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REVIEW ESSAY

## Stuart Hall and Cultural Studies, circa 1983

Stuart Hall. 2016. *Cultural Studies 1983: A Theoretical History*.

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### Abstract

Stuart Hall sought to internationalise theoretical debates and to create Cultural Studies as interdisciplinary. We chart his theoretical journey through a detailed examination of a series of lectures delivered in 1983 and now published for the first time. In these lectures, he discusses theorists such as E.P. Thompson, Raymond Williams, Louis Althusser, Levi Strauss and Antonio Gramsci, and explores the relationship between ideas and social structure, the specificities of class and race, and the legacies of slavery. We note his turn towards metaphors of divergence and dispersal and highlight how autobiographical and deeply personal Hall is in these lectures, especially in his *ego histoire* moment of traumatic memory recovery.

### Keywords

**Stuart Hall; cultural theory; Marxism; Gramsci; structuralism; race**

Historical understanding always involves a detour through theory.

Stuart Hall, *Cultural Studies 1983*, p. 89

When we learnt of Stuart Hall's death in February 2014, it came as a shock, even though we knew he had been ill for some time. Our sense of loss was felt by many and, since then, Hall's enormous contribution to British and indeed world intellectual, political and cultural life has been recognised in various ways. Friends and supporters have established a Stuart Hall Foundation that, in the spirit of Hall's life and work, aims to support new generations of creative thinkers and to 'illuminate connections between politics, culture and society and challenge the status quo'.<sup>1</sup> Duke University Press is publishing a range of books by and about Stuart Hall, including the first volume of Hall's autobiography, *Familiar Stranger: A Life between Two Islands*, and David Scott, *Stuart Hall's Voice: Intimations of an Ethics of Receptive Generosity*.<sup>2</sup> Duke is also publishing a series of Hall's selected writings edited by Catherine Hall and Bill Schwarz. The first volume in this series is Stuart Hall, *Cultural Studies 1983: A Theoretical History*, which presents a series of previously unpublished lectures Hall gave in the United States that year. This essay began as a review of *Cultural Studies 1983*, but in the course of writing we came to reflect not only on the book but also on our and other Australian encounters with Stuart Hall's work in the 1980s.

Stuart Hall's *Cultural Studies 1983* is of considerable interest for the history of cultural studies. In the decades after World War II, an era of unprecedented consumerism and prosperity, including for the working class, theorists looked for a new kind of analysis and interpretation; from that search, and not without considerable internal conflict and contestation, cultural studies gradually emerged. In British postwar intellectual history, Stuart Hall (1932–2014) was a pivotal figure. He influenced British radical intellectual life to consider new, especially continental, theoretical frameworks demanding a new temperament, a new intellectual sensibility, which challenged the narrow provincialism of English approaches to knowledge, characteristically empirical and pragmatic. In contrast to other major figures in British Marxism such as E.P. Thompson, who abhorred non-English theorists like Althusser and wanted cultural studies to be headed by a single discipline, history, and Raymond Williams, who confined himself to English cultural history and forged cultural studies as a form of literary history, Hall sought to internationalise theoretical debates and to create cultural studies as interdisciplinary.

Hall came from Jamaica to Britain in 1951; he arrived at Oxford on a Rhodes scholarship to study literature. At Oxford in the 1950s, he helped found the New Left, and in 1960 became the founding editor of *New Left Review*. From 1969, he became director of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, succeeding its founder Richard Hoggart, until 1980 when he was appointed Professor of Sociology at the Open University. A charismatic speaker, Hall was primarily an essayist, who made striking and influential interventions. These include a long-remembered critique of Thatcherism and a collaborative ethnography and analysis of new cultural forms such as youth subcultures. Through these and other projects, he helped establish cultural studies as an adventurous, internationalist and interdisciplinary reflection on the cultural phenomena of modernity.<sup>3</sup>

*Cultural Studies 1983: A Theoretical History* does not present itself as an impersonal authoritative exposition of achieved theoretical truth. Rather, it is highly personal, an *ego-histoire*, a bildungsroman, a quest, agitated, unsure where quite to go next. Hall creates his theoretical exposition as an unresolved drama, its major characters Marx, Raymond Williams, E.P. Thompson, Lévi-Strauss, Althusser and Gramsci. His theoretical journey weaves

between their diverse approaches, accepting, rejecting, sometimes baffled, looking for new directions that become turning points in his self-reflexive critical consciousness. *Cultural Studies 1983* poses questions of how much in modernity intellectual work is related to place, to internationality, to 'race', to diaspora, to colonialism and empire. In Stuart Hall, we recognise the figure of the intellectual as, in Georg Simmel's terms, the stranger who comes today and stays tomorrow, located within the history of a particular group—here the generational story of British Marxism of the 1930s refracted after World War II within Britain's New Left—yet outside and confronting it. The stranger, says Simmel, exhibits a kind of freedom in terms of perception, understanding and evaluation of what others in the group take as given. As we shall see, slavery and its legacies shape this story of the stranger, the outsider, the wanderer who comes from the Caribbean to stay in Britain (an 'imperial country, which has destroyed hundreds of cultures around the world'), a history of identity and subjectivity that Hall embraces by the end of the lectures, even while it includes a traumatic memory episode that fractures identity.<sup>4</sup> Stuart Hall transformed British intellectual life as only 'the stranger' can.<sup>5</sup>

In their warm and affectionate introduction, editors Jennifer Daryl Slack and Lawrence Grossberg explain how *Cultural Studies 1983: A Theoretical History* came about. The volume is composed of eight lectures that Stuart Hall delivered in July 1983 at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, in a series called 'Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture: Limits, Frontiers, Boundaries'. They note that the lectures provided the first sustained exposure for many intellectuals in the United States to Hall and British cultural studies, and they decisively influenced, Grossberg and Slack feel, cultural theory in the United States till this day. However, the set of lectures was never published as a book, as Slack and Grossberg had very much hoped. Hall was concerned as the 1980s went on that the lectures had become dated; in particular, they did not encompass the challenge of feminism, the theorists who populate the lectures are overwhelmingly male. There is pathos in how they survived. Sitting in the front row of the lecture hall, and with Stuart Hall's permission, Jennifer Slack recorded the talks on a small portable cassette; they were then transcribed and typed. Hall read and edited the transcripts, and wrote a preface in 1988, but still felt dissatisfied with their relevance. The publishing project lapsed; the yellowing manuscript was stored in a box, while the 'original cassettes still sit on Jennifer's desk, except for the first one, which has been lost to time'. The editors express their deep gratitude to Catherine Hall who granted them permission to publish, with the 1988 preface placed after the editors' introduction.

As it stands, then, *Cultural Studies 1983*, its cover a photo of Stuart Hall with intense, far seeing, determined gaze, is both a self-conscious history of Marxist and related theories of culture, and, by virtue of its delayed publication, itself a historical document, capturing a moment in time of past debates. It can be read as two kinds of history, both the history Stuart Hall had in mind in giving these lectures, and the history it now provides and evokes, thirty-four years later.

Cultural studies in the early 1980s, Slack and Grossberg recall, was still struggling for recognition in the United Kingdom. By the summer of 1983, the work of the Birmingham Centre and Hall's contributions in analysing working-class culture, media, news and popular culture, subcultures, ideology, semiotics, and racism and the new conservatism, impressive as they were, were only gaining visibility in what were then minor disciplines, in particular, Communication Studies and Education. Until the 1983 University of Illinois lectures, Hall's and the Centre's work, they believe, was neither well known nor widely available outside Britain: 'few people outside the UK knew of either Hall or the project'.<sup>6</sup>

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We might gently qualify this assertion. Hall, it seems to us from a little archaeological digging, may have been better known in Australia than the United States before and up to 1983, cultural studies in Australia being already a lively and varied scene, fissiparous, noisy, inchoate, its many strands ranging in theoretical approach and methodology from Marxist to Foucauldian, with sociology and social psychology also in the mix. We were part of this emerging scene, encountering Hall, as did so many others, along the way; reading *Cultural Studies 1983* has reminded us of some of the debates and concerns of the time. Stuart Hall had already examined John's doctoral thesis on the *fin de siècle*, titled *Literature and Social Thought: Australia in an International Context 1890–1925*, written in the English department at ANU, completed in 1980.<sup>7</sup> Two years later, John's polemical essay, 'In Defence of Popular Culture', drew on Stuart Hall's essay 'Deconstructing the "Popular"', to argue that popular culture is 'an arena of complex ideological struggle' where dominant pressures and perspectives like racism, sexism, individualism, the will to power and privilege, acquisitiveness, compete with counter-hegemonic attitudes.<sup>8</sup> 'In Defence of Popular Culture' opposed the blanket dismissive attitude of the 'left pessimists', then ascendant in left intellectual circles, towards popular or mass culture; in those circles, to analyse in detail a popular culture text, and to view audiences as active not passive, was heresy.<sup>9</sup>

At the New South Wales Institute of Technology (NSWIT), under the deanship of philosopher Bill Bonney, young academic staff in the Faculty of Humanities were developing courses on mass communication that were leading them to the work of the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies. In the introduction to their edited collection of essays whimsically entitled *Nellie Melba, Ginger Meggs and Friends: Essays in Australian Cultural History* (1982), Susan Dermody, John Docker and Drusilla Modjeska expressed a relaxed familiarity with Birmingham Centre thinking.<sup>10</sup> They were interested in the ways Hall and Richard Johnson were forging a middle way between 'culturalism', stressing class consciousness and culture as created by the historical actors themselves, and Althusserian structural Marxism drawing attention to the unconscious of history, to the ways ideology inserts people into the social formation in ways unknown to themselves. The Althusserian notion of 'relative autonomy', they argued, posed a troubling dilemma for Marxism. If the forms of cultural phenomena, as in aesthetic texts, myths and subcultural styles are too quickly 'related' to a dominant ideology, then the inner workings, the autonomy, of these forms might be foreclosed; on the other hand, treating their autonomy too prominently can lead the 'relative' aspect, the determination by ideology, to be foreshortened or lost.<sup>11</sup> Soon after, in 1983, Bill Bonney and Helen Wilson's text, *Australia's Commercial Media*, appeared; designed for university teaching in the growing field of mass communication studies, it, too, drew on and acknowledged approaches learnt from the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies.<sup>12</sup>

Then, three months before Stuart Hall delivered the Illinois lectures published here, he, along with Marxist-feminist Beatrix Campbell and hosted by the Marxist journal, *Australian Left Review (ALR)*, came to Australia to speak at a series of events marking the centenary of the death of Karl Marx.<sup>13</sup> In a short profile, *ALR* described Hall as 'widely regarded as one of the foremost Marxist scholars in Britain today and as a brilliant polemical speaker'. *ALR* printed Hall's main address, 'For a Marxism without Guarantees', which was an insistence on a form of Marxism that did not regard Marx's writings as a sacred text but rather as a guide for thinking about the present. In this address, Hall particularly welcomed Marx's historical materialism and his understanding of capitalism, but was critical of Marx's view that the state had a tendency

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to wither away, of the *Communist Manifesto*'s prediction of class polarisation, and of Marxism's notion of the inevitability of the overthrow of capitalism.<sup>14</sup> While she did not meet Stuart Hall on this occasion, or indeed until many years later, Ann also spoke at the same ALR Marx Symposium in Sydney, in her case on Marxist history, principally *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Napoleon Bonaparte*, that remarkable detailed study of the relations between class and politics in France between 1848 and 1851.<sup>15</sup> In addition to the public lectures, Hall also attended various seminars, one of which was at NSWIT, which Ann, as a member of academic staff at the time, remembers attending. Hall spoke about Thatcherism and the difficulties the Left in the United Kingdom was facing in combatting it; Ann has a particularly vivid memory of Hall saying, 'I hope I'm wrong, but when I look at the British Labor Party I fear I'm looking at a dodo.'

Three months later, in July 1983, just as Hall was delivering the lectures in the United States published in *Cultural Studies 1983*, a conference was being held that would prove to be an important step in the formation of Australian cultural studies. At the Australian Communication Association (ACA) conference in Sydney, organised by Bill Bonney as vice-president, two divergent approaches to media and communication studies associated with different disciplines competed for control of the ACA and its associated publications. American-style interpersonal communication studies struggled to maintain control against its growing rival, mass communication studies.<sup>16</sup> In her conference report, titled 'I Want to Disagree with Everything Said So Far', Ann commented on the 'yawning intellectual chasm' between the interpersonal and mass communication schools, which, apart from the opening session, held sessions in separate streams, with little crossover or argument between them.<sup>17</sup> The mass communication stream also had its own internal debates and conflicts over questions of popular culture. We both remember delivering a paper on the then popular and controversial television show, *Prisoner*, in a session at which Ann's colleagues at NSWIT, Helen Wilson and Diane Powell, talked about the also very popular series, *A Country Practice*. We argued that *Prisoner* was conspicuously sympathetic to the group of women prisoners rather than to authority, and we related such sympathy to a principle of inversion, of World Upside Down, the reversal of the usual and accepted in any society. We then related such inversion to a long cultural history that included seventeenth-century European comic drama as well as carnival and popular imagery in early modern Europe. However, these were early fractious days indeed in academic discussion of popular culture, as John later recalled.<sup>18</sup> At the end of our paper, one prominent cultural studies practitioner rose from his seat, red in face, and shouted in true left pessimist mode how wrong we were to talk about World Upside Down and cultural inversion in that way, since, as everyone knows, popular television shows like *Prisoner* were obviously mere safety valves. While debate could become heated at times in the antipodes, the textual study of popular culture of the kind Stuart Hall was pioneering and promoting in the United Kingdom was gaining ground in Australia and the conference concluded with the ACA agreeing to sponsor the new *Australian Journal of Cultural Studies*.

### III

Stuart Hall's *Cultural Studies 1983* is an intervention into swirling debates such as these that were occurring in distinctive ways in British cultural studies. Hall stresses that the journey he describes was inspired by an urgent question facing theorists after World War II: how could Marxist thinking transcend the heritage of 1930s Marxism with its crude and obsolete metaphor of base and superstructure, especially in the contexts of the 1950s and 1960s. Looking for answers to a historical situation of prosperity and consumerism that Marxism had

never before encountered would require not only new modes of interpretation but also new metaphors, and indeed the drift of metaphor in the lectures is an especially interesting feature.

We can see in these lectures some of the concerns that Hall had spoken about on his Australian tour, an attempt to assess Marx's strengths and weaknesses in this, the centenary year of his death. He reflects in Lecture 4, for example, that one problem with Marx's model of capitalist development was that it is 'largely predicated on one route by which capitalism has emerged and developed—that of the United Kingdom'. (92) The consequence was, he suggests, that Marx could not take into account the 'very different ways in which capitalism has been introduced, for example, by conquest and colonisation', or how capitalism in those global situations built on pre-capitalist differences to exploit 'indigenous labour, indigenous social formations and their material resources'. (93) Far from capitalism eroding the particularities of different forms of labour, as Marx suggested, in fact, argues Hall, in colonial situations capitalism uses and builds on them, exploiting indigenous labour and material resources in the process.

In these lectures, Hall is also assessing the strengths and weaknesses of Marxist and other scholars of his own time. As foreshadowed, one of the key figures Hall uses to develop his analysis, and of whose work he is, as so often, both warmly appreciative and sharply critical, is E.P. Thompson, the historian whose reworking of the Marxist tradition on class in *The Making of the English Working Class* forms for Hall one of the pillars of modern cultural studies. Hall credits Thompson with bringing into cultural studies a perspective that Raymond Williams had not: 'notions of history and historical process, and of contestation, struggle, and change as central to the way in which we define how cultures change and develop'. (42) Hall agrees with Thompson's critique, that Williams' cultural history is strangely static. Also important for cultural studies, suggests Hall, are Thompson's essays on the eighteenth century, notably his classic essay, 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism', which, in Hall's words, 'demonstrates a real affinity for those popular struggles in which the people are opposed to those in power'. (42) In that essay, Thompson shows how the transformation of a peasant population into an urban factory working class is a matter of culture as much as economics. Hall also admires Thompson's critique, using the example of law, of the classic Marxist distinction between base and superstructure; law, Thompson pointed out and Hall reminds us, is surely everywhere, imbricated both in culture and in the marketplace.

Hall, however, wanted more, and was attracted, as Thompson was not, to the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss and Althusser. Hall points to how Lévi-Strauss's structuralist approach to the analysis of myth 'represents a significant break from the humanist tradition of Williams and Thompson', because it stresses the importance of the 'so-called unconscious level at which the structure operates': 'Structuralism turns its attention from consciousness and experience in favour of the structure which is determining everything else.' (71) What occurs is a 'displacement from the domain of agency and consciousness to that of the unconscious'. (72) What this means for Lévi-Strauss is that the telling of myths is 'less a question of the subject than of a process without a subject'. (72) Hall traces a similar move in the Marxist structuralism of Althusser, and the 'Althusserian break' from humanism. (97) In Althusser's reading of Marx, Hall writes, 'the principal objects of Marx's analysis' are 'relations and structures rather than agents or subjects'. (100)

In *Cultural Studies 1983*, Hall explains why he found Althusser so theoretically attractive yet how he also became disillusioned by certain aspects, principally Althusser's functionalism, his desire to flatten out the diversity of Marx's positions into a single structuralist layer, and his rather vulgar collapsing of ideas into ideology. 'I want to examine some of the fruitful

sites of Althusser's rethinking of Marx', he said, 'but also, to point out where he goes too far and, in his fervor, eliminates many of Marx's important and complex insights.' (100) Hall believes that Althusser's decentring of the subject, and his argument that 'Marx is always concerned to bring forward the differences and specificities that fracture any attempt to make totality into a simple coherent whole', were definitely theoretical advances for Marxism in contrast to the almost naïve or unthinking humanism of British cultural Marxists like Williams and Thompson. (104) Nonetheless, while he values Althusser's theoretical break, he also thinks that Althusser's 'emphasis is, once again, too single-minded and one-sided'. (104) Hall likes the way Althusser borrows from Freud the notion of over-determination, and welcomes Althusser's insistence on the notion of relative autonomy, which rightly addresses the 'specificity of particular practices, events, or contradictions'. (108) Alas, however, Althusser 'affirms that, in the end, the content of all practices, events, and contradictions guarantees their functional correspondence to the mode of production'. (109) Hall concludes, regrettably yet to some degree satirically, that Althusser's account of ideology, as in the once-controversial essay 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', is disabblingly 'functionalist': 'ideology, after a sort of period of free relative autonomy wandering about, must be stitched, or recuperated, back in the last instance to the mode of production'. (109)

Hall here parts company with Althusser, for he 'never understood' why the move into functionalism is 'inevitable or why it is intrinsic to the concept of relative autonomy'. (109) Why not, Hall suggests, allow relative autonomy to maintain its freedom to wander? Althusser's 'unquestioned functionalism', Hall believes, assumes social formations keep endlessly reproducing themselves and precludes the possibility of 'notions of struggle and contradiction'. (110–11). In 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', Althusser unproblematically assumes an identity between the many 'autonomous' parts of civil society and the state. (132) Still, in contrast to competing theories at the time, to Foucault, to discourse theory, to post-structuralism, which all deny unity, Hall values Althusser for theorising a notion of 'complex unity' (128); he wishes to retain a theoretical gain from Althusser, that is, recognition of the 'necessity of thinking unity *and* difference'. (122) Yet, once again, he thinks Althusser goes too far in his discussion of ideology, especially when he 'quaintly' desires that the term 'ideas' should disappear, we should only talk about ideology. (131)

If Hall has his criticisms of Althusser's structuralism and functionalism, he is even harsher on Thompson's lamentably crude anti-Althusserian jeremiad, *The Poverty of Theory* (1978). Thompson, he says, not only rejects the distinction between base and superstructure but also rejects theoretical abstraction altogether. Hall adds here his personal involvement in these debates, his role in helping to introduce Althusser into theoretical discussions in Britain. Hall feels that Thompson, an important figure in *New Left Review* in its early stages, felt betrayed, believing that his own agenda for the left of a humanist Marxism was being abandoned for Althusser's anti-humanist project. Thompson's rancorous repudiation of Althusser altogether, Hall believes, influenced in Britain a 'dangerous pull back to empiricism'. (116)

For Hall, theoretical abstraction matters, and he brings out what he believes is its intellectual necessity in his long discussion of Marx, where he stresses that it is important when considering Marx's various texts not to confuse one level of abstraction with another. You don't explain a particular economic recession, Hall suggests, by theorising about the capitalist mode of production as a whole; the latter is an abstraction operating at a higher level than the one you need. Hall illustrates this point by contrasting Marx's analysis of the commodity form in *Capital* with a historical text like *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Napoleon Bonaparte*, where Marx does not deploy a simple division between capital and labour but rather presents the

interactions of a multiplicity of forces that ‘have no precise class location’, such as ‘the army, priests, officials, lawyers, writers, and journalists’. (93) In *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, classes, says Hall, are ‘fragmented and mobile terms’, composed of fractions, divisions and subdivisions. (93) Only the peasantry support Louis Napoleon, for the bourgeoisie oppose his seizing universal political power. In this situation, Napoleon advances the capitalist mode of production by developing in a distinctive way the independent power of the state. ‘It is during this period,’ Hall notes of Marx’s argument, ‘that the French State gains a kind of power with which it has continued to operate; it is here that the legacy of French State capitalist planning begins.’ (96)

While the state is not a major concern in these lectures, Hall’s comments on it are well worth reading. The state, he writes, ‘is a contradictory formation ... it is pluri-centred and multidimensional’. (120–1) It brings together political discourses and social practices concerned with power and transforms them into a ‘systematic practice of regulation’ and rule. (121) In other words, the state articulates these discourses and practices with one another, and for Hall the notion of articulation is essential to his overall project of attempting to understand society as a ‘complex unity’. Articulation is a connection between different elements made under certain conditions; it is not ‘essential for all times’. (121) In this discussion of the state, Hall is opposing both Althusser’s collapsing of the distinction between civil society and the state and Foucault’s sidestepping of analysis of the state to focus instead on the ‘dispersed microphysics of power’. (120) Against both, he is looking for a more flexible and supple form of Marxist cultural theory, and in 1983, it seems from these lectures, Hall felt he had found that theory in the work of Gramsci. He likes Gramsci for his conception of the state as a structuring agent that interposes itself between economic forces, on the one hand, and ideology and culture on the other.

Gramsci directs our attention, says Hall approvingly, away from the notion of a dominant ideology to one of an ‘ideological complex, ensemble, or discursive formation’. (167) Against a crude Marxist notion of ideological domination, Gramsci develops the idea of hegemony, the formation of a bloc (rather than a class) that through its ability to represent its ideas as if they are the ideas of the society as a whole can establish its political ascendancy. Subordinate cultures, such as working-class cultures, can survive as part of a bloc, but they are not hegemonic. For Hall, the notion of hegemony not only provides a way to analyse the complexities of modern culture while still deploying key concepts such as class, culture, structure and the state, but it also has the virtue of being historical. Once achieved, hegemony can always be displaced, and new hegemonic blocs form in their place. Hall welcomes Gramsci for showing the way towards a ‘Marxist politics’ that ‘rejects reductionism in favour of an understanding of complexity in unity or unity through complexity’. (185) With Gramsci, we can reach an understanding that varied movements, for the ‘liberation of blacks, women, or subordinate classes’, do not ‘suppress the autonomy and specificity of particular political struggles’. (185)

What ‘autonomy and specificity’ means for the particular concept of ‘black’ emerges in the final lecture, Lecture 8, in a startlingly autobiographical way. Titled ‘Culture, Resistance, and Struggle’, the lecture contains the seeds of Hall’s subsequent thinking. It begins by saying that, while culture is not reducible to ‘contradictions around class, ethnicity, and gender’, it is nevertheless shaped by them. (180) However, not one of these contradictions—race, class, or gender—is reducible to another. Hall doesn’t say much about gender, but he does explore what he means about irreducible particularity in relation to the meaning of ‘black’. Indeed, he had already discussed ‘black’ in an earlier lecture, Lecture 6, ‘Ideology and Ideological Struggle’, in the most dramatic passage in the book, its *ego-histoire* moment of traumatic memory recovery and turn towards metaphors of divergence, disunity, dispersal, fragmentation and liminality.



While in 'my thirty years' in Britain he has been variously called 'coloured', 'West Indian', 'Negro', 'black' and 'immigrant', in Jamaica, where he spent his 'youth and adolescence', Hall was always called 'coloured'. His family, he tells us, placed great weight on the fine distinctions between 'black' (the vast majority) and 'coloured' (meaning 'not black'), derived from colonial classifications of class, status, race and colour, where 'white' was 'always out of reach, the impossible, absent term, whose absent presence structured the whole chain'. Hall says he is not any one of these representations, in Britain or Jamaica, though he has been 'all of them at different times, and still am some of them to some degree'. However, he reflects, there is 'no essential, unitary "I"—only the fragmentary, contradictory subject I became'. (147)

The family story that is so significant for Hall's life makes remarkable reading, and is worth quoting at some length.

It is a story frequently retold in my family—with great humour all round, though I never saw the joke, part of our family lore—that when my mother first brought me home from the hospital at my birth, my sister looked into my crib and said, 'where did you get this Coolie baby from?' 'Coolies' in Jamaica are East Indians, deriving from the indentured labourers brought into the country after abolition to replace the slaves in plantation labour. 'Coolie' is, if possible, one rung lower in the discourse of race than 'black'. This was my sister's way of remarking that, as often happens in the best of mixed families, I had come out a good deal darker skinned than was average in my family. I hardly know any more whether this really happened or was a manufactured story by my family or even perhaps whether I made it up and have now forgotten when and why. But I felt, then and now, summoned to my 'place' by it. From that moment onwards, my place within this system of reference has been problematic. It may help explain why and how I eventually became what I was first nominated: the 'Coolie' of my family, the one who did not fit, the outsider, the one who hung around the street with all the wrong people, and grew up with all those funny ideas. The Other one. (149)<sup>19</sup>

Hall comments that the signifying chain that led to the Caribbean classificatory distinctions that he feels created him as the outsider, the Other, was inaugurated at a specific historical moment, the 'moment of slavery', in the insertion of the enslaved peoples of the coastal kingdoms of West Africa into the social relations of 'forced labour production in the New World'. (149) When Hall returns to the question of race and the meaning of 'black' in Lecture 8, he insists again, with renewed force, that ideologies of race vary; they have to be explained in terms of specific histories, and certainly cannot be reduced to class. 'Race and class', he writes, 'are powerfully articulated with one another but they are not the same'. (187)

By tracing the paths that led him towards Gramsci's greater stress on irreducible complexity and fluidity, Hall thus explores the unresolvable complexities and contradictions of identity. Such conflicts demand to be told in anecdote and story, as in his remarkable revelation in the final lecture of a traumatic childhood memory of being othered, cast out, by his own family, seen as one more chapter in the tortured history of post-slave Caribbean society.<sup>20</sup> In an almost novelistic mode, then, Hall as narrator moves towards a recovery of subjectivity and consciousness as a way of transcending the desire of structuralism to analyse structures as if they have no agency or subjects. He creates himself as a subject in history, a liminal outsider and stranger who belongs to many histories, Caribbean, diasporic, British and what we might call world theoretical reflection: the wanderer in thought, imagination and being who in Simmel's terms in 'The Stranger' came to stay, forging thought anew.

Engaging closely with this just-published 1983 text has been an interesting and absorbing exercise. On the one hand, we are reminded of some important debates in the development of cultural theory from the 1950s to the 1980s, and of the seriousness of attempts to work out how to connect questions of economy, politics, society and culture, or alternatively, class, gender and race, without collapsing one into the other, or denying their specificity. Yet some parts of the book, it seems to us, live on and resonate much more than others. The discussion of discourses of race is particularly striking, and the comments on the shifting relationship between race and class in the history of capitalism remain very much to the point today. The treatment of the state when Hall considers Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire* and Gramsci seems more relevant than ever, especially when we consider recent political developments in the United States, the United Kingdom and elsewhere. The search via concepts such as contradiction and articulation for a flexible and nuanced version of Marxism is impressive. Yet the persistent desire for unity and totality, for a 'complex unity', that Hall expresses again and again, is now a little hard to understand; so influenced have we been by subsequent theoretical developments, from poststructuralism onwards, that it is now hard to recall why the search for unity and totality was so important.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, in his later thinking, Hall himself increasingly adopted poststructuralist emphases on the ambiguity and fluidity of representation, for example in an illuminating essay on Black Diaspora artists in *History Workshop* in 2006.<sup>22</sup> Yet, while the search for a 'complex unity' that resonates throughout this text may seem less pressing to us than it was to Hall in 1983, the ideas Hall develops along the way and the exposition of his style of thinking—flexible, lucid and self-reflexive—remain as important as ever for interpreting the world we live in now.

## About the authors

Ann Curthoys and John Docker are both honorary professors at the University of Western Australia, and are the joint authors of *Is History Fiction?* (2005, rev. edn. 2010).

Ann Curthoys works on Australian history in a transnational and imperial frame, and on historical theory and writing. In press with Cambridge University Press is Ann Curthoys and Jessie Mitchell, *Taking Liberty: Indigenous Rights and Settler Self-Government in the Australian Colonies, 1830–1890*. She is currently writing a history of Paul Robeson's tour of Australia and New Zealand in 1960, and (in association with colleagues at University College, London, and Monash University) researching some of the legacies in Australia of British slave ownership.

John Docker is a literary and cultural critic whose books include *Postmodernism and Popular Culture: A Cultural History* (1994) and *The Origins of Violence* (2008). He has published essays on the entwined relationship between genocide and settler colonialism, and is writing an *ego-histoire*, *Growing Up Communist and Jewish in Bondi*.

## Notes

1. Stuart Hall Foundation, <http://stuarthallfoundation.org/>.
2. Stuart Hall, *Familiar Stranger: A Life Between Two Islands*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2017; David Scott, *Stuart Hall's Voice: Intimations of an Ethics of Receptive Generosity*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2017.
3. For an excellent outline and appraisal of Stuart Hall's life and intellectual contribution, see the obituary by Geoff Eley in *History Workshop Journal*, no. 79, 2015, pp. 303–20.
4. Hall, *Cultural Studies 1983*, p. 15.
5. We wrote this review essay before having access to Stuart Hall's autobiographical *Familiar Stranger: A Life Between Two Islands*, which arrived too late for it to be substantively discussed. We can, however, note briefly that the title 'Familiar Stranger' immediately reminded us of Georg Simmel's essay 'The Stranger'.

- A quick index check led to the following sentence on p. 172, where Hall links Simmel's notion to his own 'diasporic perspective' of displacement that always leads to 'more than one positioning': 'This is the insider/outsider perspective of Georg Simmel's "stranger", the terrain of Homi Bhabha's "in-between", the controlled doubling of Ashis Nandy's "intimate enemies", W.E.B. DuBois's "double consciousness" and Edward Said's "out of place"'. See also John Docker's discussion of Leopold Bloom in Joyce's *Ulysses* in terms of Simmel's essay, in *1492: The Poetics of Diaspora*, Continuum, London, 2001, pp. 86–8. For Simmel's original formulation, see *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, ed. and trans. Kurt H. Wolff, The Free Press, Glencoe IL, 1950, pp. 402–8.
6. Hall, *Cultural Studies 1983*, editors' introduction, p.viii.
  7. John Docker, 'Literature and Social Thought: Australia in an International Context 1890–1925', PhD thesis, Department of English, Australian National University, 1980. In the introduction to the thesis, John mentioned favourably an essay by Birmingham Centre figure, Richard Johnson, titled 'Culture and the Historians', in *Working Class Culture*, ed. John Clarke, Chas Critcher and Richard Johnson, Hutchinson in association with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, London, 1979.
  8. John Docker, 'In Defence of Popular Culture', *Arena*, no. 60, 1982, pp. 72–87; Stuart Hall, 'Deconstructing the "Popular"', in Raphael Samuel (ed.), *People's History and Socialist Theory*, History Workshop Series, Routledge, Abingdon, 1981. 'In Defence of Popular Culture' also refers to Paul Willis's Birmingham Centre-influenced *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*, Saxon House, London, 1977.
  9. John had come across the felicitous term 'left pessimist' in British film theorist Terry Lovell's *Pictures of Reality: Aesthetics, Politics, Pleasure*, British Film Institute, London, 1980.
  10. Susan Dermody, John Docker and Drusilla Modjeska (eds), *Nellie Melba, Ginger Meggs and Friends: Essays in Australian Cultural History*, Kibble Books, Melbourne, 1982.
  11. Introduction, 'Australian Cultural Studies: Problems and Dilemmas', in Dermody, Docker, and Modjeska (eds), pp. 2–6.
  12. Bill Bonney and Helen Wilson, *Australia's Commercial Media*, Macmillan, South Melbourne, 1983.
  13. The main Sydney event, on 8 April 1983, titled 'Karl Marx and the Challenge of the Eighties', was chaired by Indigenous activist Pat O'Shane, while a similar Melbourne event a week later was called 'Prospects for Socialist Change in Australia', *Australian Left Review*, no. 83, 1983, pp. 16–17.
  14. Stuart Hall, 'For a Marxism without Guarantees', *Australian Left Review*, no. 84, 1983, pp. 38–43.
  15. Ann Curthoys, 'Marxist History and Australian Political Movements', *Australian Left Review*, no. 84, 1983, pp. 22–9. We later returned to the Eighteenth Brumaire in *Is History Fiction?*, where we point out that it has challenged, piqued and fascinated historians and literary and cultural critics such as Edward Said, Dominic LaCapra and Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, especially for the carnivalesque extravagance of its satirical language. Ann Curthoys and John Docker, *Is History Fiction?*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2005, pp. 124–5, 252.
  16. Steven Maras, 'Thinking about the History of ANZCA: An Australian Perspective', *Australian Journal of Communication*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2004, pp. 13–51, <http://www.anzca.net/conferences.html?id=73:adam&catid=1>.
  17. Ann Curthoys, "'I want to Disagree with Everything that's Been Said So Far": The Australian Communication Association Conference', *Listening Post*, no. 46, August 1983, pp. 21–2.
  18. John Docker, *Postmodernism and Popular Culture: A Cultural History*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1994, p. 159. Revised versions of the paper were published in John Tulloch and Graeme Turner (eds), *Australian Television: Programs, Pleasures, and Politics*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1989, and in Docker, *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*.
  19. For another telling of this story, see Hall, *Familiar Stranger*, p. 34.
  20. We wrote this sentence before coming across, in our early reading of *Familiar Stranger*, Hall movingly saying in the opening chapter 'Colonial Landscapes, Colonial Subjects', that 'Jamaica worked to "other" me' (p. 11), and refers to 'the long, tortuous, tortured and never-concluded route out of colonial subalternhood' (p. 13).
  21. See, for example, Hall, *Cultural Studies 1983*, p. 120.
  22. Stuart Hall, 'Black Diaspora Artists in Britain: Three "Moments" in Post-war History', *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 61, no. 1, pp. 1–24.

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