Edward W. Said died in 2003. Jacques Derrida died in 2004. Kofi Awoonor was killed in Westgate Mall last year. Now Stuart Hall is gone. A generation of intellectuals and activists, and intellectual–activists, is disappearing. Academics worldwide could not think ‘Black Britain’ before Stuart Hall. And in Britain the impact of Cultural Studies went beyond the confines of the academy. That quiet, gentle, witty, tenacious, learned, original political thinker inspired generations of students into intellectual and activist cultural production. Paul Gilroy, Angela McRobbie, Isaac Julien, John Akomfrah, the list goes on.

It was my good fortune to meet Stuart Hall at the Marxist Cultural Interpretation Institute in Champaign, Urbana in 1983, under the shadow of Sabra and Shatila. He recounted the days of the saving of New Left Review when the Russell Foundation no longer supported it in 1962, having been its founding editor in 1960, after its formation out of the merger of The New Reasoner and Universities and Left Review – the latter of which Hall had worked on while at Oxford in the mid 1950s. Today, I remember that it was also the moment of the death of Lumumba, Fanon and Du Bois. Hall came in and participated without epistemic recognition at the inauguration of a new way of thinking the world. His significance is not confined to British Cultural Studies, but rather to the world of social justice after the passing of the initial dreams of Negritude and pan-Africanism.

It was Awoonor who made me imagine the early 1960s in this worldly way. Awoonor came back to Accra with a good Brit Lit degree from Leeds even as the New Left was consolidating itself at Oxford. Awoonor became Du Bois’s minder. He remembers the move against Du Bois’s sympathies with a peculiar communism that meant passport denial in the United States, but might mean going with the Eastern bloc in newly fledged Ghana. (Remember Padmore’s ‘Pan-Africanism or Communism?’ And that Marcus Garvey was still taken seriously as an alternative.) More important, he remembered the 1959 Pan-African Congress, with both Lumumba and Fanon (‘the tall one and the short one’) in attendance. I want to place Hall, young man lately arrived in England from Jamaica, in this broad world, for the philosophers of the future, rather than keeping him local. I wish he were here for me to be having this discussion with about global connectivities. You listened, contradicted but also, sometimes, agreed.

Nowhere is the possibility of such a rereading clearer than in ‘When Was the Postcolonial? Thinking at the Limit’ (in Ian Chambers and Lidia Curti, eds, The Post-Colonial Question, Routledge, London, 1996). Although the essay apparently relates to a by-now-forgotten debate between ‘postcolonial critics’ and Arif Dirlik, Ella Shohat, Anne McClintock, Lata Mani, Ruth Frankenburg, Mary Louise Pratt, Robert Young and Homi Bhabha, ‘larger issues are “at stake” in these debates than the criticisms which have been widely signalled sometimes suggest’ (256). Paragraph after paragraph describe – without mentioning Africa – the
predicament of postcolonial nation-states in Africa, a predicament that clearly signals Africa’s nationalism, division into regionalism and unexamined culturalism. As we are today reeling under the dismissal of a good governor of Nigeria’s Central Bank, or looking at an ageing FLN member running again for president in Algeria, tremendous ethnic conflict in Kenya, an inequitable infrastructure and education system below a certain class in Ghana – indeed, at the well-known fact that the difference between rich and poor is most aggravated in sub-Saharan Africa with South Africa coming close behind – we read Hall’s words about the emergence of powerful local elites managing the contradictory effects of under-development ... characterized by the persistence of many of the effects of colonization, but at the same time their displacement from the colonizer/colonized axis to their internalization within the decolonized society itself.

We read this in the context of Africa, not, as he does, in the context of the Gulf States, where we are looking at Sykes–Picot. I hear Assia Djebar, bringing colonial and postcolonial violence together, exclaiming in October 1988: ‘Once more, O Frantz, the “wretched of the earth”!’ In some quarters, the desired solution is to make the countries safe for foreign direct investment. This is Hall’s ‘devil and the deep blue sea’, not the contradictions in Dirlik’s, or Shohat’s, or yet Robert Young’s arguments. It should be noticed that Hall’s arguments do not apply to the proliferating examples of the removal of bad heads of state by popular movements being signalled as ‘revolution’, yet with no preparation for building new states. It is in the context of ‘Africa rising’, looking at tradition surviving inter-regionally rather than favouring conflict, that we can read Hall’s words that ‘some other, related but as yet “emergent” new configurations of power–knowledge relations are beginning to exert their distinctive and specific effects’ (254).

While the New Left was organizing itself at Oxford, W.E.B. Du Bois was looking carefully, as Marx looked at Morgan, at responsible critical and scholarly anthropological texts describing West, South, East Africa, making notes, marking indexes – to combat the stupidity of declaring the Negro slave population stupid because violently withdrawn from impressively structured social organization: a tremendous statistical and historical achievement inscribed on mnemonic material and altogether impressive linguistic sophistication, where the line from figurative practice to rational choice is always alive in daily practice. He was looking to examine how post-slavery African Americans in the American South could possibly have worked so quickly with the structural principles of Reconstruction and parliamentary administration and, if his marginalia and index markings are to be trusted, he is thinking of something operating in the absence of any entry granted into intellectual labour – something that Fernand Braudel would later call the longue durée – persistent perennial residual structures unrecognizable by Southern gentry and benevolent collecting types. So we are dealing not just with exceptions, such as Phyllis Wheatley and Frederick Douglass, but also with the general community of emancipated slaves.

It is here that Stuart Hall’s work on ideology and national identity can be made intertextual within a field into which he himself did not venture. In their different ways, the work of Gilroy and Julien has elaborated such possibilities. In the evenings here in Ghana, back from Du Bois, I read Awoonor’s posthumously published The Promise of Hope. There is a moving tribute there to the Jamaican activist writer Neville Augustus Dawes, a writer involved in the transformation of pan-Africanism in postcoloniality. Stuart Hall was resolutely North London. Yet I want to close with some words from that inclusive homage, because I have tried to write this tribute to my friend Stuart Hall in the spirit of conjunctural inclusiveness and solidarity:

I come again I say
half-clansman of the ritual goat
tethered to a forgotten tree
in a ruined and alien field:
I am the last dancer in the circular team
kicking only dust
after the graceful ones are done,
the jeers and sneers echoing
down the vast saharas of my history
on whose corner
this day, this natal day,
I weep anew
for historical follies I could not shed
abilities I did not realize
hopes I did not endure.1

When I heard of Stuart Hall’s death I was in Calcutta, writing a piece on Coleridge where I was discovering when the postcolonial was. That essay is dedicated to his memory.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Stuart Hall and Cultural Studies

The death of Stuart Hall has already provoked a wave of remembrance and retrospective reflection that will no doubt continue for years to come. Here I will consider Hall’s contribution to the field with which he and his work became at times synonymous: Cultural Studies. Exactly what type of entity Cultural Studies might be is itself a controversial topic. Hall was ambivalent about whether Cultural Studies was a ‘discipline’ or a ‘trans-disciplinary field of inquiry, not a discipline’: each of these characterizations appeared in the same 2007 essay. This ambivalence is in part inherent to the concept of ‘discipline’ itself, but is also a genuine index of a willingness to problematize the intellectual and institutional identity of cultural studies, which is one of the most distinctive hallmarks of that field itself; one that it shares with certain strands of art practice, but with few other disciplines or quasi-disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, wherein disciplinary policing is arguably become stricter and more anxious as the pressures of dwindling resources and bibliometric competition become more ever more intense.

This general resistance to formulation and institutionalization is one of the most striking effects of Hall’s long-range influence within Cultural Studies. Although both Richard Hoggart (who founded the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies [CCCS] at Birmingham University – inviting Hall to join the staff – in 1964 and appointed Hall as his successor in 1968) and Raymond Williams were committed to interdisciplinarity and methodological experimentation, their resistance to codification was not as rhetorically explicit as Hall’s. Hall was frank about his distaste for systematization, famously remarking upon his preference for The Eighteenth Brumaire over Capital, although it was always unclear how far this was a matter of literary taste and how far a deconstructive ethic, resistant to system as such, informed Hall’s approach. The obvious retort was that Marx could only write The Eighteenth Brumaire because, and to the extent that, he was on the way to writing Capital; that the possibility (and, at times, the necessity) of abstract schematization is a necessary element of any analytical practice that can get beyond the limits of positivism. I don’t think Hall would have disagreed with this, however, and his own forays into schematic theoretical exposition were notorious for their economy, utility and widespread influence.

Although Hall authorized and encouraged the idea of Cultural Studies as a field within which a very diverse ecology of practices could flourish – from ethnography to media content-analysis to ‘pure’ theory – he was consistent in his understandings of what the overall aim and shared objective of such work should be. On the one hand, Cultural Studies was to be always about power, about the shifting nature and multiple operations of power relationships at every conceivable social scale, a formulation that Hall offered most memorably and succinctly in his 1997 interview with Radical Philosophy. On the other hand, the orientation of Cultural Studies was always to be towards the general analysis of ‘the conjuncture’, this Gramscian term designating the specific ensemble of social, cultural and economic forces shaping possible political outcomes at a given moment. This by no means implied that all work in Cultural Studies had to concern itself with some ambitious attempt to survey the whole field of contemporary power relationships, merely that the question ‘what does this have to do with everything else?’ should, at some point, always be asked of whatever phenomenon was under discussion.

This raises the intriguing question of why exactly a transdisciplinary field with its roots in Leavisite English Literature should have become the place where two (perhaps more – we shall see) generations of anglophone scholars would go if these were the questions they wanted to address. Michael Rustin has remarked that Cultural Studies as we know it could just as well have emerged from social anthropology. Paul Bowman once quipped to me that if today we were thinking of a name for the transdisciplinary field concerned with the conjunctural, multiscalar analysis of power relationships, then ‘Cultural Studies’ probably wouldn’t be the obvious choice. We could add to these observations by remarking upon a situation
with which readers of Radical Philosophy will prob-
ably be familiar: that in many institutional contexts
‘Cultural Studies’ has come, bizarrely, to name a space
in which speculative philosophy in the ‘continental’
tradition is discussed, banished as it has largely been
from academic ‘Philosophy’ by the dominance of the
analytic tradition. At the same time we ought to ask
why an intellectual practice whose primary object
is the analysis of power relationships should, to this
day, have had almost no productive relationships with
the academic field of Political Science or even the
supposedly more expansive ‘Political Studies’.

There are two related answers to this question.
One is the influence of, and role played by, Hall
himself, not only in Cultural Studies, but in the wider
life of the British intellectual Left since the 1960s.
Hall became the key figure in Cultural Studies, and
drew many scholars into it, not only because of his
own publications or the support and inspiration
which he offered to successive cohorts of students
who would go on from Birmingham (and later the
Open University) to teach and practise Cultural
Studies in their own careers, but also because of the
role he played as a uniquely insightful political
commentator in the wider public sphere. Hall’s com-
mentary typically drew on conceptual resources that
were being developed in Cultural Studies (semiotics,
Gramscian and Althusserian ideology-critique; later
on, postcolonial theory and some post-structuralism)
in order to offer deft and penetrating pictures of the
key emergent tendencies shaping British politics and
culture. The most striking example of this continuity
is his derivation of an analysis of emergent Thatcher-
ism – which turned out to be unquestionably presci-
ent and accurate, despite its dismissal at the time
by most of the Left – from the analytical work done
by Policing the Crisis, the multi-authored study of a
press moral panic around ‘mugging’ and its broader
political context conducted by Hall and colleagues in
the mid-1970s and published in 1978.

The other answer is perhaps more contentious.
I would suggest that it has to do with the profound
hegemony of liberalism within the British academy,
which takes multiple forms in different contexts, but
which ensures that neither Philosophy nor Political
Studies has been an institutional site at which any
kind of serious critique of a culture and polity his-
torically shaped by it has been possible, except under
very exceptional circumstances. The narrowness of
these disciplines’ self-conceptions is a symptom of
the narrowness and complacency of the ideology
that shapes their habitual norms and assumptions
to this day, and it is in the vast space, the enormous
territory of unanswered questions and unaddressed
phenomena left vacant by this unconscious rigidity
which something called ‘Cultural Studies’ has grown,
spread out and multiplied, in a form which is often
frustratingly diffuse, but which is so by virtue of
the size and variety of the issues that have been left
open to it by those disciplines that might otherwise
have been expected to address them. Cultural Studies
has been shaped, and indeed called into existence,
in part by the need to find ways of talking about

claim that the overwhelming orientation of Cultural Studies to recognizably ‘New Left’ positions was simply a consequence of Hall’s personal political commitments. Raymond Williams was arguably at least as central a figure to the early British New Left, and Hoggart obviously knew Hall’s work as the founding editor of *New Left Review* when he recruited him to work at the CCCS. To some extent the very idea of ‘Cultural Studies’ is a New Left idea, more traditional forms of Leftism having tended to be satisfied with the intellectual tools made available by the more traditional social sciences or dialectical philosophy.

On the other hand, the propagation of Cultural Studies as an intellectual and (trans)disciplinary project informed by the politics of the New Left was a major political achievement for this trio and their followers, given that Leavisite liberal humanism could easily have become the organizing political paradigm for some new interdisciplinary project in the humanities, as Leavis’s own suggestions for an expanded liberal arts curriculum made clear. None of this is to deny that, as critics of the field tend to stress more than is perhaps reasonable, a certain banal liberalism has itself become the implicit political orientation of the worst kinds of Cultural Studies. Nor is it to deny that the precise political orientation of most Cultural Studies remains often frustratingly vague: this itself being, arguably, a symptom of Hall’s reluctance to address the issue schematically at any stage. But these facts do not detract from the general point that Hall succeeded in consolidating the work of his mentors in defining Cultural Studies not only as a productive and porous new field, but one wherein the politics of the New Left would remain implicitly hegemonic to this day.

This is not to say that Hall was entirely satisfied with what Cultural Studies had become. In later years he often expressed the view that cultural theory had emerged as too much of an autonomous domain, cut off from concrete political and analytical problems. He seemed to feel that it was Hall the theorist, the author of those classic schematic essays, rather than Hall the analyst, the key author of *Policing the Crisis*, whom younger scholars too often sought to emulate, whereas it was becoming the latter that he regarded as his greatest contribution to the intellectual and political causes that he espoused. At times, there was an inevitably conservative-sounding tone to some of these remarks, but his resistance to theoretical neophilia was clearly justified. How many of the conceptual fads that have excited aspiring young radical intellectuals in recent decades (from Agamben to Žižek) have ended up having any actual political purchase whatsoever? Isn’t the lack of historical consciousness and clear, patient analysis an endemic feature today of activist culture, just as a certain anti-intellectualism was the phenomenon against which Hall and his colleagues had to struggle on the left in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s? Under such circumstances, Cultural Studies as conceived by Hall – a sort of multifaceted political sociology, deploying a wide range of theoretical tools in order to analyse shifting dynamics of power and their historical specificities – is needed today more than ever.

Jeremy Gilbert

**Notes**


5. Whether or not ‘conjuncture’ means the same thing as ‘totality’ is not a question that need detain us here. For thorough discussions of the status of concepts such as ‘conjuncture’ and ‘context’ in Cultural Studies, see Lawrence Grossberg, *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense*, Duke University Press, Durham NC, 2010.
Stuart Hall was a significant intellectual force among many of the artists and filmmakers of what came to be known as the Black Arts Movement (BAM) of the 1980s and early 1990s. That he generously gave his time and willing support to their projects to the very end rendered him a figure of affection and respect, as expressed most recently in John Akomfrah and Smoking Dogs’ film *The Stuart Hall Project* (2013) and the triple projection installation recently presented at Tate Britain, *The Unfinished Conversation* (2012). Both of these beautifully articulate the moods and events of the decades after World War II, with Hall’s incisive responses indicative of Britain’s socio-political reluctance to acknowledge the loss of imperial and economic power and the changing demographies created by the immigration of previous colonial subjects.

Stuart always felt himself to be an outsider, both in his place of departure, Jamaica, and in Britain, where he arrived in 1951 as an Oxford University Rhodes Scholar. But, perhaps because of this, he was a sensitive observer of shifting articulations in socio-political and economic conditions, who effectively bridged successive generations with differing cultural experiences and aspirations. Like many artists and writers of this first post-World War II diasporic generation, he arrived expecting to be regarded as an equal in the intellectual and artistic life of the ‘mother’ country. For artists, this included an engagement with modernism, which they understood as an international and cosmopolitan movement devoted to the invention of new artistic languages, and of which they felt themselves to be a part.

For Stuart, the political turbulence of the times – anti-colonialism and independence movements, the ideological polarization of the Cold War, the US Civil Rights Movement – meant a radical engagement with what he was later to call a ‘structuralist-Marxist’ social and cultural politics. Although this first generation of artists initially enjoyed a modicum of success in the British art world, by the mid-1960s, with the surge in societal and institutional racism and the ‘Americanization’ of British culture, optimism turned to disillusionment as they were progressively excluded from the art system. This exclusion of British black and Asian modernists from the British art canon produced an art-historical vacuum that was not addressed until Rasheed Araeen’s exhibition *The Other Story* at the Hayward Gallery in 1989. This sense of isolation led to the formation of the Caribbean Artists Movement (1966–1972), intellectually grounded to a large extent in Stuart’s radical socio-political analyses.

Stuart, however, is less identified with this first diasporic generation of visual artists than the second, British-born, generation, who had next to no knowledge of this earlier British black and Asian modernism. The dismal fact is that, until the 2000s, there were few art historians or critics either interested or schooled in modernisms outside the white male Euro-American axis. Indeed, the prevailing establishment view was that modernism was the exclusive domain of whites, from which the work of women and ethnic ‘others’ were to be excluded as inferior derivatives. This racialized exclusion extended to the new generation, the consequence of which – against a background of inner city ‘race’ riots likewise rooted in a racially inflected social deprivation – was the militant politicization of young black and Asian artists, for whom Stuart became a natural ally and mentor. Thus, in the absence of British art world support structures, the new generation sought to develop their own galleries, magazines and archives, and their own debates by reference to African-American and Caribbean cultures, alongside the prevailing discourses of the time. By the early 1980s these discourses constituted a number of interlocking, albeit sometimes antagonistic, strands prompted by new social movements: anti-racism, feminism, gender and identity politics, cultural and film theory, particularly as it had evolved through *Screen* magazine, and post-colonial theory, developed by diasporic theorists from literary studies such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak. Stuart, of course, must be added to this cluster of significant intellectuals, largely because his post-Marxist or New Left approach to the study of culture enabled us to see how the subject is
interpellated into ideological and political structures of cultural power. Given the significance of the visual image for this approach to culture, Stuart’s analyses of the construction of the black subject through the politics of representation and its deconstruction became a central concern for the BAM.

The charge is occasionally made – somewhat unjustly – that Stuart’s ‘sociological’ approach led to the self-ghettoization of black and Asian artists in restrictive ‘identity’ politics. The argument hinges on the febrile relationship between the socio-political and the aesthetic in general; namely, that art practice led by socio-political ‘theory’ becomes a mere illustration of it, which disregards the insights and knowledge that aesthetic experience itself can produce. And yet art is not produced in a vacuum but responds to the conditions in which the practitioner finds herself. By the late 1970s, British mainstream art criticism was seriously moribund, popular and mass media culture were expanding dramatically, and it was clear that art required a broader contextualization than simply aesthetic ‘taste’ based in Eurocentric white male genealogies. In effect, the socio-political needed to be brought back into dialogue with the aesthetic without sacrificing art’s ‘sense’.

Regarding the rise in race and ethnic ‘identity’ debates, Spivak had proposed that ‘strategic essentialism’ was a short-term means by which a constituency could impose a public agenda, without necessarily adhering to it ontologically. This position was concomitant with the circulation of poststructuralist and postmodernist critiques of the entire premises of Enlightenment thinking, which above all challenged the privileged, so-called ‘Cartesian’ subject, exemplified in the art world by the modernist male ‘genius’. But, as Stuart ironically commented at the time, advocates of the ‘postmodern’ were pronouncing the ‘death of the subject’ at the very moment when the black self was attempting to construct itself as a speaking subject. For Stuart, however, like Frantz Fanon before him, subjectivity was a political construct and identity was not a fixed entity but in continuous negotiation and transformation with the world in which the self found itself.

The legacy and continuing support of British black and Asian artists and photographers was to be enshrined as the Institute of International Visual Art (InIVA) and Autograph (ABP) in a dedicated building designed by David Adjaye. Stuart was instrumental in their initial success, functioning for many years as chair for both organizations; and the library is named after him. Few, however, could have predicted that the globalization and commodification of art would render InIVA’s initial remit partially redundant, and it has so far failed to reinvent itself under these new conditions – although how far this failure may be due to deference to Stuart is impossible to gauge. In any case, the generation of black and Asian visual artists that followed the BAM during the 1990s – notably Chris Ofili, Yinka Shonibare and Steve McQueen – have forged successful international artistic practices that bypassed InIVA and are less overtly indebted to Hall. Perhaps one can say that they absorbed his discourses on race and class, and learned lessons from the BAM, but evolved practices in which the political is less militantly inscribed in the aesthetic.

Stuart readily confessed his lack of expertise in matters aesthetic and was very mindful of the critical debates that surrounded the supposed influence of Cultural Studies on British black and Asian artists. He responded to them with typical generosity and grace. It is these qualities that illuminate his essay ‘Assembling the 1980s: The Deluge – and After’ (in the 2005 collection Shades of Black, edited by David A. Bailey, Ian Baucom and Sonia Boyce), which directly addresses the complex and often conflictual relationship between the visual arts and the multiple cultural discourses that informed both his own intellectual trajectory and those of the BAM. Stuart’s own legacy continues not only through his published essays and recorded public addresses, but also through those artists who have now entered academia and for whom he was an inspirational and ethical role model.

Jean Fisher

Notes

1. Initially, the designation ‘black’ was a political not ‘epidermal’ marker, referring to any ethnic group subjected to colonial repression and racist discrimination, although it was dominated by artists of African, African Caribbean and South Asian ancestry. Artists affiliated to the early formation of BAM included David A. Bailey, Sonia Boyce, Eddie Chambers, Lubaina Himid, Claudette Johnson, Keith Piper, Donald Rodney and Maud Sulter. Whereas early practices were dominated by painting, they later expanded into photography and film/video, the latter including Black Audio Film Collective (later reconfigured as Smoking Dogs) and Isaac Julien’s Sankofa.

2. Ronald Moody had arrived in the 1920s; the post-World War II artists include Rashid Araeen, Frank Bowling, Clifton Campbell, Avinash Chandra, Li Yuan Chia, Avtarjeel Dhanjal, Balraj Khanna, Donald Locke, David Medalla, Ahmed Parvez, Amwar Shemza, Francis Souza, Uzo Ugonu and Aubrey Williams.

3. CAM was formed by Edward Brathwaite, John La Rose and Andrew Salkey; its participants included Art Denny, Uzo Egonu, Wilson Harris, C.L.R. James, Linton Kwesi Johnson, David Lamming, Errol Lloyd, Althea McNish, Ronald Moody, Horace Ové, Sam Selvon and Aubrey Williams.