies by its critics:

We are told that the biography of cultural studies is a story of 'patron saints, superstars, hot gossellers and true believers', characterised by an 'inward looking narcissism', an obsession with 'publically re-examining its own entrails', and a 'growing fascination with its own life story' . . . cultural studies . . . has 'all the appeal and significance of the premature memoirs of an adolescent prodigy', or in Barker and Beezer's words, of an egocentric 'football star at 25 . . . busy writing (his) own autobiography'.

(Morley 1998: 484)

Alongside these accusations of narcissism, Morley notes cultural studies has also been charged with obscurantism, an uncritical

understanding of resistance and popular culture, complicity with Thatcherism and with embracing a depoliticised postmodern relativism, accusations in which Hall appears implicated to varying degrees. While exposing the flaws in these individual positions, Morley also considers their more general call for a return to traditional subject areas like sociology, anthropology and political economics and 'the "real world" of parliamentary politics, hard facts, economic truths' (Morley 1998: 489). Morley argues that underpinning these arguments is a teleological, or linear understanding of cultural studies as a narrative of progress that has lost its way, finally reaching a dead end.

Against this view of 'a succession of exclusive orthodoxies', Morley cites the work of Hall who 'always argued that a crucial part of what was going on in Birmingham in the 1970s was "the posing of sociological questions against sociology"' (Morley 1998: 479). Hall's approach is 'multidimensional' (Morley 1998: 493) and dialogic; it involves building 'new insights on to the old' rather than progressing in a one way fashion from one position to the next. Morley's account reveals how Hall's thinking might contribute productively to the disruption of orthodox narratives of cultural studies.

## HALL'S THEORETICAL LEGACY

Hall, himself, has reflected on the international and institutional rise of cultural studies, and his own incorporation within it, in an influential essay entitled 'Cultural studies and its theoretical legacies' (1992). This paper was originally delivered at an international cultural studies conference in Illinois in the early 1990s when the field of cultural studies was becoming increasingly professionalised as a discipline within Britain and the US. Hall, who himself declined a number of lucrative offers to move to the US before he retired, describes this moment as one of 'extraordinarily profound danger' in which cultural studies risks becoming an orthodoxy, a self-contained discipline or set of formal theories incapable of making political intervention. What his comments also suggest is that the dangers of institutionalisation facing cultural studies, have implications for his own work, which risks becoming part of that orthodox theoretical history of the subject.

Even his presence as a keynote speaker at the conference, he implies, is premised on his mythical status as an origin, a 'founding father' of cultural studies.

Hall's essay rejects the view that cultural studies has reached a dead end and must look to its origins for inspiration; he denies that he is 'the keeper of the conscience of cultural studies, hoping to police you back into line with what it really was if only you knew'. In practice, Hall has continually rejected originality in favour of what Morley calls multidimensionality; working with and through a series of often irreconcilable critical positions, rather than progressing heroically from one to the other. In 'Why Hall?' we saw how Stuart Hall used autobiography strategically, not to re-examine his/cultural studies' own entrails, but in order to disrupt and de-centre what he refers to disparagingly as the 'grand narrative' of cultural studies. Against the 'theoretical fluency' and 'overwhelming textualization' of contemporary cultural studies, Hall prefers metaphors like 'wrestling' with theory; theory as 'interruption'; 'theory as a set of contested, localized, conjunctural knowledges, which have to be debated in a dialogical way' (CSTL: 286). If Hall has tended to become a 'spirit of the past resurrected' (CSTL: 277) in relation to the institutionalised debates of contemporary cultural studies today, perhaps one of his most productive legacies will be his call for the desedimentation of this increasingly 'settled' field.



# FURTHER READING

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There is no complete bibliography of Hall's work currently available. However, an excellent 'working bibliography' arranged in chronological order (1958–94) appears in D. Morley and K. Chen (eds) *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (1996).

## WORKS BY STUART HALL

### BOOKS

—— with Paddy Whannel (1964) *The Popular Arts*, London: Hutchinson.

This text exemplifies the culturalist phase of Hall's work. Read critically, *The Popular Arts* remains an illuminating and engaging text, containing detailed analyses of postwar popular culture. See the substantial closing section 'Projects for teaching' which contains a series of revealing exercises and questions for classroom use.

—— with T. Jefferson (eds) (1976) *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain*, London: Hutchinson.

One of the most influential research projects conducted at the CCCS, this volume collects key essays by critics who have since become leaders in the field, such as Dick Hebdige, Angela McRobbie

and Iain Chambers. The most relevant section for students of Hall's work is the long introductory essay 'Subcultures, cultures and class', in which Hall *et al.* define subculture in terms of how youths negotiate their class existence through style. The essay is followed by a series of 'Notes' by the CCCS Mugging Group which distil some of the key arguments of *Policing the Crisis*. Just four pages in length, these notes are well worth having in your hand when you come to read the 400-page *Policing the Crisis*. Also see Chas Critcher's 'Structures, cultures and biographies', which contains an extract from the pamphlet *20 Years*, the CCCS's first response to the Handsworth mugging in 1972.

—— with C. Critcher, T. Jefferson, J. Clarke and B. Roberts (1978) *Policing the Crisis*, London: Macmillan Press.

Many critics regard this as the most ambitious and successful of all the CCCS projects. Section by section the text moves outwards from an actual account of mugging; to the rise of the mugging label; to the role of the press and police in the construction of that label; to the broader crisis in state hegemony of which mugging emerges as a displaced effect. *Policing* was prescient in terms of its identification of the emergence of Thatcherism (before Thatcher came to power!) and the breakdown of the postwar consensus. The text remains relevant today in terms of its challenge to common-sense notions of crime, particularly for British readers familiar with a Blair government that claims to be 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime'.

—— with B. Lumley and G. McLennan (eds) (1978) *On Ideology*, London: Hutchinson.

The most 'theoretical' of the CCCS collections and therefore regarded by many as the most 'difficult', this volume contains Hall's 'The hinterland of science: ideology and the "sociology of knowledge"' and the co-authored 'Politics and ideology: Gramsci'.

—— with D. Hobson, A. Lowe and P. Willis (1980) *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, London: Hutchinson.

Contains a number of important essays by Hall, notably his influential opening chapter 'Cultural studies and the centre: some prob-

lematics and problems'. In Chapter 8 Hall traces the development of the media group at the CCCS, while in Chapter 12 he offers a critique of the poststructuralist theories developed within the film theory journal, *Screen*.

—— (1988) *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left*, London: Verso.

This collection of essays is more comprehensive than Hall's earlier collection, *The Politics of Thatcherism* (1980). Also contains an excellent introduction by Hall which clearly outlines his main arguments on Thatcherism, his theoretical influences (Gramsci and Laclau) and a persuasive assessment/defence of the key criticisms of his project.

—— with Martin Jacques (eds) (1989) *New Times: The Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s*, London: Lawrence & Wishart.

In addition to the editors' introduction this collection contains Hall's 'The meaning of New Times' and, with David Held, 'Citizens and citizenship'. Other useful essays in *New Times* that deal with issues relating to Hall's own concerns are Robin Murray's 'Fordism and post-Fordism', Dick Hebdige's 'After the masses' and Frank Mort's 'The politics of consumption'.

—— (ed.) (1997) *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, London: Sage Publications.

Published as part of The Open University course D318 'Culture, media and identities', this text contains two chapters by Hall: 'The work of representation' and 'The spectacle of the "Other"'. The former provides an excellent introduction to the structuralist and poststructuralist theories that have influenced Hall, and to the theories of representation touched on in Chapter 6. The latter is an equally accessible account that develops these theories in relation to debates on race and difference examined in Chapters 4 and 6. For other useful chapters by Hall published in conjunction with The Open University, also see Hall *et al.* (eds) *Formations of Modernity* (1992) Cambridge: Polity Press; Hall *et al.* (eds) *Modernity and its Future* (1992) Cambridge: Polity Press; P. du Gay *et al.* (eds) *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of The Sony Walkman* (1997) London: Sage; K. Thompson (ed.) *Media and Cultural Regulation* (1997) London: Sage.



## ARTICLES

—— (1958) 'A sense of classlessness', *Universities and New Left Review* 1 (5): 26–32.

Perhaps Hall's most influential New Left essay. An account and analysis of changing attitudes to consumption in postwar working-class communities. Reveals Hall's early critical engagement with Marx and the problems of economic determinism. The long footnotes to this text are particularly illuminating.

—— (1972) 'The determination of news photographs', *Working Papers in Cultural Studies* 3, pp. 53–88.

One of the best examples of Hall's engagement with structuralist semiotics. Clearly influenced by Barthes.

—— (1973) 'Encoding and decoding in the media discourse', Stencilled paper 7, pp. 1–20.

Hall's classic essay uses Marxist structuralism in order to argue that media discourse is an overdetermined site at which meaning is not present but is socially produced at the moments of production (encoding), circulation and consumption (decoding). Elaborates on key concepts of denotation and connotation, preferred, negotiated and oppositional readings.

—— (1974) 'Deviance, politics, and the media', in P. Rock and M. McIntosh (eds) *Deviance and Social Control*, London: Tavistock Publications, pp. 261–305.

Reveals the early influence of deviancy theory on Hall's work, making it good background to *Resistance and Policing*. Also contains a fascinating analysis of media coverage of student insurrection at Birmingham and London in 1968–9.

—— (1978) 'Racism and reaction', in *Five Views of Multi-Cultural Britain*, London: Commission on Racial Equality, pp. 23–35.

The best introduction to *Policing the Crisis* available.

—— (1980) 'Cultural studies: two paradigms', *Media, Culture and Society* 2: 57–72.

A penetrating account of the so-called culturalism/structuralism divide and, more importantly, a successful move beyond its binary logic.

—— (1980) 'Encoding/decoding', in *Culture, Media, Language*, London: Hutchinson, pp. 128–38.

Also see Hall (1973) 'Encoding and decoding in media discourse'.

—— (1980) 'Cultural studies and the centre: some problematics and problems', in *Culture, Media, Language*, London: Hutchinson, pp. 15–47.

This is a detailed, rewarding piece written at the point of Hall's departure for The Open University and reflecting on the CCCS's theoretical and institutional history.

—— with I. Connell and L. Curti (1981) 'The "unity" of current affairs television', in T. Bennett (ed.) *Popular Television and Film*, London: The Open University, pp. 88–117.

Builds on many of the positions first outlined in Hall's 'Encoding/decoding' essay. Focusing on the British news programme, *Panorama*, it argues that news values such as 'balance' and 'impartiality' actually help generate, rather than mitigate against preferred meanings.

—— (1981) 'The whites of their eyes: racist ideologies and the media', in G. Bridges and R. Brunt (eds) *Silver Linings: Some Strategies for the Eighties*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, pp. 28–52.

An influential account of racism and the media that reflects, among other things, on Hall's television programme *It Ain't Half Racist Mum* (1979). Produced as part of the Campaign Against Racism in the Media (CARM), this essay is also a Gramscian attempt to consider what might be involved in the creation of 'an anti-racist popular bloc'.

—— (1981) 'Notes on deconstructing "the popular"', in R. Samuel (ed.) *People's History and Socialist Theory*, London: Routledge, pp. 227–40.

This essay employs Gramsci's theory of hegemony to argue for an historicised conception of the popular as an embattled, relational category; a site of struggle between dominant and subordinate culture.

—— (1982) 'The rediscovery of "ideology": return of the repressed in media studies', in M. Gurevitch, T. Bennett, J. Curran and J. Woollacott (eds) *Culture, Society and the Media*, London: Methuen, pp. 56–90.

Hall's classic account of ideology and its 'rediscovery' within cultural studies research.

—— (1985) 'Signification, representation, ideology: Althusser and the post-structuralist debates', *Critical Theories of Mass Communication* 2 (2): 91–114.

Hall's most detailed and illuminating account of Althusser describing what he finds helpful and unhelpful about *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* (Hall prefers the former). Also a pivotal essay in terms of the way it looks forward to Hall's subsequent work on ethnicity, his critical engagement with poststructuralism and his strategic use of autobiography.

—— (1986) 'The problem of ideology: Marxism without guarantees', in D. Morley and K. Chen (eds) *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (1996), London: Routledge, pp. 25–46.

This essay elaborates on Hall's critical, but ongoing engagement with Marxism.

—— (1987) 'Minimal selves', in *Identity: The Real Me*, ICA Documents 6, pp. 44–6.

A short, seminal essay that also provides a useful 'footnote' to Hall's 'New ethnicities'.

—— [1988] (1996) 'New ethnicities', in D. Morley and K. Chen (eds) *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, London: Routledge, pp. 441–9.

Arguably Hall's most significant contribution to debates on contemporary black cultural production. This ground-breaking text was the first to tentatively outline a shift in the politics of identity and representation taking place in the 1980s.

—— (1989) 'The "first" New Left: life and times', in Oxford University Socialist Group (ed.) *Out of Apathy: Voices of the New Left Thirty Years On*, London: Verso, pp. 11–38.

Hall's most detailed reflection on his time with the New Left makes compelling reading.

—— (1991) 'The local and the global: globalization and ethnicity', in A. King (ed.) *Culture, Globalization and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, pp. 19–39.

This collection also contains Hall's 'Old and new identities, old and new ethnicities' which develops the debates of 'The local and the global'. These two lively and engaging essays provide helpful points of connection between the debates of Hall's New Times project (see Chapter 5) and his work on identity as ethnicity (see Chapter 6).

—— (1992) 'What is this "black" in black popular culture?', in Gina Dent (ed.) *Black Popular Culture*, Seattle: Bay Press, pp. 21–33.

This essay develops the Gramscian reading of 'the popular' Hall produced a decade earlier in 'Notes on deconstructing "the popular"', combining it with a re-reading of Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque. Shifting his emphasis from class to 'race', Hall sees black popular culture as a contradictory space, a site of incorporation as well as a potential point of political intervention. Hall discusses his use of Bakhtin (which is informed by his reading of Stallybrass and White's *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (1986)) in greater detail within the essay 'For Allon White: metaphors of transformation' (1993). Both Hall's essays can be found in Morley and Chen (eds) (1996) *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, London: Routledge.

—— (1992) 'Cultural studies and its theoretical legacies', in L. Grossberg, C. Nelson and P. Treichler (eds) *Cultural Studies*, New York: Routledge, pp. 277–94.

Although this influential essay has been reproduced in a number of places, it is worth getting hold of this version because it also contains the question and answer session following the paper's delivery. The piece combines reflections on the history of cultural studies with thoughts on the current state of the field.

—— (1992) 'The question of cultural identity', in S. Hall, D. Held and T. McGrew (eds) *Modernity and its Future*, Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 274–316.

'The question of cultural identity' (pp. 274–316), is an accessible and well-illustrated account of identity in relation to the debates of Chapter 5 in this volume on globalization, postmodernism and subjectivity.

—— (1992) 'Race, culture, and communications: looking backward and forward at cultural studies', *Rethinking Marxism* 5 (1): 10–18.

An illuminating reflection on race in relation to the emergence of British cultural studies.

—— (1993) 'Cultural identity and diaspora', in P. Williams and L. Chrisman (eds) *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory*, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, pp. 392–401.

A more readily available version of Hall's earlier essay 'Cultural identity and cinematic representation' published in *Framework* (1989). In this essay Hall distinguishes between two ways of thinking about identity: identity as *similarity and continuity* and identity as *difference and rupture*. The former involves thinking of identity in 'essentialist', the latter in 'cultural' terms. The strength of Hall's argument is the way in which he historicises these alternative ways of thinking about identity, not to reveal how one is more 'progressive' than the other, but to suggest that both ways of seeing have been valid and valuable when located within their specific historical contexts.

—— (1996) 'Introduction: who needs "identity"?', in S. Hall *et al.* (eds) *Questions of Cultural Identity*, London: Sage, pp. 1–17.

Traces the key theoretical debates on subjectivity in terms of psychoanalysis (Freud, Lacan, Bhabha), discourse (Foucault), feminism (Rose, Butler) in order to present a poststructuralist reading of identity that, nevertheless, remains politically grounded.

—— (1996) 'When was "the post-colonial"? Thinking at the limit', in I. Chambers and L. Curti (eds) *The Post-colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*, London: Routledge, pp. 242–60.

A penetrating and nuanced assessment of the 'post-colonial' concept that, among other things, reveals the increasing influence of poststructuralist theory on Hall's work. 'Thinking at the limit' is a phrase Hall borrows from Derrida.

—— (1996) 'For Allon White: metaphors of transformation', in D. Morley and K. Chen (eds) *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, London: Routledge, pp. 287–305.

This essay was written following the death of Allon White, one of Hall's postgraduate students at the CCCS. With Peter Stallybrass, White had written *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (1986), an influential study of the symbolic categories 'high' and 'low' in

European culture that reworks Bakhtinian notions of the popular. In the essay Hall meditates on Stallybrass and White's text in a way that reveals key developments in his own thinking on popular culture.

—— (1997) 'Subjects in history: making diasporic identities', in W. Lubiano *The House that Race Built*, New York: Pantheon Books, pp. 289–99.

Originally delivered in the United States, this paper offers one of Hall's clearest accounts of culture as a site of political struggle and of some of the connections and differences between diasporic identities in the US and UK.

—— (1998) 'The great moving nowhere show', *Marxism Today* November/December: 9–14.

Picking up where essays like 'The great moving Right show' left off, this essay explores the continuities between Thatcherism and the political project of New Labour under Tony Blair.

## INTERVIEWS

Bromley, R. (1992) 'Interview with Professor Stuart Hall', in J. Munns, G. Rajan and R. Bromley (eds) *A Cultural Studies Reader*, London: Longman, pp. 659–73.

Contains useful reflections on the New Left, the CCCS and Hall's incorporation within American cultural studies.

—— (1993) 'Reflections upon the encoding/decoding model: an interview with Stuart Hall', in J. Cruz and J. Lewis (eds), *Reading, Listening: Audiences and Cultural Reception*, Boulder: Westview Press, pp. 253–74.

A probing interview in which Hall provides some illuminating contextual information for his 'Encoding/decoding' essay. Defends certain positions within his essay, while making concessions in relation to others. Brings the encoding/decoding debate up to date.

—— (1996) 'The formation of a diasporic intellectual: an interview with Stuart Hall by Kuan-Hsing Chen', in D. Morley and K. Chen (eds) *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, London: Routledge, pp. 484–503.

A long interview (in a good way), this piece provides helpful autobiographical information that is well worth reading alongside Hall's recent work on diaspora and ethnicity. The opening sections of the interview also provide useful background information about Hall's work with the New Left and the CCCS.

Grossberg, L. (1966) 'On postmodernism and articulation: an interview with Stuart Hall', *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, in D. Morley and K. Chen (eds) *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, London: Routledge, pp. 131–50.

A lively and passionately argued interview in which Hall locates himself in terms of postmodern and poststructuralist debates. Contains withering assessments of, among others, Baudrillard and Lyotard. Also contains a useful definition of articulation.

Osborne, P. and Segal, L. (1997) 'Culture and power: interview with Stuart Hall', *Radical Philosophy* 86: 24–41.

One of the most illuminating interviews with Hall, particularly helpful in terms of its discussions of ideology in relation to the work of Gramsci, Althusser and Laclau.

Phillips, C. (1997) 'Interview with Stuart Hall', *Bomb* 58: 38–42.

Focuses on Hall as a diaspora intellectual.

## WORKS ON AND AFTER STUART HALL

Barker, Martin (1992) 'Stuart Hall, *Policing the Crisis*', in M. Barker and A. Beezer (eds) *Reading into Cultural Studies*, London: Routledge, pp. 81–100.

A thoughtful, succinct introduction to *Policing* that also considers what Barker takes to be the limitations of Hall *et al.*'s thesis: the absence of agency.

CCCS [1982] (1994) *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain*, London: Routledge.

Now published by Routledge, *The Empire Strikes Back* develops some of the key debates first outlined in Hall *et al.*'s *Resistance through Rituals* and *Policing the Crisis* surrounding the crisis of hegemony in

1970s' Britain, the relationship between race and class, the construction of black criminality and policing and authoritarianism. In his preface, Paul Gilroy states the book, 'would not have been possible without Stuart Hall's tuition', however the text does much more than reiterate Hall's lessons, offering a substantial re-reading of that critical decade.

Gilroy, Paul [1987] (1993) *There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack*, London: Routledge.

Arguably the most significant and influential monograph yet written on postwar black British cultural politics, this book builds upon many of the key insights of Hall's work on race from the late 1970s and early 1980s.

——, Grossberg, L. and McRobbie, A. (eds) (2000) *Without Guarantees: In Honour of Stuart Hall*, London: Verso.

Containing 34 articles, this wide-ranging collection reflects on all the major aspects of Hall's career from an international perspective.

Giroux, Henry (2000) 'Public pedagogy as cultural politics: Stuart Hall and the "crisis" of culture', *Cultural Studies* 14 (2): 341–60.

Explores the politics of Hall's teaching within and beyond the university in order to develop 'an expanded notion of public pedagogy'.

Harris, David (1992) *From Class Struggle to the Politics of Pleasure: The Effects of Gramscianism on Cultural Studies*, London: Routledge.

A critical account of what Harris regards as the limitations of Gramsci's influence on cultural studies that contains numerous discussions of Hall's work at both Birmingham and The Open University.

McGuigan, Jim (1992) 'Between the grand old cause and the brand New Times', in *Cultural Populism*, London: Routledge, pp. 33–44.

A fascinating account of cultural populism, of which Hall is, according to McGuigan, 'the most eloquent and credible exponent'. This section offers an account of Hall *et al.*'s New Times project.

Mercer, K. and Julien, I. (1988) 'De margin and de centre', *Screen* 29 (4): 2–10. Also reprinted in D. Morley and K. Chen (eds) *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, London: Routledge.



This essay represents the most significant development of Hall's work on new ethnicities and the 'burden of representation' so far. Also see Kobena Mercer's essays collected in *Welcome to the Jungle* (London: Routledge (1994)) which extend Hall's work on diaspora into more substantial discussions of the aesthetics of black film.

Morley, D. and Chen, K. (eds) (1996) *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, London: Routledge.

The most important document of/dialogue with Hall's work so far. Contains a selection of high-quality essays on Hall, along with interviews and key essays by Hall.

Rojek, C. (2003) *Stuart Hall*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

A detailed examination of Hall's work in which Rojek also seeks to address what he perceives to be its shortcomings. Contains a useful bibliography.

Smith, Anna Marie (1994) *New Right Discourse on Race and Sexuality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

An excellent study of racism in Britain between 1968 and 1990 that develops Hall's work on Thatcherism, race and identity.

Wood, Brennon (1998) 'Stuart Hall's cultural studies and the problem of hegemony', *British Journal of Sociology* 49 (3): 399–412.

Argues that Hall's use of the term hegemony is inconsistent, and has contributed to the discursive turn in cultural studies that Hall is otherwise critical of.

Wren-Lewis, Justin (1983) 'The encoding/decoding model: criticisms and redevelopments for research on decoding', *Media, Culture and Society* 5: 179–97.

A critical assessment of Hall's model and the way it has been reformulated in the work of others, notably David Morley.

## **WORKS ON THE CCCS AND BRITISH CULTURAL STUDIES**

Dworkin, Dennis (1997) *Cultural Materialism in Postwar Britain – History; the New Left and the Origins of Cultural Studies*, Durham: Duke University Press.

Contains thorough, accessible accounts of the New Left and the formation of the cultural studies project. Easily the most detailed and illuminating history of these formations and Hall's contribution to them available.

Green, Michael (1982) 'The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies', in P. Widdowson (ed.) *Re-reading English*, London: Methuen, pp. 77–90.

Written by one of Hall's former colleagues at CCCS, this short chapter is particularly helpful for its account of some of the political contexts and the disciplinary status of cultural studies at the Birmingham Centre during Hall's years there.

Miller, Richard (1994) '“A moment of profound danger”: British cultural studies away from the centre', *Cultural Studies* 8 (3): 417–38.

An illuminating discussion of cultural studies at The Open University that deals with Hall's contribution there.

Morley, David (1998) 'So-called cultural studies: dead ends and reinvented wheels', *Cultural Studies* 12 (4): 476–97.

Uses Hall's work to question some of the assumptions about cultural studies emerging in the critical backlash against the discipline.

Schwarz, Bill (1994) 'Where is cultural studies?', *Cultural Studies* 8 (3): 377–93.

A thought-provoking reading of British cultural studies in terms of Britain's imperial decline that draws upon Hall.

Tester, Keith (1994) 'The problem of cultural studies', in *Media, Culture and Morality*, London: Routledge, pp. 8–31.

A critical account of the popular as a site of investigation in cultural studies and in Hall's work in particular. Tester uses this critique to call for a return to a sociological perspective.

Turner, Graeme (1990) *British Cultural Studies: an Introduction*, London: Unwin Hyman.

An extremely helpful survey of British cultural studies containing some useful discussions of Hall's contribution to the field.



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