Theories and Methodologies

In the Thickets: Stuart Hall in 1983

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> He's working on building the movement without which the words mean nothing . . . he's involved in wrestling with difficult ideas and making ideas come alive for people.
>
> —Stuart Hall, Karl Marx Memorial Lecture, Sheffield, 1983

Cultural Studies, 1983: A Theoretical History, a transcription of the eight seminars presented by Stuart Hall at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, for the Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture summer school, has been widely recognized as a summary statement of Hall's conception of cultural studies at that moment (Carrington; Munro; Rodman). With his additional lecture for the concluding conference—"The Toad in the Garden: Thatcherism amongst the Theorists" (published five years later in a volume edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg)—and his contributions to events in Australia that same year, 1983 is recognized as a moment of internationalization for British cultural studies, in which Hall disseminated to the Anglosphere academy a particular version of cultural studies, thus consolidating the field (Curthoys and Docker; Wellman).[1]

This can be true, without illuminating much about Hall's own intentions. As Grossberg and Jennifer Daryl Slack point out, if the seminars of *Cultural Studies, 1983* were a "theoretical history" of cultural studies, that history necessarily excluded as much as it included—the seminars "underplayed" the empirical research undertaken at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham, the institutional praxes that enabled that work, and the political "debates and diversity that constituted a vital part of the everyday life of the Centre and often connected it with political and artistic activities in Birmingham" (ix). Additionally, though Hall was

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explicit about his political target in "The Toad in the Garden," much remains missing or only implicit in the 1983 seminars. If we take seriously Hall's claim that cultural studies was an intellectual activity that enabled better political analysis and action (*Cultural Studies* 2), that he should be understood not as an academic, a scholar, a theorist, or a critic but as a teacher and a public or organic intellectual ("Through the Prism" 277), a considerable amount of reconstruction is required to situate his contribution to the summer school and conference and to understand his full praxis.

The Toad

Margaret Thatcher's Tory government was reelected on 10 June 1983, in the first week of the Urbana-Champaign summer school. Hall had been running a sustained campaign from his 1979 essay "The Great Moving Right Show" onward expounding a critique of Thatcherism, an analysis of the conditions that her hegemonic project addressed, and a critique of the political responses of the left.[2] It is often noted that Hall's analyses of the period are developed in relation to a revisionist Marxism, possibly tending toward a post-Marxism, in which economism and ideologism, teleology, and the resort to large-scale materialist abstractions are complicated by discursive, structuralist, and other paradigms.

What is frequently misunderstood, or simply not recognized at all, is that Hall's critiques had an altogether more practical target than Marxism as a scholarly or academic object for the advancement of cultural studies. Since the 1950s, Hall had recognized the Labour Party as the key electoral vehicle for political transformation.[3] He had also consistently criticized its economic, domestic, foreign, and defense policies.[4] Hall presented the failure of the Labour Party to provide an adequate response to either the long crisis of the 1970s or Thatcherite conservatism as an opportunity for major revision and renewal toward an altogether different project from that offered by either the old right or the old left of the party. Thus, though the critique of economism is elaborated throughout Hall's essays on ideology as a critique of "orthodox Marxism," it was directed in his 1982 essay "A Long Haul" not toward Marxists or communists but toward a far more nebulous "left"—those who would shape the organization, policy, and action of the Labour Party. At an event organized by *Marxism Today* in October 1982, Hall debated not with a prominent sociologist or Marxist but with the Labour member of parliament Tony Benn.[5]

The Mole

Hall had forged these arguments within *Marxism Today*, the theoretical journal of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB); at the CPGB Communist University of London, which had been established in 1969 (see Andrews; Bloomfield; Thompson); and at the conferences of the Sociology Group of the CPGB (see, e.g., Hunt, *Class* and *Marxism*). This work, though highly critical of cruder forms of dogmatic recitation, was aimed not at dismantling Marxism but at fostering forms of open Marxism.[6] Hall understood his role as one of providing the intellectual groundwork for revitalizing Marxist concepts and categories for popular understanding—of contributing to the formation of a new good sense. His accounts of Marx and Marxism were presented on large public platforms. An early airing was at the inaugural Karl Marx Memorial Lecture, organized by the Sheffield City Council in March 1983. As Daisy Payling has argued, Sheffield presented an important example of the municipal socialism championed by Hall, reconceptualizing class categories and expanding political organizing beyond the traditional workplace—forging a new left politics that embraced the demands and practices of women's liberation, gay liberation, and antiracism.

The lectures in Sheffield and Australia drew on a substantial body of work that Hall had been preparing for the new public broadcaster in Britain, Channel 4, launched in 1982. Dorothy Hobson has highlighted the relationship between cultural studies and Channel 4, which is publicly owned but commercially financed, in terms of its personnel and the conception of popular culture it was based on. Hall was invited to contribute to two projects that showcased his interpretation of Marx to a large

public audience. The first—"Whatever Happened to Marx?"—broadcast in March 1983, was a half-hour discussion between Hall and David McLellan, chaired by the historian Juliet Gardiner. The second—*Karl Marx*—was a two-episode, two-hour documentary developed with the film director Alan Horrox, broadcast in October.

Hall and Horrox met fortnightly over a year, developing the narrative.[7] Hall set out the aim of the documentary in a treatment titled "What Does Marx Mean to You? or, 'Pessimism of the Intellect, Optimism of the Will'": "Without 'doing a biography' it seems to me critical to establish that Marx was talking about a *real* world . . . to 'normalize' Marx's ideas: i.e. not rob them of their critical revolutionary edge, *but* bring him in out of the ghetto of 'weird thoughts.'" He further argues, "[W]e aren't in the business of persuading viewers to agree with Marx's ideas: but we are in the business of convincing them that they must be and can be taken seriously: they inhabit the same mental universe as *we* do." He then sketches a four-part narrative: "1) The Living Marx / Marxism; 2) Marxism—And Actually Existing Socialism; 3) Marxism in the Third World; 4) How Credible to / Relevant in the 1980s are Marx's IDEAS?"

The final script of the film as broadcast largely maintains this structure, but the fourth part is split in two, so that the first episode, "Karl Marx: The Spectre of Marxism," closes with a survey of democratic movements in Soviet satellite states, and the second, "Karl Marx: Revolution in the Revolution," closes with an account of Black Power and the Black Panthers, the student movement of 1968, women's liberation, and gay liberation. Hall singles out the Women's Peace Camp at Greenham Common as indicative of "perhaps the largest of the social movements to re-emerge in the seventies" in Europe, adding, "It challenges the commitment of both existing Communism and Capitalism to defend their systems through the threat of nuclear war" (Postproduction script 42). The film constitutes a richly illustrated, popular version of Hall's argument in "The Problem of Ideology—Marxism without Guarantees"—epistemologically against dogma, doxa, and disciplinary security; against the notion that levels of abstraction neatly align within a social totality that contains a rational logic; and praxiologically against a politics that assumes either a vanguardist authority or a triumphant outcome for class struggle. The film closes:

> For my part, so long as Britain remains Capitalist, and it does, and so long as the world is dominated by imperialism, as it is, Marx will continue to be relevant. He can't predict the outcome of the struggle but he still provides the best place to start the analysis from. After all he had a passionate commitment to change things, but this was always rooted in an analysis of actuality as it was. His favourite motto, after all, was "You must have doubts about everything!" (43–44)

A Terrain

The practical qualities of Hall's work at the CCCS are not captured by his presentation of a "theoretical history" in *Cultural Studies, 1983*. But Hall's location of practice had also substantially changed—by then he was professor of sociology at the Open University (OU).

Launched in 1969, the OU constituted a major departure in British higher education. The result of Jennie Lee's determination to break open space for large-scale tertiary education, the OU was pedagogically focused, high-quality, and delivered at distance using a blend of textbooks, radio, and television, supported by regional tutors and summer schools. A number of unique features of the OU meant that it attracted a high level of political scrutiny: there was no qualification bar for entry; courses were taken by thousands of students; OU course materials were used by other UK universities, hungry for literature; courses were broadcast on national radio and television, reaching a broad general public; and finally, the OU was directly funded and overseen by the Department of Education and Science (DES).

Though the OU may seem in many respects altogether different from the CCCS, and though Hall himself narrated the move as a form of escape (Connell 300–01), he had had a long-standing relationship with the institution, providing content for courses as early as the mid-1970s. Broadcast on 17 April 1975, the film *Mugging: A Case Study in*

Communication was wholly narrated by Hall, presenting a summary of some of the main arguments covered in the first part of *Policing the Crisis* (1978, coauthored by Hall): the development of "moral panics," the role of "primary definers" in news media, the "amplification spiral," and so on. Hall provided a text book—*A Review of the Course*—for a second-year undergraduate course, Society and Schooling, which became a very public target for conservative educationists who identified "Marxist bias" in the program literature (see Hammersley).

Scrutiny by educationists and neoliberal economists continued once Hall was in the post. Social Sciences: A Foundation Course, developed under Hall as course chair, was taken by five thousand students in its first year (Potter). It immediately attracted accusations of bias from a small number of tutors, resulting in reports in the press (Gold). Hall responded in an open letter to tutors and students, arguing the case for including "marxisms" alongside "pluralist" perspectives. Recognizing that this marked a departure from previous versions of the course, he argued that this change was necessary in response to increased social conflict and crisis—conflict and crisis that had generated epistemological fragmentation and contestation in the social sciences themselves ("Marxism").

While Hall was battling on this front, the course was under direct material and ideological attack from the DES. The education minister and Thatcher's ideologue in chief, Keith Joseph, slashed the OU budget by a third (Weinreb 110–11) and directly challenged the course. Throughout 1983, Joseph wrote directly to the OU vice-chancellor, John Horlock, to complain about its content and commissioned a report that was submitted in spring 1984. Compiling the views of anonymous "professional economists" (Hancock 1), the report claimed that the course misled students by describing modern Britain as a "capitalist economy" (!) and that its presentation of "Economics" had failed to recognize the value of basic theories of "marginal utility" and "supply and demand" (8, 3, 4, 6). Hall, supported by Horlock, successfully defended the course.

Thus, when Hall wrote in his essay "Education in Crisis" (1983) that "Margaret Thatcher's . . . short-term cuts and savaging of the system . . . are written large for anyone on the run to read," he knew to what he referred (2). Thatcher, he argued, had generated a contradictory but powerful proposition—that parents should be able to choose for their children "the best education" they could afford and that education should be governed by standards that separate those who are academically "excellent" from those who are not—with Thatcherism "inequality in education has become, once again, a *positive* social programme" (3).

To counter that assault required not a defense of the system established in the postwar settlement but a new left project of vigorous transformation of curricula, led by a political principle—the dismantling of the division of labor. Hall diagrammed these twin poles of a left project as the "technical" and the "strategic" and argued that these had historically generated a "void" filled by "a particular kind of educational 'progressivism'" (7). Progressivism had resulted in both "the profound awareness . . . that every educational process is a form of social control" and the "honouring of . . . the experience—of the learners, of the excluded classes" (7). But with this last achievement came a fatal error—treating "experience itself" as "alone the great teacher" (8): "We have to work with, but also *work on* experience. We need to bring something to bear on experience. . . . [W]e need to be able to see round; that is, to understand the principles and invisible structures on which 'experience' rests and which determine its shape, beyond the naked eye" (8).

Here is an example of Hall's "macrohydraulics of power," which he contrasted at the Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture conference with a Foucauldian "micro-physics of power" ("Toad" 70). It comes from a recognition that, through its articulation with other instances in the social totality, education is not autonomous but rather a key battleground in a wider terrain of political struggle. That political struggle informed Hall's advocacy of cultural studies in education and his research on the history and nature of the modern state: throughout 1982 and 1983, Hall was meeting colleagues and publishing the course materials for The State and Society, launched in January 1984 (see Held et al.; McLennan et al.).

A Small Axe

Throughout the 1970s, Hall participated in UNESCO meetings, encouraged by the director of social science programs, the Trinidadian Marion O'Callaghan (née Patrick Jones). There, Hall developed one of his most distinctive intellectual contributions—an account of the articulation of race and class in modern capitalist societies.[8] While the significance of that work has been appreciated, the context and audiences he was addressing have not (but see Karayiannides). Considering this context enables a greater grasp of Hall's political and intellectual motivations in 1983.

In a paper delivered in late January 1980, at a UNESCO-sponsored expert meeting in Bridgetown, Barbados, Social Science Needs and Priorities in the English-Speaking Caribbean and Suriname, Hall argued for the specificity and primacy of the Caribbean experience, identifying four "openings" for challenging inherited modes of social science ("New Perspectives" 10). The first opening came from the discipline of history, which he argued had "been something of a theoretical *organizer*," providing "an intellectual *matrix* in which the relations of the Caribbean to other 'histories' and to world historical development could be reconstructed and redefined" (11). The second and third openings—for a reconsideration of the state and of class formation and social structures—were made available through revisionist or neo-Marxisms. For the fourth and most significant opening—analysis of "ideology . . . and formations of culture"—Hall advocated the adoption of cultural studies (11). He concluded with a qualification—he had not been offering a "prescription" but recognizing that "the erosion of the mainstream social science approach and empirical problem-areas must be of concern to the future planning and organization of postgraduate training and research in the region, if the old gaps and dependencies are not to be reproduced anew" (12).

The "Final Report and Recommendations" of the meeting adopts Hall's position on "the need to ground our understanding of Caribbean societies in the specificity of their historical formation and experience, and in an appreciation of their ideological and cultural constitution, as well as in the study of economic and political structures" (UNESCO 46). In the fall of 1983, Hall was again at a UNESCO symposium—this time in Paris—under the title Issues and New Trends in Migration: Population Movements within and across National Boundaries, held to provide evidence for the following year's General Conference on Population. Seven themes were discussed; Hall contributed to the fourth, on "[s]ocio-cultural adaptation and conflict," concerned with "relations and perceptions" between "different cultures," with a particular emphasis on "second and succeeding generations" (6).

In this contribution Hall answers the questions he posed in the late 1960s: How would the second and third generations of migrants to Britain survive the profoundly (symbolically and materially) alienating experience of continual racialization, displacement, and dispossession and the "traumatic gaps and disagreements between them and their own parents" ("West Indians" 17).[9] Hall appears at first to analyze the emergence of Rastafarianism, reggae, and patois in Britain as indicative of a failure of adaptation, as a reversal of the "'classic' pattern" of immigrant "adaptation . . . converg[ing] around common socio-cultural patterns between settling and 'host' societies" ("Socio-cultural Adaptation" 1), a failure that is "double edged" in its outcomes (20)—strengthening the community but at the same time generating intercommunity conflict. But all of this is, in the end, refuted in a conclusion that takes aim at the grounds on which the symposium was called:

> The language of adaptation, pregnant with its promise of integration . . . dear to the hearts of official bodies and persons—quite inadequately represents what this experience is actually like, on the ground, in different parts of the world, at the terminal point of the migration process. . . . History, circumstances and conditions can play as powerful a structuring role as the outlooks and experiences which migrating peoples bring with them. . . . These cultural transactions between past, present and future, symbolized in and transmitted through cultural processes, represent some of the most profound, and least studied, aspects of the migration experience. (22)

So, the widely accepted argument that 1983 marks a moment in which Hall internationalized cultural studies is confirmed, but must be nuanced. Hall was, indeed, attempting such, but not only—and certainly not primarily—to the academies of the Anglosphere and not for the purpose of establishing a "field." Hall had, by 1983, been promoting the problematics and praxis of cultural studies to social scientists, educationists, and policymakers through UNESCO forums in Barbados, France, Mexico, and South Africa for more than a decade. He was intervening directly in debates on state formation, migration, and race and racism, advocating for a conjunctural analytic that simultaneously recognizes the epochal process of decolonization, on the one hand, and the conjunctural crisis of the 1970s, on the other; he was arguing for epistemological paradigm change and championing and practicing a new kind of pedagogy (both public and institutional); he was doing so from an overt, declared political position.

Notes

1. Hall delivered a lecture titled "For a Marxism without Guarantees" at the Marx Centenary Symposium, organized by the *Australian Left Review*, which subsequently published the text of the address. The text has been reprinted in *Salvage* (spring-summer 2022).

2. "The Great Moving Right Show" is in *Selected Political Writings* 172–86; for subsequent articulations of this critique, see Hall, "Thatcherism"; in *Selected Political Writings* 187–99, "'Little Caesars'"; Aaronovitch et al.; Hall, "Long Haul"; Hall and Jacques.

3. Sanchez and Wickham-Jones have recently opened up some important space for debate and reconsideration of Hall's political engagement with the Labour Party.

4. For a powerful example, see Hall's 1966 essay "Political Commitment" (*Selected Political Writings* 85–106).

5. Held at Queen Mary University of London, this event, The Great Moving Left Show (29–31 October 1982), was more like a festival than a conference, including music, cabaret, film screenings, comedy acts, and children's shows. Such a mixture of popular culture and political argument was a core feature of *Marxism Today*.

6. Andrews has illuminated how the Sociology Group reconceptualized the role of the Communist Party as a catalyst for political transformation.

7. A record of Hall's engagement with the creators of both Channel 4 programs can be found in his appointment diaries, held at the Stuart Hall Archive of the Cadbury Research Library of the University of Birmingham. Though "Whatever Happened to Marx" is less substantial than the documentary made with Horrox, Hall's diaries show engagement with the program's creators over a number of weeks in late 1982. The contract for cowriting with Horrox, also preserved in the Stuart Hall Archive, is dated 18 June 1982.

8. Hall's UNESCO papers from this period include "'Africa' Is Alive and Well in the Diaspora: Cultures of Resistance, Slavery, Religious Revival and Political Cultism in Jamaica" (1975), "Pluralism, Race and Class in Caribbean Society" (1977), and "Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance" (1980), all collected in *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*.

9. See also Hall's 1967 essay "The Young Englanders" (*Selected Writings* 42–50).

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