# 1

# *The 'Absolute Cultural Hybrid'*

Stuart Hall was born in Kingston, Jamaica in 1932. He was the son of lower middle-class, upwardly mobile parents. His father rose through the ranks of the major corporate employer on the island, the American-owned United Fruit Company, eventually becoming Chief Accountant.[1] Hall describes each of his parents as possessing a strong streak of conservatism. Both were uncomfortable with the movement for Jamaican independence. Each instinctively regarded Britain as the mother country, an outlook that the young Hall repudiated as 'anachronistic' (1995c: 660). He disapproved of their *arriviste* identification with the Jamaican establishment, and the collusion it implied with colonial rule.

In retrospect, Hall declares that he always 'felt as if I were a kind of stranger in my own family' (Jaggi 2000: 8). The sense of estrangement went further than the tension between his parents' dogged colonial loyalism and his incipient attachment to the cause of Jamaican independence. Frictions of class and colour were also at play. Hall's father, Herman, was the product of the coloured lower middle class, only two generations removed from his African ancestors (Hall 1995c: 661). Hall's mother, Jessie, was from a different class and colour formation, only two generations on from an ancestry which included some white forebears. Although she was born into relative poverty, she was adopted by an Anglophile lawyer uncle, and raised in some style.[2] Hall regards his family of origin as over-determined by class, colonial and racial tensions. He was born, he remarks, 'in a lower-middle-class family that was trying to be a middle-class Jamaican family trying to be an upper-middle-class

Jamaican family trying to be an English Victorian family' (1993d: 135). Hall's father represented the dark-skinned, country faction in Jamaican society, while his mother was lighter skinned and identified with the English-plantation oriented faction. Hall identifies traces of African, East Indian, Portuguese Jewish and 'low, probably convict' Scottish blood in the family, which, he maintains, stamps him as 'a mongrel culturally, the absolute cultural hybrid' (1995c: 661; 1995b: 7). He describes himself as the blackest member of the family, and, on several occasions in interviews, recalls being teased by his sister, for being a 'coolie baby' (1996e: 485; Jaggi 2000: 8).

## Hall, class and colour in Jamaica

However, it is questionable whether Hall then, or now, would be properly regarded as 'black' in Jamaican society. As Hall notes, gradations of colour are fundamental in Jamaican society (Jaggi 2000: 8). In an aside, he contends that Jamaica has the most complicated colour stratification system in the world (1991b: 53). In terms of the gradations of Jamaican society, Hall belongs to the 'brown man' category. It is important for non-Jamaican readers to understand that, in Jamaica, this nomenclature has significant racial and political overtones. Far from being a digression from an accurate understanding of Hall's writings, it is essential to go through the details.

The classical statement of the hierarchy of gradations regarding class and colour in Jamaican society was produced by the Jamaican anthropologist M. G. Smith (1965). Although a good deal of controversy now surrounds Smith's methodology and intellectual independence, his study is the classical resource in academic discussions about the subject (for contrasting versions of the controversy, see Robotham 1980; Scott 2000).

Smith portrays Jamaican society as an extraordinary mixture of racial and cultural blending. According to him, four-fifths of the population is 'black', nine-tenths of the rest is coloured, 'of mixed ancestry, and subsidiary minorities are white, Chinese, East Indian, Portuguese, Syrian and Jewish'. His account of the operation of this racial and cultural mélange of peoples and mixtures is grounded in history. He proposes that in the early nineteenth century, Jamaican society consisted of a complex hierarchy of differentiated social categories (1965: 92–101). Broadly speaking, this was conceptualized in triangular fashion. Thus, at the head, the whites constituted the economically and culturally dominant class. Below them, Smith

identified the free coloureds and the free blacks. The base of the class system was the slave class. Smith described the slave class as numerically dominant, but culturally and economically subjugated.

Within each of these divisions, Smith noted a series of subdivisions. Hence, the white class was differentiated into creole strata (those born in the West Indies) and immigrants. Overlaying this division was a distinction between 'principal' and 'secondary' whites, the former holding authority over the latter. Creole whites were further subdivided into planters, the professional class and merchants; immigrant whites were subdivided into administrator, militia and planter groups. Migrant planters, in turn, were divided into owners; those who work for them (overseers, book-keepers, master masons); and owners of small estates who hired out slaves as field and domestic labourers. At the cultural level, Smith made the distinction that the principal whites, in general, tended to be 'better educated' than the secondary whites and, further, that creole and white immigrants formed separate social groups (1965: 95).

Turning now to the analysis of the free 'coloured population', Smith maintained that coloured slaves were differentiated by the traditional plantation practice of employing them as estate craftsmen or domestic servants (1965: 99). They constituted a distinctively graded social group, separated from the black field-work slave labourer, and possessing a closer association with principal and secondary whites. Free blacks were recipients of property, gifted by 'affectionate masters', and allowed to pursue their own subsistence. However, because the plantation economy was based on the full employment of slave labour, the opportunities for free blacks to prosper were limited. In cultural terms, Smith suggests, free blacks did not possess the social and cultural affinities with the creole and white dominant class possessed by the free coloured class.

As for the slave class, Smith argued a basic status distinction applied in respect of occupation, as tradesmen, domestic slaves and field slaves (1965: 101). Coloureds tended to be predominant in occupying the roles of tradesmen and domestic slaves, while most field slaves were black. Within the slave class, domestic slaves possessed superior status, since they enjoyed greater opportunities for contact in white households (1965: 102). Next were tradesmen, whose technical knowledge assigned them certain latitudes of conduct, such that they constituted a 'small, select group' (1965: 102). Field slaves were also subdivided into different categories. The senior stratum acquired status through longevity and often regarded manual labour of any type as beneath their standing.

Below them were the creole slaves, and at the bottom of the slave status hierarchy were the newly imported 'African' slaves.

Smith's elaboration of the historical nuances of class and colour distinctions in Jamaican society was partly designed to oppose Parsonian models of society which emphasized binding common values as the cement of social cohesion. For Smith, nation-states founded on the legacy of conquest and violence are necessarily predisposed to hierarchical segmentation, since questions of embodiment and emplacement are irretrievably permeated with colonial racial distinctions. In addition, Smith clearly regarded the segmented hierarchy of Jamaican society as posing substantial obstacles of culture and race in the nation-building process. Crucially, Smith conceptualized culture as a social construction, transmitted and assimilated between the physicality of groups (1965: 15). Thus he regarded race to be a genetic condition of embodiment, impermeable to human control. The latter distinction is, of course, quite contrary to Hall's conception of race as a 'floating signifier', which possesses a history and discourse that can be destabilized and reflexively reconstituted as a politics of difference, through cultural and economic intervention. The inference of Smith's analysis is that while cultural differences between strata can be gradually mitigated, usually through strong central leadership, so that they become less significant, racial differences do not follow the same logic, or succumb to the same remedy.

Viewed synoptically, as Robotham (1980) observes, Smith's discussion of pluralism in Jamaica explains cohesion in terms of acculturation. The discussion of the various gradations of class and colour operates on the presupposition that the values and practices of the various subordinate classes voluntarily emulate those of the principal whites, albeit, of course, with differing chances of convergence. Hall himself has questioned the 'extensive' social cohesion, adaptation and accommodation between different groups in the pluralist model of Jamaican society (1978c; 1985c). Smith, of course, accepted that white rule deliberately set out to marginalize the cultures of the other groups in Jamaican society. Yet, curiously, his view of the characteristic cultural values of the dominant class is reminiscent of the Eliot/Leavis tradition, which regards white elite culture as 'the best that has been thought and done'. Thus Smith holds that the subordinate classes, free brown, free black and black plantation slave, voluntarily gravitate towards white colonial normative precedents of organization, association, practice and belief, because they are regarded to be the most rational known to mankind.

The consequence is a peculiarly rigid reading of hierarchy and segmentation. For critics like Robotham (1980), cultural and racial distinctions are not simply ordained by the status ladder erected by the colonial power, but also entail the reflexive responses of creole and migrant subaltern populations to the fact of conquest. Acculturation is not a satisfactory concept to encapsulate this response, because it conceives of development as a one-way process in which the standards and values of the dominant class are emulated by other social strata.

The contradictions in acculturation theory are thrown into sharper relief when one turns to schisms in the power balance in Jamaica precipitated by free brown and free black aspirations for national independence. Smith supported the nationalist movement in Jamaica that began in the late 1930s. Brown man middle-class activists occupied the vanguard of this movement. They identified strongly with the Eurocentric values of principal white strata. Thus they were in favour of parliamentary democracy, the codified law, a rational education system, sport and the retention of colonial institutions of finance, technology and industry. Their ideals of respectability, personal decorum and manners were drawn from Britain, nowhere more so than in the value attributed to education as a means of upward mobility and a mark of social status. Oxford and Cambridge were fetishized as the pinnacle of academic learning and cultural cachet. In this respect, it is revealing that Hall went through all the arduous hoops to gain an Oxford education. For him at this time, largely one suspects at the prompting of his parents, and particularly his mother, gaining a place at Oxbridge was the summit of academic achievement. But going to Oxford also signified relations of cultural dependence, and perhaps even illustrated in Hall's mind the operation of the Hegelian master–slave relationship. I shall return to the question of Hall's Oxford experience, and its place in his intellectual pedigree, presently. At this stage of the discussion it is necessary to explore some of the tensions in the Jamaican nationalist movement at greater length.

The nationalist movement sought independence from colonial rule, but it divided internally in respect of the tactics designed to accomplish this end, and the extent of political, economic and cultural divergence from Britain. On the one hand stood a landed, pro-colonial enclave that visualized independence as the nationalist management of the institutions and codes of practice introduced by the British, and sought political advantage in rendering them, formally at least, inclusive to the popular constituency. This group

regarded the goal of Jamaican society to lie ultimately in the direction of a harmonious, more equal relationship with Britain. Against them was situated an equally prosperous anti-colonial enclave, intent on preserving the foundations of British institutions and practices but fundamentally reforming them, via an egalitarian alliance between middle-class brown men activists and the subaltern black population. This group, of which the Manley family was a prominent example, favoured self-government under the retention of dominion status within the British Commonwealth. Both enclaves were faithful to the institutional and cultural essentials of the colonial programme of acculturation, albeit with the important proviso that brown men would either lead, or join with the British in running, the country. In particular, neither envisaged the abandonment of Eurocentricism, and still less, the positive promotion of Africa and 'African' culture.

Robotham (1980) and Scott (2000) argue that the aspirations of the acculturalist brown middle class were untenable, since they neglected to encompass a sustainable politics of difference. Smith's theory of acculturation identified the transition of power to the brown man class as a progressive feature of social and political development in Jamaica. However, in two respects it was seriously faulty. First, it precluded the possibility of racial hybridity in government because it presupposed revised acculturation as the dividend of brown man ascendancy. Thus brown man government was conceptualized as reforming colonial racism, and thus affirming aspirations for self-determination, but crucially, the ultimate consequence of self determination was conceptualized as the renewal of the culture and institutions introduced by the British. This raises difficult questions about the conditionality of independence. In particular, it implies that brown man nationalism presupposed continuing subsidiarity to Eurocentric cultural and economic hegemony.

Second, it was not sufficiently reflexive about the racism inherent in brown man categories of belonging and recognition that enforced the devaluation of African culture. The pro-colonial brown man enclave, to which Smith's personal sympathies were most closely attached, was left in an invidious, contradictory position. 'Neither able to support colonialism because of its blatantly repressive character, nor able to support the radical anti-colonial movement because of its revolutionary character' (Robotham 1980: 86). Brown man government pursued a policy of reheated acculturation, which is negatively associated with the elaboration of racial patron-

age and clientism, and which failed to address the aspirations of the subordinate blacks. The eclipse of brown man power after the 1970s is partly the result of the ascendancy of a new black middle class, which draws its power from the market, and maintains reflexive, critical distance from the colonial acculturation process and the renewal of this process under brown man hegemony.

Although there are necessarily many lacunae in this account of race and colour in Jamaica, some of the issues raised help to clarify several of Hall's lifelong intellectual preoccupations. Thus, throughout his writing, Hall has continuously returned to problems of position and difference. In his public accounts of the frictions in his own family, these questions have precedence. Hall's family was upwardly mobile, brown middle class and, through his father's job, dependent on the interests of the dominant business corporation on the island. In class and income terms it is probably correct to classify Hall's family as middle class rather than 'lower middle class'. After all, his father rose to be Chief Accountant in the main source of corporate employment in the country, and his mother, although technically *déclassé*, was clearly raised in a social milieu with strong links with the Jamaican brown and white middle class. By Hall's own account, throughout her life she was more or less consumed with the need to maintain the appearance of superior colour and class status (Jaggi 2000: 8). Smith's account of colour and class in Jamaica demonstrates that the nuances of position and difference permeate Jamaican culture. Jesse Hall's consciousness of these issues may have been importunate; her son certainly found them to be so. Yet on Smith's account the entire social structure during Hall's boyhood was riddled with conflict and friction over these issues.

This placed Hall in a contradictory position. To use a phrase that he has somewhat popularized in his later writings, he was 'doubly inscribed'. As the brown man son of the man who rose to be the Chief Accountant of the premier business corporation on the island, he was symbolically identified as part of the hegemonic bloc that succeeded white rule in Jamaica. The United Fruit Company was at the centre of Jamaican landowning issues. The company operated a neo-feudal system in which land was rented to farmers on a bonded basis. Resources for planting and cash were advanced to the farm labourers. In return the produce was sold to United Fruit at a price set by the company. Hall's family was positioned in direct collision with the peasantry and the nationalist uprising in 1938, in which land ownership and low plantation wages were key issues.

His privileged education at Jamaica College and Oxford, and his successful career in the Western academy and media reinforced the populist view that Hall was a brown man of the middle or upper middle class. Yet his intellectual and political outlook predisposed him to identify with black nationalism. This identification carried over into Hall's migrant experience. Certainly, as we shall see later, *Policing the Crisis* (Hall et al. 1978) tends to romanticize black street crime, or at least, refuses to accept police and populist accounts on a priori grounds. For the 'doubly inscribed body', hybridity, hyphenated identity and the third space might seem attractive solutions to the contradictions of embodiment and emplacement. But they also encourage critics to see slippage and modishness as attendants of this intellectual stance.

## Being black in the UK

Hall (1991b) tells of returning to the Caribbean in the 1960s, after his Oxford years, and finding his parents worrying that he might be regarded as a black immigrant in the UK. This was a moment of epiphany for Hall. He reminisces that his parents wholly misunderstood the nature of racism in Britain (1991b: 55). In the UK he was interpellated as a black man (1991b: 53). The nuances of colour that his mother and father recognized in Jamaica were negated in Britain. Later, in the 1960s and 1970s, and perhaps not unexpectedly, he identified with the black Rastafarian movement. In a telling memory, Hall recalls:

> At that very moment, my son, who was two and a half, was learning the colours. I said to him, transmitting the message at last, 'You're Black.' And he said, 'No. I'm brown.' And I said, 'Wrong referent. Mistaken concreteness, philosophical mistake. I'm not talking about your paintbox. I'm talking about your head.' That is something different. The question of learning, learning to be Black. (1991b: 55)

It is an unequivocal identification with the most oppressed elements in Jamaican society.

Within the England of the 1960s and 1970s with its crude division between black and white one can see the point. But in the context of Jamaican society at the same time, it is a muddled message. Brown man hegemony was more rooted, entrenched and privileged than Hall's testimony allows. In Jamaica, through his father's job and his Oxford education, he was implicitly

associated with brown man domination and capitalist exploitation. It would be overstating the case to maintain that Hall's course was 'determined' by this situation. On the other hand, Cultural Studies is a very long way from the neo-feudal system run by the United Fruit Company and the intellectual milieu of Merton College, Oxford. In taking the journey, Hall was not merely making a voyage of discovery, he was also making a personal and political point.

At the same time, presenting oneself as black in the body of a brown man raises difficult questions of position, emplacement and embodiment in Jamaica, which Hall perhaps sweeps aside too easily. Brown man hegemony can also be related to Hall's powerful elucidation of the concept of authoritarian populism, in respect of Thatcherism. Unquestionably, the thread of authoritarianism is prefigured, but not of course determined, in Hall's own family. Both parents were quite strict. Hall is particularly critical of their part in destroying a relationship involving his sister, because they attributed inferior status on grounds of colour to her suitor, a black student doctor from Barbados (1995c: 660; 1996e: 488). The incident occurred when Hall was seventeen. It left his sister 'seriously ill' (1996e: 488; Jaggi 2000: 8). Hall clearly took her side in the family conflict. His deliberate, and heartfelt, reference to the incident, in two interviews when he was over sixty, suggests that it was a profound turning point for him.

The episode reveals his acute early sensitivity to issues of power and positionality. He clearly judged the actions of his parents to be reprehensible. He was especially critical of his mother, a strong personality, whose influence he describes, variously, as 'overwhelmingly dominant' and 'devouring' (Hall 1996e: 489; Jaggi 2000: 8). He confesses that the desire to escape her was the main reason behind his decision to migrate to England (1993d: 135). His academic work returned repeatedly to the issues of the misuses of power and the importance of resistance.

Yet overarching these family tensions was the friction in the Jamaican nationalist movement. The struggle between the pro- and anti-colonial enclaves formed the political backcloth to Hall's childhood and adolescence. The landed pro-colonial group formed their own political party and won the first general election held on universal adult suffrage in 1944. Their slogan was 'Socialism is slavery! Socialism is brown man rule!' Hall must have regarded this campaign as deeply cynical, and he would have been struck by the populist approval of policies that directly contributed to the

marginalization of the black population in the market and the public sphere. Perhaps there is an inkling here of Hall's later antipathy to the monetarist and nationalist rhetoric deployed by Thatcher in the 1980s. Certainly, the attempt by the landed-colonial interests to define nationalism in this period in terms of their own interests would have taught Hall early important lessons about the political appeal of essentialism and its various delusions.

The acculturation programme validated by both wings of the brown man nationalist movement privileged education as a route of upward mobility. In many respects, Hall's schooling conformed to the archetype of the brown man model of respectability. Hall was educated at Jamaica College, Kingston. To some extent, he under-sells his secondary education by describing it as 'one of the big Colleges in Jamaica, strongly modelled after the English public school system' (1996e: 486). In fact, Jamaica College was the country's premier boarding school, faithfully enshrining all of the familiar 'old country' public school rituals, of chapel every morning, houses and prefects, school tie, cap and crest, cricket, shooting and swimming. The headmasters were either 'Jamaica white' or imported from Britain. The total number of pupils was no more than 350. A handful of scholarships were available, but most pupils were fee-paying.

Hall's schooling was designed to equip him with the habitus and skills to become a professional son of the colonies. As Hall himself testifies, 'I was formed, brought up, reared, taught, educated, nursed and nurtured to be, a kind of black Englishman' (1995b: 8). Of course, by no stretch of the imagination can Hall be regarded as a scion of the old Jamaican upper crust, unlike Roddy Edwards who set up the now famous Walkerswood Jerk Sauce company, or Chris Blackwell who made his fortune promoting Bob Marley and Island Records. However, he went to school with some of them. It was a schooling and adolescence liberally sprinkled with the saccharine of Empire duty and loyalty. Hall is gracious about the role that individual schoolteachers played in his education, but rather dismissive about the general system. Yet it was incontestably a more privileged education than that experienced by most of the British students he went on to teach in Britain.

In 1951 Hall left Jamaica, as a Rhodes scholar, to study at Merton College, Oxford. At Oxford, he felt divorced from the white British establishment university culture, a fish out of water. He was a victim of racism and ineffable Oxford snobbery. He remembers the 'willed triviality' of Oxford in the 1950s. His description of the

dominant stratum of 'Hooray Henries' attempting to 'relive *Brideshead Revisited*' rings true (1989f: 19). His middle-class, brown man status in Jamaica was lost on most of the white British students of the day. To them, as his parents feared, Hall would have been an undifferentiated 'black' student.

He found refuge with fellow students from America and the Caribbean and developed a deeper interest in Caribbean politics. Intellectually, he describes himself at the time as a 'left Leavisite' (1995c: 663), drawn to Leavis because Leavis undertook to define literature as a serious issue, but critical of the intrinsic elitism in Leavis's position. For a while, he contemplated returning to Jamaica to pursue a political career, but instead, surprisingly, given his emotional antipathy to Oxbridge, decided to embark on a Ph.D. in Oxford. Hall's topic was the relationship between Europe and America in the novels of Henry James. With hindsight, it seems an odd choice for someone who ended his academic career as Professor of Sociology at the Open University. Yet one should remember that while James is the novelist *par excellence* of manner, style and high society, his work also deals continuously with questions of power, difference, representation and emplacement. All these are lifelong interests in Hall's sociology and cultural studies.

During this period Hall increased his acquaintance with people on the Left, mainly from the Communist Party and the Labour Club. For example, Hall met Raymond Williams, who worked as an extramural lecturer in Oxford, and developed friendships with student members of the Communist Party, including Raphael Samuel and Peter Sedgwick. Hall characterizes his political stance at this time as 'independent left' and 'anti-Stalinist', sympathetic to Marxism, but eschewing Marxist dogmatism (1996e: 492). He was in dialogue with the Communist Party, but on intellectual and moral grounds could not defend the Soviet system. In an attempt to create intellectual space for the 'independent Left', Hall and his circle 'occupied and revived' the Socialist Club and tried to bring together British Marxists, dissidents from the British Communist Party, anticolonial intellectuals, fellow travellers in the Labour Party and other left-wing intellectuals (Hall 1997b: 120).

If Hall was repulsed by the Hooray Henries of Oxford in the 1950s, he also encountered another England there, composed of demobbed young veterans and national servicemen, Ruskin College trade unionists and scholarship boys and girls, from home and abroad. Hall clearly discovered something of the independent Left with which to empathize here. For example, he remembers

G. D. H. Cole, rooted in the co-operativist and workers' council traditions of Guild Socialism, convening seminars that brought together a stimulating discussion group of left-leaning students (1989f: 15). Cole's seminars were formative in the New Left circle, of which Hall became a prominent member, that eventually went on to establish the *Universities and Left Review* (*ULR*), one of two precursors to the *New Left Review* (*NLR*).

## The 'double conjuncture'

Appropriately, the catalyst for Hall's political and intellectual activism was what he calls the 'double conjuncture' (1995c: 663) of external events, that is, the twin crises in Hungary and Suez in 1956. The Soviet suppression of the Hungarian Revolution, and the British and French invasion of the Suez Canal occurred within days of each other, and crystallized Hall's anti-Stalinism and anti-imperialism.

Hall quit Oxford in 1957 and worked as a supply teacher in South London. In the same year he co-founded and co-edited the *Universities and Left Review* with colleagues from the Socialist Society, Charles Taylor, a Canadian, and Raphael Samuel and Gabriel Pearson, two British Jews. The internationalism of the editorial board was important, even though copy was mainly directed at a British readership. The mixture of a Jamaican, a Canadian and two Britons, albeit from ethnic minorities, on the editorial board signified sympathies with globalization and multiculturalism which contrasted sharply with the insularity of the traditional Left in Britain. For Communist Party members of Hall's generation, the Soviet suppression of Imre Nagy's government in Hungary was traumatic. Hall recollects that Raphael Samuel's 'whole political world' was 'blown apart' by the invasion, which was regarded to signify 'the apotheosis of the degeneration of Stalinism and Soviet communism' (Hall 1997b: 120). After 1956 the romantic attachment to Moscow and the anti-capitalist revolution in Eastern Europe exhibited by the vanguard of the British Communist Party became a point of odium for the New Left. The youth of the editors was also significant. Hall and his colleagues self-consciously regarded themselves to be members of a new generation, addressing a new agenda for socialist change. The new broom had arrived and it was left to Hall and his new socialist colleagues to seize the opportunity and wield it.

It was perhaps at this time that Hall recognized the impossibility of ever returning to Jamaica or ever 'becoming truly British'. The intellectual preference for concepts of diaspora, hybridity and emergent identity in his later writings is perhaps related to his experience of displacement, in terms of class and colour, in Jamaica, and the trauma of his migration to the UK. Arguably, the recurring 'problems' of slippage and modishness in his work spring from the same fountain.

In a paper written later in his career, Hall observes that the processes of racial, economic and cultural assimilation, translation, adaptation, resistance and reselection combine to make the search for origins a fruitless quest in Jamaican society (1995b). In this deeply hybrid, nuanced formation, cultural community is always and already, imagined community. As such, it is subject to the same dilemmas of representation, invention, selective memory and repression that, for Hall, always accompany the attribution of identity.

Hall regards his own position to be 'twice diasporized' (1995b: 6). In Jamaica he lived in a place in which the cultural and economic centre was acknowledged to be Britain; and on migrating to Britain he was conscious from the start of being racially positioned as a representative of 'the Other'. As he elaborates in respect of his migration:

> Having been prepared by the colonial education, I knew England from the inside. But I'm not and never will be 'English'. I know both places intimately, but I am not wholly of either place. And that's exactly the diasporic experience, far away enough to experience the sense of exile and loss, close enough to understand the enigma of an always-postponed 'arrival'. (1996e: 490)

Although exile is generally beclouded with metaphors of loss, displacement and pain, there are, unquestionably, positive analytical resources in occupying outsider status. Living on the borders often has profound advantages for intellectual labour, since it allows one to treat the habitual practices of the surrounding natives as an anthropologist would. Raymond Williams, a scion of the border country between England and Wales, never lost sight of the strategic advantages it conferred on him. By never 'quite arriving', one can immediately see the limitations of those natives who confidently believe they know the lie of the land. The metaphysical strangeness of habitual practice has been a rich seam mined by Hall,

in his writings on race, class and hegemony. One definition of his concept of articulation might be the process of making the absence of the exoticism that underlies native renderings of 'common sense' transparent. For him, the migrant experience was also racially loaded, conveying indelible lessons about emplacement, empowerment and ideology. In respect of his relationship to his family, and his connections with Britain and Jamaica, Hall has a strong sense of subjective displacement. 'I was always aware', he writes, 'of the self as only constituted in that kind of absent–present contestation with something else, with some other "real me", which is and isn't there' (1993d: 135).

## The New Left

In 1960, *ULR* was merged with the *New Reasoner* (*NR*) to become the *New Left Review.* The *New Reasoner* was initially edited by Edward and Dorothy Thompson and John Saville from the North of England. As I noted in the first chapter, it represented a socialist humanist, critical flank in the communist movement. There was therefore a measure of tension between it and the *ULR*. The *New Reasoner* was edited by a generation older than Hall's, formed in the 1930s and 1940s through the Popular Front, the humiliation of the politics of appeasement and the war against fascism. After Khrushchev's 'secret speech' at the Twentieth Annual Congress of the Soviet Communist Party and the Soviet invasion of Hungary, the *NR* became an important front for communist dissidence.

In contrast, the *ULR* emerged from the postwar student generation of the 1950s and operated around an Oxford–London axis. The journal was less embroiled in the doctrinal disputes of the Communist Party. It regarded itself to be a rallying point for the independent Left and deliberately eschewed party political involvement. It pursued an editorial line that argued that the institutions and language of normative coercion in Britain were failing. The national crisis in Britain was paralleled in the hegemonic decomposition of the socialist alternative in Eastern Europe. The *ULR* proposed that socialist renewal had to commence with a new conception of socialism and an analysis of the dramatic realignment of the economic relations, social formations and cultural dynamics of postwar capitalism. This translated into the publication of topical articles along with more theoretical papers. The *ULR* deliberately sought to convey that the Left had moved into, if one may

borrow a term that Hall popularized over thirty years later, 'New Times'.

The *NR* and *ULR* merged to create the *New Left Review* in 1960.[3] Hall edited the journal between 1960 and 1961. Raymond Williams recalls that Hall 'produced a style of journal closer to the original *ULR*, in contact with new cultural styles, new modes of visual presentation, in a language that differed from the typical left magazine' (1979: 365). Williams sympathized with this approach, but he noted that it did not impress all members of the editorial board, particularly those with roots in the *NR*.

The journal fostered the umbrella organization of New Left Clubs, in which discussion groups on education, literature, new theatre and race were regularly held. The clubs were catalysts for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and, as Ioan Davies (1993) observes, were frequently formed from local groups of the Workers' Educational Association and National Council of Labour Colleges. The origins of the New Left were therefore outside the established university sector and, importantly, were not concentrated in the London metropolis.[4]

The schisms in the editorial board of the *NLR* placed Hall under enormous pressure. As Williams recollects, Hall's role was encumbered

> with constant circulation of internal memoranda about the policy of the magazine. I think the editor never got either the proper backing for what in the event he was more or less left to do on his own, or clear directives for which the editorial board took collective responsibility. Working under great difficulties, he was often just blamed for whatever came out – a fairly typical situation on the Left. There were endless arguments within the board over whether it was running a political movement or a magazine. There were also the mundane problems of the usual sort about the temporary debts of the journal. (1979: 365)

In 1962 Hall resigned his editorship to teach media, film and popular culture at Chelsea College, University of London.[5] He combined this with research for the British Film Institute into the pedagogy of popular culture, conducted with Paddy Whannel. This was eventually published as *The Popular Arts* in 1964. At Chelsea, Hall began to read anthropology and sociology more systematically. The new insights he acquired, together with the idea of culture as 'ordinary' and 'a whole way of life' which Raymond Williams championed at the *NLR*, further exposed the limitations of the

Eliot/Leavisite tradition on culture, which Hall encountered and substantially rejected, at Oxford. In addition, the bankruptcy of traditional Conservativism, the evident decline of British pre-eminence in the world as the loss of Empire exposed foundational weaknesses in the domestic economy, and the superficiality of Western consumer culture made this a particularly rich moment for left-wing criticism. Before the emergence of public social movements concentrating on, for example, gay and lesbian rights, environmental erosion, health issues and particular instances of social injustice, the New Left constituted a popular front of solidarity through which the rule of capital could be meaningfully challenged.

## The Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies

In 1964 Hall was appointed as Research Fellow at the newly established Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). Richard Hoggart, a professor in English at Birmingham University, founded the Centre. As he observed, Cultural Studies did not exist in British universities at this time (Gibson and Hartley 1998: 17). The Centre was therefore a unique venture. It was financed from outside public funding by a tax deductible covenant from the publisher, Sir Allen Lane of Penguin books.[6] Additional funding from the publishing firm Chatto and the *Observer* produced £2,500 per year over a seven-year period. Further funding was provided through grant applications, notably an award from the Rowntree Trust for a study of the press.

Hoggart's original vision envisaged the Centre as a tripartite project: one part historical-philosophical, another sociological, and the third literary-critical. For Hoggart the literary-critical element was the 'most important' element (1970: 254). Hoggart's book *The Uses of Literacy* (1958), a nostalgic account of traditional working-class culture in the North of England, was clearly a template for the programme of study in the Centre, but not an exclusive or intimidating one. His main influence on the development of Cultural Studies at Birmingham was as a moral leader and manager, especially with the university hierarchy in the departments of English and Sociology. Rather like Ilya Neustadt, who assembled an outstanding Sociology department at the nearby University of Leicester, Hoggart played a crucial role in keeping the Centre afloat, and gaining respect for it from critical elements in the University of Birmingham.

Hoggart did not seek to take teaching and research in the Centre down a political road. His own intellectual background was working class and aspirational, in the widest sense of recognizing the value of 'ordinary' culture and supporting the means of expression for marginalized cultures. This predisposed him to oppose the pomposity and self-regard of elite culture, and to demonstrate that marginal and subordinate forms of cultural expression have their own validity, and are worthy of scholarly regard. But it was no part of a neo-Marxist project. This inflection came later in the Centre's history, under Hall's directorship.

It is worth noting *en passant* that Raymond Williams argued that it is significant that the origins of Cultural Studies lay in non-metropolitan, 'non-traditional' pedagogic traditions (Laing 1991: 145). The three key figures in the incipient growth of Cultural Studies in Britain – Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson – all taught in extra-mural departments and Workers' Educational Associations. To some extent then, it is tenable to maintain that Cultural Studies was founded by intellectual misfits in the traditional British university system. This sense of being outsiders and operating on the edges of knowledge and power is still central to the self-image of Cultural Studies. Thus Richard Johnson, who succeeded Hall as Director of the Birmingham Centre, submitted that Cultural Studies must constantly resist academicism, and strive to relate cultural questions to the analysis of power, and 'social possibilities' (1983: 9).

Under Hoggart the research agenda of the Birmingham School was dominated by broad questions of class inequality, cultural representation and the mechanics of cultural gatekeeping. Predictably, the role of the media emerged as a pivotal research focus. To begin with this work was heavily influenced by American communication research. Theory was an underdeveloped resource. Perhaps Hall's first significant intellectual contribution to the Centre was to lever media research away from the quantitative, empirical American tradition and steer it towards the subject of ideology.

Hall has acknowledged the crucial significance of Raymond Williams's contribution of the study of culture as 'the relationships in a whole way of life' in the intellectual development of the Centre (Hall 1980a; Williams 1958; 1961). Equally significant were Williams's concepts of 'the selective tradition' and 'structure of feeling'. By the term 'selective tradition' Williams meant the institutional and textual funnelling of cultural data to produce the notion of a dominant tradition and agenda of cultural debate and

practice. For Williams, selection always involves a degree of fabrication, since to valorize the 'core' necessarily peripheralizes 'the margins'. The 'great tradition' of English novelists constructed in Leavisite pedagogy is a case in point. Leavis's roll-call of the great and the good was both prejudiced and partial. Williams held that the central defect of the selective tradition as a methodological device in organizing culture is that it mistakes contemporary preoccupations for eternal verities. The composition of Leavis's great tradition is certainly vulnerable to this charge.

'Structure of feeling' is a complex concept, referring *inter alia* to the *episteme*, concerns and sensibility of a generation that is reflexively rendered in cultural forms. The New Left group was certainly bound up with a common structure of feeling that shaped their outlook, their writings and their political interventions. Moreover, the Centre, in its heroic period, certainly conveyed an organic 'structure of feeling', a connotation with a theoretical and political project which was absolutely distinct.

The more combative influence of Edward Thompson, evident in his approach to culture as 'a way of struggle', was also pivotal in the development of the Centre. Interestingly, aside from the work of Richard Johnson and Bill Schwarz, the tradition of long-range, detailed historical research never flourished in the Centre. On the other hand, Thompson's methodological proposition that the historical study of culture is always a matter of a dialogue between concepts and empirical evidence was a considerable general influence on Birmingham thinking and debate. Thompson's history of the English working class (1963) held a totemic significance in the Centre, even if it failed to engender a trend of emulative historical research. Johnson recollects that the intellectual labour at the Centre engaged more strongly with Literary Studies than History (2001: 261). Even so, he goes on to note that history was a significant theme in collective work at the Centre between 1974 and 1979. Group work and doctoral theses explored the subjects of history and theory, historical transitions (from feudalism to capitalism and laissez-faire to monopoly capitalism), radical movements, the crisis in state hegemony, the peculiarities of the English and the popular politics of the Second World War. Historical approaches to culture survived until the mid 1980s through the work of subgroups and the increasing importance given to memory in the partly collectively organized M.A. But while history can certainly be said to be part of the context of intellectual labour in Birmingham, and in particular, Hall returns repeatedly to the importance of the period between the 1880s and

1920s as *formative* for understanding contemporary British culture (1981b), it did not occupy the foreground.

In part, perhaps, this was a reaction to Thompson. His contribution to the history of the English working class was recognized to be immense. Yet as a cultural theorist, he was also an obvious loose cannon. Nowhere more so than in his superbly marshalled, but cruel and one-sided denunciation of Althusserian Marxism (1978). An attack, moreover, that was delivered at the very apogee of Althusser's influence over Hall and his associates, as they published what is, arguably, the single most important work to emerge from the Centre, *Policing the Crisis.*

## 'Culturalism' and 'structuralism'

When asked to comment on the direction the Centre took under Hall's leadership, Richard Hoggart replied, somewhat laconically, that it became 'a) more political and b) more theoretic' (Gibson and Hartley 1998: 19). Hall's famous paper on the aetiology of Cultural Studies (1980a) recognizes 'two paradigms'. *Culturalism* is the British tradition, associated with the work of Hoggart, Williams and, to a lesser extent, Thompson. It rejects the anthropological emphasis on culture as 'practice' or 'mores and folkways' of society. Instead it focuses on the organization of cultural relations with material conditions, institutions and traditions. Culturalism addresses the ensemble of relations that constitute 'the whole way of life' of a determinate social formation. In contrast with elitist approaches, it emphasizes the 'ordinary' nature of culture. Politically, culturalism tends to favour the values of the Left or Centre-Left, without however, identifying with Marxism. Indeed, Williams was always very critical of the base–superstructure model in which the economy is understood as determining cultural relations. It is a criticism fully shared by Hall, who objected to the essentialism of 'vulgar materialism'.

Nonetheless, Hall clearly regards the culturalist tradition to be inadequate (1980a: 63–4; 1981b: 228, 233–5). Firstly, its emphasis on agency and experience is held to perpetuate a tendency towards humanism in culturalist analysis, which Hall plainly regards as naive. Secondly, culturalism is criticized for condensing levels of analysis through means which are not sufficiently reflexive. Thirdly, culturalism fails to delineate clearly and consistently the levels in the ensemble of relations that constitute the whole historical process, the 'cultural totality', as Hall terms it.

Structuralism was incorporated into the Birmingham project as a way of remedying the perceived defects of culturalism and to produce a more adequate approach to the study of culture. For Hall, the key structuralists are Louis Althusser, Claude Lévi-Strauss and, of course, Marx. What is the central contribution of structuralism to cultural analysis? Hall lists four points (1980a: 67–8):

1 *Theoretical determinacy* Structuralism locates cultural experience in relation to the network of the relations under capitalism which position men and women as social agents. Against the 'heroic affirmation' of agency offered by classical culturalism, structuralism contextualizes agency in relation to structures of power.
2 *Recognition of the necessity of abstraction* Structuralism deploys abstraction to elucidate social reality. It distinguishes different levels of abstraction and analyses relations between these levels and the correspondence that these levels have with concrete agency.
3 *Emphasis on totality* Structuralism examines agency and history as part of a complex unity composed of differences as well as homologies of practice. The emphasis on 'unity in difference' and 'complex unity' clarifies the contextual relations behind agency and reveals the process of 'overdetermination' in relation to cultural and historic specificity.
4 *Emphasis on ideology* Structuralism 'decentres' experience by locating structures of power and agency in relation to the terrain of ideology. Culturalism is unable to command this terrain because its emphasis on the authenticating power of 'experience' imposes a barrier between culturalism and 'a proper conception of ideology'.

Hall recognizes the tendencies towards pure abstraction, functionalism and theoretical closure in structuralist thought, and deplores them. To some extent, culturalism supplies answers to these weaknesses. In particular, it refuses to treat agents as 'cultural dopes' (Garfinkel) or to treat agency as the mere reflection of ideology. Hall advocates Gramsci's approach as a fruitful way of combating these unfortunate tendencies in structuralist thought and retaining the meaning of the agent as an informed, reflexive actor.

Hall's valuable discussion of the two paradigms is clearly intended to accomplish syncretic narrative fusion between what he regards as the best elements in each one. He does not intend to

replace culturalism with structuralism. Nevertheless, as Hoggart recognized (Gibson and Hartley 1998), the inflection of culturalism through the lens of structuralism makes Cultural Studies more theoretical and political. Interestingly, at the height of the New Times thesis in the early 1990s, Hall lamented the socialist 'problem' of 'translating everything into the language of "structures"'' (1991d: 59). Yet within the context of British Marxism, Hall's advocacy of structuralism in the Birmingham years was a major catalyst in popularizing structuralist analysis.

Hall's espousal of structuralism was not, of course, an isolated event. After the climacteric of 1968 in which the hopes of 'Socialist Man' were dashed by the collapse of the student and worker revolt in Paris, the British Left became more critical of the lacuna in Marxism. Hall identifies two journals, *Screen* and *Screen Education* (sponsored by the Society for Film and Television) as being particularly significant in this regard (Hall 1980c: 157). *Screen* theory drew on the contribution to semiotics made by Christian Metz, and the debates between the journals *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Cinétique*, Althusser's theory of ideology, theories of language and discourse associated with Julia Kristeva and Michel Foucault, the Brechtian critique of 'realism' and, perhaps above all, the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan. Hall is critical of *Screen* theory (1980c), and his criticism helps to clarify the distinctive features of the Birmingham approach to culture at this time. Although he is broadly sympathetic to semiotics, seeing in it a useful mechanism of decoding common-sense meaning and thus exposing the hand of ideology, he refutes the textual turn taken by the *Screen* group.

The crux of the matter is *Screen*'s appropriation of Lacan's psychoanalytic theory. Hall proposes that Lacan follows Lévi-Strauss in regarding the subjective 'entry into culture' as decisive in signification and symbolic representation (1980c: 158–9). However, whereas in Lévi-Strauss this transition is located outside the subject in the cultural and social structure, in Lacan it is internalized in the constitution of the subject in the 'symbolic', in language, the system of signifiers. For Lacan this occurs at an unconscious level, a caveat that violates the Freudian concept of the integrated subject by retheorizing the subject as a set of 'positions' formed in relation to knowledge and language. Hall notes that Lacanianism gives primary significance to language and relies on a series of visual analogues to explain agency and meaning – the 'mirror phase', the 'gaze', the 'look', the 'scenario of vision'. The Birmingham posi-

tion, asserts Hall, is different. The crucial distinction is that the Birmingham approach emphasizes the operation of signification and ideology in specific social formations and historical formations. In this perspective the positioning of the subject is concrete and historically specific, while in the *Screen* approach it is transcultural and ahistorical.

Coward (1977) launched a famous poststructuralist attack on the Birmingham approach, accusing it of determinism and theoretical naivety for taking class and gender as unproblematically 'given' and cultural practice as expressions of class and other structures. Hall may have been influenced by this critique, but his turn towards representation, signification and the nature of identity predates it by at least five years.

The crux of the distinction is that the Birmingham approach rejects textual determinacy and embraces relative textual polysemy, while the *Screen* approach inverts these polarities. Tudor fastens on an interesting contradiction in the Birmingham perspective in this regard (1999: 112–14). He comments that David Morley advances the Birmingham perspective as being more sensitive to the polysemic nature of signs and sign-based discourses and is supportive of interrogative/expansive readings of culture (Morley 1980: 167). This is the corollary of the Birmingham accent on 'struggle in ideology' and the crucial significance of resistance to domination. From the Birmingham standpoint this accent is absent in *Screen* theory because it presents the entry into culture, and hence ideology, as a universal, text-driven unconscious process. However, as Tudor correctly notes (1999: 113), the notion of infinite polysemy is anathema to the Birmingham approach, since it rules out a basis for concrete political intervention. The solution was to devise the concept of the 'preferred reading'. The concept retained the Gramscian stress on ideological dominance and hegemony, and equipped the Birmingham School with the political role of penetrating the mist-enveloped regions of habit, convention and 'common sense' that gathered around the ascent of ideology.

The concept of 'preferred reading' was to prove problematic for the Birmingham School, because the criteria for claiming preference appeared to treat ideology and hegemony as a text within which the subject is positioned, thus raising difficult questions about the real nature of agency and struggle in capitalist society. I will take up this matter at greater length in the next chapter in relation to Hall's encoding/decoding model (1973a; 1993e).

## Being at the Centre: pedagogy and research
## in Birmingham

To concentrate only on the theoretical and political turn taken by the Centre produces an unbalanced view of its extraordinary achievements under Hall's stewardship. In respect of pedagogy, training and publications, Hall's term of office was associated with some major innovations. As will quickly become apparent, boundaries between pedagogy, research and writing were not recognized by members of the Centre. To be sure, the method of graduate teaching was deliberately organized to raise research issues and to explore them through subgroups. Similarly, research was expected to feed back into teaching and colloquia work. However, as a way of organizing the material relating to the Birmingham tradition, the division between pedagogic, research and publishing innovative interventions is helpful.

Firstly, on the level of pedagogy, Hall pioneered a collaborative spirit of teaching that was unprecedented in the British university system. Tutorials, seminars and lectures in Birmingham were non-hierarchical and aimed to maximize student participation. Hall and his associates were among the first academics to adopt workshops and colloquia as pedagogic devices. Socializing with students was treated as a formative part of the education process. Weekly Centre general meetings were held which covered everything from curriculum content to current affairs issues such as the firemen's strike, or the rise of Thatcher. A general theory seminar open to all subgroups also allowed wide-ranging debate about theoretical matters, such as the value of Althusser or the significance of Gramsci.

The sense of being engaged in a collective pursuit with political as well as intellectual dimensions perhaps best defines the atmosphere of the Centre in its heyday. Above all, there was the intoxicating 'structure of feeling', the exciting sense of exploring a new terrain and inventing new methods and theories to encompass it. 'We made the curriculum up,' Hall recalls. 'It was the inauguration of, not a discipline, but a field of inquiry that . . . is interested in how culture organizes everyday life. It was a very creative moment' (Jaggi 2000: 8).

Two M.A. postgraduate degrees were offered at the Centre: M.A. by course work and dissertation, and M.A. by thesis. It is particularly interesting to reflect on the course content of the M.A. by course work and dissertation, since this may be regarded as

evidence of the technical training in Cultural Studies that was regarded as fundamental under Hall's leadership.[7]

The M.A. was a twelve-month 'taught' degree, comprising three courses and a dissertation. Faculty regulations required two of the three courses to be assessed by examination; the third was assessed by a seminar paper of not less than 5,000 words. The dissertation, approximately a 12,000-word study, was normally written over the summer and submitted in October.

## *Course 1: Theory and Method in Cultural Studies*

The course in theory and method addressed the main ways in which 'culture' has been deployed in contrasting intellectual traditions: the culture-society tradition, the Weberian tradition, Durkheim and the 'sociological' tradition, the anthropological tradition, the Marxist critique, mass society and mass culture theory. The second part of the course moved on to five substantive concerns. These were:

(i)     *Culture, meaning and meaning construction*   The role of language and communication in the 'objectification' of culture.
(ii)    *Culture and ideology*   The relation of culture to belief systems, cognitive frameworks, ideologies and consciousness.
(iii)   *Culture and structure*   The relation of culture to social structure, the determination of culture and cultural institutions.
(iv)    *Cultures, subcultures and classes*   The formation and transmission of culture through groups and their historical practice.
(v)     *Dominant, subordinate, alternative and countercultures*   The 'elementary forms' of the cultural process as a whole.

## *Course 2: British Society and Culture, 1880–1970*

The course in British society and culture related changes in selected cultural institutions, with reference to the 'specific' conjuncture for 1978–9, to historical changes between the 1880s and 1926. The course concentrated on:

1   *General problems in cultural history and cultural analysis*   The sites of culture; culture and ideology; the location of the conjuncture within a larger historical framework; problems of transitions; the notion of hegemony.
2   *Political parties, political ideologies and political philosophies* Including schooling, mass media and literature; the cultures of 'popular classes' in relation especially to family and work.

3   *Interrelations between cultural shifts illustrating theoretical issues*
    Questions of 'levels', for example, from philosophies to informal
    practices and 'common sense'; implications for the study of
    recent conjunctures, continuities and breaks.

## *Course 3: A Subject Area in Cultural Studies*

Course 3 was designed to intensify familiarity with the basic lit-
erature, problems and methods involved in the cultural study of
a particular subject area. In practice this involved becoming a
member of one of the existing subgroups. Subgroups were partly
constructed as efficient mechanisms for sharing information and
participating in theoretical refinement. However, attached to these
technical pedagogic functions was also the aim of creating a sense
of collective solidarity and common purpose. We shall not under-
stand Hall's work in Birmingham correctly unless we constantly
bear in mind that it was a political as well as an intellectual project.

   In addition to taught courses and examined research, the Centre
also regarded itself to be a sort of open think-tank in the study of
culture. Links with scholars from other universities, through attach-
ments, seminar presentations, symposia and public lectures, were
actively encouraged and pursued.

Turning now to the question of interventions in research, Hoggart
pays tribute to Hall's high intellectual standards (Gibson and
Hartley 1998). This is certainly reflected in the quality of graduates
who engaged in research projects during his tenure. Under Hall's
leadership, research in Birmingham involved some of the most tal-
ented students of culture of their generation. Consider: Paul Willis,
Dick Hebdige, Janice Winship, Larry Grossberg, Angela McRobbie,
Paul Gilroy, Hazel Corby, Bill Schwarz, Chas Critcher, Charlotte
Brundson, David Morley, Dorothy Hobson, Iain Chambers, Colin
Sparks, Phil Cohen, Greg McLennan, Stuart Laing, Lucy Bland,
Gary Whannel and Frank Mort were all part of the 'Birmingham
mafia'.

   The label is intended to be affectionate, but it does contain the
grit of critical insight. To understand the nature of this insight fully
it is necessary to give an account of the style of intellectual labour
advocated and practised by Hall in Birmingham. To begin with, it
was an omnivorous approach to the study of culture. Hall's Direc-
tor's Report of 1979 listed ongoing M.Litt. and Ph.D. research in,
*inter alia*, political/feminist theatre, women and the welfare state,

secretarial work and technological change, press representations of race, European avant-garde movements, cultural and social movements in postwar Italy, the transition from school to work for girls, problems in historiography, sexual ideologies, postwar feminist writers, ideology, technology and practice in photography, lower middle-class culture between 1800 and 1918, science and the Cold War, aspects of nationalism and the Northern Ireland problem, classroom cultures, discourses in TV comedy, the culture of popular conservatism, the emergence of rock music since the 1950s, race and the construction of 'race relations', women and the welfare state, representations of sport in the media, languages of resistance and nationalism, and postwar education.

It is an extraordinarily potent mixture of research activity, supported in sometimes trying circumstances of financial and political conflict with the university. One should particularly note that staff–student ratios were very high. Until 1974, when Hoggart formally resigned, he and Hall were the only full-time faculty. After 1974, Richard Johnson joined from the Department of Economic and Social History and Michael Green arrived as a half-time appointment shared with English (Davies 1995: 36). The range and quality of intellectual work accomplished consistently in Birmingham throughout the 1960s and 1970s are astonishing, and are a great tribute to the dedication and energy of Hall and his colleagues.

The Director's 1979 report locates the main intellectual themes of research in the Centre as cultural history; education; English studies; family/school; language; media, race and politics; state; women's studies; women and fascism; and work. Each of these themes involved orthodox methods of individual study and seminars. However, they also entailed the formation of subgroups, which were explicitly devised as an advance on more traditional and hierarchical modes of research. At the levels of both pedagogy and research, subgroups were intended to be the main creative cell of the Centre's collective work. They allowed for collective discussions of common problems and particular texts in major areas. At the end of each academic year, the subgroups were required to present their year's work to the Centre. Subgroups were also intended to be seed-beds for the production of articles or books. The Centre's research ethic paralleled the ethic of teaching, which was that as many tasks as possible should be undertaken by groups and not by individuals. This was, of course, diametrically opposed to the conventions in postgraduate activity in social science and humanities at the time, which tended to privilege the importance

of individual self-discipline and 'originality' through examination performance, the presentation of dissertation work and the defence of research theses. Wherever possible, teaching and research work at the Centre minimized status distinctions between members.

The third area of innovative intervention was in respect of the Centre's publishing programme. The main media outlet for work in the Centre was the serial publication *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*. Until 1978 this was self-published, but under the pressure of slender resources and with the demands of rising circulation, a publishing agreement was struck with Hutchinson Press. In part the journal constituted a forum for the publication of completed work and work in progress from Centre members. However, it was also intended to stimulate dialogue and critical debate. To this end, external papers were published from prestigious national and international contributors such as Stanley Cohen, Umberto Eco, Fred Jameson, Geoff Pearson, Paul Corrigan, Graham Murdock and Simon Frith. The Centre also published stencilled papers and special numbers of the journal, such as *Women Take Issue*, *On Ideology*, *Resistance through Rituals*, and *Policy and Practice* (*Schooling England since 1944*). The publishing programme also produced a valuable income stream to support the Centre's activities.

The publishing milieu was very novel. Lecturers and research students often wrote together, and commented on each other's drafts. Hall remembers that research issues and responses were frequently circulated by means of internal bulletins and papers (1997a: 39). Anyone could put a position into circulation.

This method of collaboration maximizes collective involvement, but it can dilute the focus of arguments on the principle that 'too many cooks spoil the broth'. Much of the published work that emerged from the Centre during Hall's term of office has the quality of an open seminar. 'If you look at the books we produced,' Hall elaborates, 'they are in a sense unfinished. They lack the tightness of argument that you can get out of a singly authored book. They don't have the coherence of conception. But we were making up the field as we went along' (1997a: 39). As with an open seminar, the topic of publication tended to follow fashion or respond to public issues of the day. Hall's thoughtful and rigorous reading of Marx's method (1973b), and his charismatic and compelling elucidation of the relevance of Gramsci and Althusser to Cultural Studies attempted to bolster the intellectual spine of the research and publishing programme at Birmingham. But the difficulties of accommodating cultural development with theoretical coherence were

always very great, and they became particularly severe after feminism began to make a contribution.

Hutchinson provided an international platform from which to disseminate the Centre's ideas and projects. The publishing programme was intended to offer direct interventions in culture. Hall dismisses the allegation that the Centre was a political agent intent on precipitating class revolution (1995c: 666–7). Not unreasonably, he claims that had it acted thus, it would have been disowned by the university, and financial support would have been withdrawn.

Hall's conception of intellectual work at the Centre recognized several different tasks, relating, most obviously, to cultural analysis, cultural critique and theory. Each of these tasks was regarded as having an active relation to politics. But, in his view, the Centre never aspired to establish a Marxist monoculture. As he points out (1995c: 667), he and his associates were hostile to the base–superstructure reductionism in Marxism, which they regarded as mechanistic and crudely overdeterministic.[8] Marxism was certainly a major influence in the intellectual development of the Centre, especially during the 1970s, when the work of Gramsci and Althusser suggested new neo-Marxist ways of working around the base–superstructure problem. The attack on *Screen* and Coward and Ellis's book *Language and Materialism* (1978) reasserted the value of materialist approaches to culture. However, in Hall's judgement, Marxism was always only one element in a rich theoretical mix of influences, including sociology, anthropology, symbolic interactionism, feminism, criminology, linguistics, French structuralism, semiotics, Lacanian psychoanalysis and poststructuralism. To some extent, he saw his responsibility as Director partly to defend dialogic relationships between different analytical, critical and theoretical positions. Using these relationships to articulate contradictions in the economy and body politic was, however, regarded as a legitimate part of Birmingham practice. This is certainly reflected in the publishing programme pursued by the Centre.

With one or two exceptions, notably the collections of working papers *On Ideology* (Hall, Lumley and McLennan 1978) and *Culture, Media, Language* (Hall et al. 1980), titles were not prepared or published with narrow pedagogic or academic intent. Rather the aim was to contribute books and papers which would contribute to the articulation of contradictions in contemporary culture, most obviously so in the case of *Resistance through Rituals* (Hall and Jefferson 1976) and *Policing the Crisis* (Hall et al. 1978).

Several students in Birmingham during the 1960s and 1970s described the institution as a 'laboratory' of pedagogy and research. Although the Centre was not immune from the usual academic frictions caused by careerism, individual jealousies and struggles with the administration over funding, it was remarkable for the spirit of genuine collectivism that it cultivated, and achieved, in the late 1960s and up to 1978. In part, this derived from the conviction of its members that they were embarked on an important new project of study that required constant innovation in respect of methodology, theory and pedagogy.

Also, after Hall became de facto Director, the political complexion of the Centre became more obviously harnessed to a public critique of capitalism, and to the advance of socialist transformation. One of the principal intellectual achievements, regularly mooted by Hall in his reminiscences of his time at the Centre, was the prediction of the rebirth of right-wing authoritarianism in Britain. It is a prominent theme in *Policing the Crisis* (Hall et al. 1978), and Hall returned to it in his lecture to the Cobden Trust (1979), which concentrated on the drift into a law and order society. Yet political activism, in the revolutionary sense, was never really on the table.

Why then do many people remember the Birmingham Centre as an axis of political opposition? Hall submits that one reason is that the Centre was explicitly organized to produce the democratization of knowledge (1997a: 39). It sought to engender a genuinely collective way of creating knowledge, based on a critique of the established disciplines, a critique of the university as a structure of power, and a critique of the institutionalization of knowledge as an ideological operation. According to Hall, the student movement of 1968 was the decisive factor in radicalizing and politicizing the Centre (1995c: 666–7; 1997a: 39). Many students who enrolled after that date were activists in the '68 student protests and occupations. Against the backdrop of escalating American involvement in the Vietnam war, the central institutions of capitalist society, notably patriarchy, the family, the education system, the law and the police, came under ferocious critical scrutiny from the students. They undoubtedly contributed to the ethical milieu that emerged in Centre after 1968.

## Organic and traditional intellectuals

However, a more profound political and ethical influence was the ideal of intellectual labour fostered by Hall. Pivotal to this was

Gramsci's (1971) concept of the 'organic intellectual'. As Hall put it in 1992:

> The 'organic intellectual' must work on two fronts at one and the same time. On the one hand, we had to be at the very forefront of intellectual theoretical work because, as Gramsci says, it is the job of the organic intellectual to know more than the traditional intellectuals do: really know, not just pretend to know, not just have the facility of knowledge, but to know deeply and profoundly . . . If you are in the game of hegemony you have to be smarter than 'them'. Hence, there are no theoretical limits from which cultural studies can turn back. But the second aspect is just as crucial: that the organic intellectual cannot absolve himself or herself from the responsibility of transmitting those ideas, that knowledge, through the intellectual function, to those who do not belong, professionally, in the intellectual class. And unless those two fronts are operating at the same time, or at least unless these two ambitions are part of the project of cultural studies, you can get enormous theoretical advance without any engagement at the level of the political project. (Hall in Morley and Chen 1996: 268)

This amounts to Hall's fullest expression of the ideal of intellectual work required by the Centre, and is, I submit, his best testament of the substance of intellectual craftsmanship. Several issues in the passage repay our attention.

To begin with, Hall, following Gramsci, pointedly contrasts the labour of the organic intellectual with that of the traditional intellectual. The organic intellectual is an agent charged with conserving and disseminating the distinctive knowledge, ideas and values of a particular social class or group. The organic intellectual is *not* necessarily a revolutionary agent, since the ruling power bloc also relies on intellectual labourers to conserve and disseminate the mental relations of force which distinguish it from other strata. However, it is clear that Gramsci regards the organic intellectual as pivotal in socialist construction through, *inter alia*, breaking down the barriers between mental and manual labour and raising consciousness of hegemony as an organized network of force. Gramsci also identifies the 'traditional intellectual', who looks for authority in 'detachment' and 'objectivity'. According to Hall, the decisive difference is that organic intellectuals recognize a determinate class affiliation, while traditional intellectuals see themselves as 'free floaters', lacking this affiliation (Hall, Lumley and McLennan 1978). The inference is that the labour of the traditional intellectual

is often hidebound by mere academicism.[9] In contrast, the organic intellectual is not constrained by the boundaries of academic disciplines, but instead makes a virtue of interdisciplinary study and research. At its best, this results in better questions being formulated, and better solutions being proposed.

For Hall, the crucial issue is the *relevance* of knowledge produced through intellectual labour. He proceeds on the basis that the labour of the organic intellectual recognizes no limits, and addresses knowledge as a resource to answer the power relations that characterize capitalist society. This is why he deliberately rejects the traditional boundary between the university and society, in favour of a more dialogic model of cultural intervention. In this respect, his observation that he, and the students in the Birmingham years, 'made up the field as they went along' pointed to a big strategic advantage since, at one leap, it freed them from the seigneurial introspection and self-satisfaction that is often found in traditional intellectual labour.

This may have been one reason why ethnographic work featured so prominently in the research activities of the Centre. Hall was always more at home with writing, debating and theory than interviewing or survey work. Nonetheless, he presided over a research programme in which Paul Willis, Christine Griffin, Dorothy Hobson, Phil Cohen, Tricia McCabe and David Morley all used innovative ethnographic methods to exploit and develop cultural research. It would be quite wrong to think of the Centre as a talking shop. Qualitative research was privileged over quantitative methods as the best means to explore empirical data in culture. The quality and range of ethnography conducted in Birmingham during Hall's term as Director illustrates the diversity of work conducted at the Centre. As with the discursive labour produced at the Centre, an important aim behind ethnographic work was to elucidate hegemony and to precipitate cultural intervention.

However, one of the prices of entering 'the game of hegemony' is to engage in a struggle with established academic disciplines. Hoggart gives an interesting concrete instance of this struggle in Birmingham (Gibson and Hartley 1998: 17–18). He recounts that the Vice-Chancellor in 1968 decided that the Centre was instrumental in fomenting student activism and precipitating riots and unrest. He attempted to close it down, or at least significantly reduce the scale of its operation, by establishing an independent commission to report on its activities. The commission found against some aspects of intellectual work at the Centre. For example, it criticized

the tendency for 'abstract, polysyllabic complicated' language to dominate research theses, and the collectivist 'ownership' of some theses which, the Commission held, was counter to good academic practice. However, to the chagrin of critical factions within the university, it praised the quality of intellectual work conducted at the Centre as being of the highest calibre, and vindicated it from the charge of acting as a political *agent provocateur* in student unrest.

It should now be clear that Hall's understanding and application of the concept of the 'organic intellectual' carried with it deep ethical responsibilities. It is not enough for the intellectual to 'know', he or she must 'really know', and use knowledge to answer power. The labour of the organic intellectual is therefore predicated on a dialogic relationship between research and cultural and political intervention.

The ethical responsibilities demanded of intellectual work at the Centre were enormously attractive to students and researchers. But they were also associated with intellectual overconfidence and a predilection to regard Birmingham work as morally superior on a priori grounds. Hall's pointed contrast between the labour of the organic intellectual and the traditional intellectual was a predisposing factor in this. Theoretically, at least, it conferred the advantage of political relevance to the organic intellectual, while simultaneously ascribing a lack of political relevance, and therefore a degree of ethical bad faith, to the labour of the traditional intellectual. The practice of democratizing knowledge and challenging the structure of institutionalized pedagogy in the university was also significant. The students and researchers working in the Centre were conscious of working on the frontline of what was institutionally acceptable, and this doubtless carried considerable cultural *cachet*.

This relates back to the soubriquet of the 'Birmingham mafia', which is sometimes negatively applied to describe researchers and graduates of the Centre. Birmingham 'organic intellectuals' frequently occupy the moral high ground, as if it is their natural habitat, and their research work and writing possess a proselytizing quality, as if they have a duty to correct the obfuscation and woolly thinking that dominate the field. No doubt this also relates to the tenor of intellectual work at the Centre which pursued the discipline of social criticism more avidly, and with greater distinction, than the practice of social construction. Given the Centre's self-image of an institution actively challenging the traditional disciplinary organization of knowledge, the established pedagogic

and administrative apparatus of the university, and the orthodox detachment of the Academy from cultural intervention, there was good reason to foreground social criticism. Moreover, at the level of pedagogy, the creation of subgroups was unquestionably a creative innovation which constructed solidarity through collective work in ways that were very imaginative and novel, at least in the context of the British system of tertiary education. Nonetheless, at the levels of research labour and writing, the comparative neglect of questions concerning detailed policy, strategy and a vision for the future left the Centre open to the charge of making a fetish of abstract criticism.

Remarkably, the core unit of capitalist culture, namely the business/industrial corporation, was not seriously investigated. All the Birmingham work presented capitalism as the context in which culture and agency develop. But the differences between capitalist corporations, and the shifting balance of power between national and multinational organizations remained a closed book in the Centre. Instead, especially after the infusion of Althusserian ideas in the 1970s, the Centre concentrated on the capitalist state. The latter was regarded as the major player in determining the rules of capitalist operations, and it was also identified as the lever for meaningful socialist change.

It is perhaps also worth observing that the existence of the Centre was heavily dependent on public funding. Many of the students who enrolled in the 1970s relied on state grants, often supplemented by part-time college teaching. Under Thatcherism a squeeze on grants for study in 'liberal' subjects like Sociology and Cultural Studies was introduced and part-time teaching opportunities diminished. The loss of Social Science Research Council and Arts 'quotas' imperilled graduate work at the Centre and contributed significantly to the decline of Birmingham as an intellectual powerhouse in the 1980s.


## The Birmingham 'project'

For many traditional academics, and not a few university administrators and Department of Education personnel, the Birmingham 'project' was frequently associated with semi-subversion. This was unjust. The Centre was always stronger on analysis than feasible plans for action. The work on the interventionist state, schooling, racism and policing purported to strip capitalist ideology naked.

But despite Hall's emphasis on the need to make ideas politically relevant, there was a clear predisposition in the Centre towards discourse, debate and intellectual exchange over direct political action. In reality the sheer range of subgroups and intellectual activities meant that the Centre was never firmly focused around a coherent political strategy. Needless to say, everyone who worked at Birmingham to a lesser or greater degree was in favour of emancipatory politics. Yet this covered a good deal of ground, including support for class resistance, feminism and the contradictions of heteronormativity. These trajectories did not always converge. Indeed, as we shall see in more detail below (pp. 127–9), the Women's Studies subgroup was highly critical of 'male-stream' dominance in the Centre's intellectual and social activity. If there was a Birmingham 'project' it boiled down to encouraging maximum, diverse, mobile investigation into questions of culture in a milieu that was shaped by a number of theoretical influences among which Marxism was, for much of the time, pre-eminent.

While there was a good deal of gesturing and uncoordinated activity in favour of radical social transformation, the immediate role of the Centre as an instrument of political change was modest. Birmingham's real legacy was in raising the consciousness of both students and the public about the role of ideology in everyday life and the various cultures of inequality in Britain. But, to date, this work has never really engendered either a coherent view of political agency or a tenable political strategy. To be sure, the work on school youth cultures, race, patriarchy, the distortions of the mass media and the transition from school to work for working-class kids in the 1970s articulated profound questions of injustice and inequality centred around class. Yet arguably with the exception of Paul Willis's brilliant work on cultural homology and difference (1977; 1978), the Centre in the 1970s and 1980s tended to reproduce an overconsensual and holistic view of resistant agency. Edward Thompson observed that

> We should not forget that 'culture' is a clumpish term, which by gathering up so many activities and attributes into one common bundle may actually confuse or disguise discriminations that should be made between them. We need to take this bundle apart, and examine the components with more care: rites, symbolic modes, the cultural attributes of hegemony, the inter-generational transmission of custom and custom's evolution within historically specific forms of working and social relations. (1991: 13)

The cleavages, and necessary discriminations, within the concept of resistant agency are undertheorized in Birmingham work. Although divisions of class and race are acknowledged, the levels and components of cultural friction, fusion and fission, and their various implications for cultural intervention, are inadequately elucidated.

This produces serious difficulties in the application of the concept of resistant agency, not least in respect of the analysis of class, gender, subcultural and racial mobilization. These difficulties are compounded when one considers the Birmingham elucidation of the hegemonic structures within which resistant agency is located. Following Gramsci (1971), there is a lucid treatment of the contingent, negotiated character of hegemony. This connects up with a positive aspirational role for cultural intervention which the Centre always optimistically subscribed to, since it suggests that under capitalist hegemony there is everything still to play for. At the level of theory, the hydraulics of hegemony, particularly in respect of the operation of the state in capitalist society, were impressively dismantled, and the circuits of power revealed. As already noted, the role of the corporation in capitalist society was handled less satisfactorily. Research at the Centre in the 1970s was influenced by Althusser's theory of the state apparatus and ideology (1971; 1977), and the debate between Miliband and Poulantzas in respect of class power and the state (Poulantzas 1973; Miliband 1983). This work privileged the state in the orchestration of hegemonic rule. In so far as the corporation figured at all in research conducted at the Centre, it was presented in 'clumpish' terms, as the exemplar of Fordism.[10] But as the work on globalization and postmodernism in the 1980s and 1990s made clear, there was considerably more diversity and flexibility in the form and actions of corporations than Fordist models allowed. In particular, corporate branding and theming in consumer culture energized and divided people in ways that the Centre failed to fully recognize. The failure to take consumer culture seriously was a general fault of the Birmingham Centre in the 1970s and 1980s. It limited debates around embodiment and emplacement to neo-Marxist assumptions of commodity fetishism. These limitations were exposed in the 1980s by other groups, notably the *Theory, Culture & Society* formation, who were not so obviously bound by a political agenda.

I propose that 1978 was the Centre's climacteric. With the publication of perhaps the most triumphant example of the Birmingham approach, *Policing the Crisis*, in that year, latent tensions became manifest. In particular, the conflict between the 'scientific' struc-

turalism of the Althusserian tradition and the more open and interpretive Gramscian tradition became pronounced, and feminist criticisms of the 'male-stream' Birmingham tradition became sharper.[11]

In 1979 Hall left Birmingham to become Professor of Sociology at the Open University. Richard Johnson succeeded him. Under Johnson, the emphasis on the historical construction of everyday life was revived, a move that some commentators interpreted as a veiled criticism of the prominence of textual analysis and ethnography under Hall's stewardship. Turner records Johnson's view that ethnography in Birmingham was relatively 'undertheorized' and carried a tendency towards 'elitist paternalism' (G. Turner 1990: 73; Johnson 1983).

After Hall's departure, it is perhaps fair to say that the Centre never achieved the same level of dynamism or public profile. Some of the most promising Birmingham graduates were establishing careers outside the region and indeed, outside the UK. The Birmingham project was gradually disseminated through the national and international expansion of Cultural Studies and Media and Communication courses. In the 1980s, as part of the general retrenchment in higher education under Margaret Thatcher, the existence of the Centre was imperilled. Both Johnson and his successor, Jorge Larrain, devoted much of their energies to securing the intellectual and financial security of the Centre and blocking pressure from the university to reallocate it to the Department of English. The Centre became a Department of Cultural Studies and, for the first time, offered an undergraduate programme to supplement postgraduate Masters and doctoral work.

## From coercion to consent and hyphenated identity

Hall left the Birmingham Centre and became Professor of Sociology at the Open University in 1979. At Milton Keynes he co-produced the U203 'Popular Culture' interdisciplinary undergraduate course convened by Tony Bennett, which ran from 1982 to 1987. In its first year the course attracted over 1,000 students. Anthony Easthope placed U203 as second only to the Birmingham Centre as the most significant institutional intervention in Cultural Studies in the UK (1991: 74).

Interestingly, Williams had misgivings about the Open University project (1989a: 157–8). He argued that the technocratic style of course committee widened access but separated faculty from the

local conditions of students. As one might expect of Williams, he was critical of forms of delivery in education that decoupled the connection between pedagogy and the 'whole way of life' in culture.[12] In a criticism directed more pointedly at U203 and perhaps Hall himself, Williams lamented the turn towards structuralism in Cultural Studies. He regarded this as 'a new form of idealist theory' which produced an unsatisfactory view of agency (1989a: 157). In his view structuralism reinforced the tendency towards 'decoupling' in the Open University by encouraging course planners 'not to look' at 'the practical encounters of people in society' but instead to position these encounters in 'deeper' structuralist frameworks. Williams also takes a pot-shot at the eclecticism and partiality of the structuralist tradition in Cultural Studies. He complains that the tradition 'subsumes' the 'quite different' work of 'Gramsci and Benjamin' and provides a limited reading of culture by, for example, neglecting the critique of idealism associated with the writings of Bakhtin and Medvedev (1989a: 158).

The year of Hall's move in 1979 was also the year that Margaret Thatcher was elected to power. Throughout the 1980s, most obviously via a torrent of trenchant and influential articles in *Marxism Today*, Hall established himself as one of the foremost public critics of Thatcherism. If, before the late 1970s, he dreamed of a personal nemesis that would embody the relations of force, hegemony and overdetermination that he analysed in abstract terms at the level of society and culture, he located it thereafter in Margaret Hilda Thatcher. Thatcherism embodied all of the key themes, concerning ideological manipulation and the organization of popular consent to an authoritarian programme, that Hall had been working on for two decades. But Margaret Thatcher constituted a peculiarly virulent point of articulation, an individual that personally aggravated Hall and stimulated his critical imagination. Some of Hall's best, most enduring writing was produced in these years.

Initially, the central problem that he confronted was why the working class 'voluntarily' voted for a government openly committed to dismantling the postwar welfare settlement. The tight control over public finances and the narrow moral agenda promised by Thatcher in 1979, as the antidote to 'the winter of discontent' under James Callaghan's Labour administration, directly threatened hard-won civil rights in respect of health, education, unemployment and welfare provision. Why, asked Hall, should the working class voluntarily vote to cut its own throat? Gradually, as Thatcher proceeded to achieve two more election victories, only to

be finally extirpated by a putsch from within the Tory Party, Hall's interests broadened to embrace the repertoires of English (as opposed to Scottish, Welsh or Irish) nationalism and the cultural, economic and political consequences of globalization. Hall coined and developed the concept of authoritarian populism to describe the democratically constituted civil, moral and economic closure accomplished by Thatcherism.

The analysis of authoritarian populism followed *Policing the Crisis* (Hall et al. 1978) in insisting on the virtue of historical specificity in theoretical labour. From the outset it portrayed much of the traditional Left as becalmed in the problematics of the past. The success of Thatcherism, Hall maintained, lay in addressing the real historical moment, albeit in terms which distorted reality by framing it overwhelmingly through the interests of capital. Hall's analysis demonstrated how Thatcherism was able to utilize and weld together outwardly incompatible elements to achieve popular control. It did not spare the Left. Labour in government under James Callaghan was upbraided by Hall for introducing the 'monetarist realism' which he regarded as paving the way for full-blown authoritarian populism. Labour in opposition he excoriated for either indulging in a complacent and profitless yearning for the revival of class struggle or colluding with the central tenets of Thatcherist 'reform', and so diluting the socialist promise. In these years, the organization of subjectivity comes to occupy the forefront of Hall's intellectual concerns, but always in the political context of the revision of socialism as a counter-hegemonic force to capital.

Much of Hall's ire against the Left at this time derives from his conviction that traditional socialists failed to recognize the seismic nature of the social and economic change which Thatcherism both exploited and expressed. The New Times thesis proposed that the last quarter of the twentieth century underwent an epochal transition from organized to flexible accumulation. Further, it argued that this change is equivalent in significance to the transition in the closing decades of the nineteenth century from the 'laissez-faire' to the advanced or organized stage in capitalist development which eventually culminated in Fordism. Because Hall was understood to claim that New Times revolutionized both the objective conditions of life and the subjective formation of interpersonal relations, thus eventuating in a break or rupture with organized capitalism and its accessories, he was widely criticized by left-wing associates for converting to postmodernism.

In fact Hall distanced himself from prominent aspects of postmodernism, notably its apocalyptic model of change and its proposition of the death of the social. However, as ever, when fashionable new theories challenged his understanding of emancipatory politics, Hall's response to postmodernism is vulnerable to the charge that he wants to have his cake and eat it.[13] The New Times thesis refers to the 'ambiguous and treacherous reaches of postmodernism' (Hall and Jacques 1989: 15). Nevertheless, from the late 1980s, Lyotard's hypothesis of the collapse of grand narratives is appropriated as the central premise of Hall's writings on culture and politics. Difference, dissemination and *différance* now occupy the fulcrum of his thought on identity, although always with a continuing commitment to socialist intervention. Then, after the mid 1980s his thought becomes increasingly receptive to poststructuralism and postmodernism. So much so that Sparks argues that Hall's work gradually moves away from an identification with Marxism (Sparks 1996: 88–90). The decisive intellectual inheritance behind this shift is the work of Laclau (1977) and Laclau and Mouffe (1985). This work weakened the Althusserian legacy by rejecting the thesis that ideological elements have any necessary class connotation. Laclau's position advances a more culturalist reading of ideology by shifting the notion of the interpellation of the subject from social class to multiple identities. The effect was to produce a concretized, differentiated approach to ideology capable of exploring how ideological discourse operates to interpellate, for example, racial, gay and lesbian identity, without positing class struggle as the floor or foundation of the social formation.

Laclau further shifted the discussion of representation and ideology away from class by redefining the central contradiction in politics as that between 'the people' and the power bloc. This was an important resource for Hall's discussion of authoritarian populism. It promoted a reading of culture, in all of its concrete variable forms, as an axial site of political struggle in the process of consent and resistance. It also opened up the question of nationalism, which Hall used to illustrate the ideological subtlety of Thatcherism's appropriation of decline, heritage and freedom around what it is to be 'British'. The emphasis that Laclau placed on contingency and discourse clearly liberated Hall from what might be called the ideological fundamentalism of Althusserianism. Ideology remained central to his work, but he now took its refraction through concrete, contingent formations more seriously.

After the mid 1980s the subject of identity emerges as a pre-eminent theme in Hall's writing. Doubtless this reflects the New Times thesis which, as Hall noted elsewhere (1991d), involved 'the return of subjectivity' as a focal topic of social theory. But it also mirrors Halls growing interest in poststructuralism, feminism and postcolonialism. Hall has never adequately explained how 'interrupted identities' and 'sliding', 'fragmented' subjectivities, emerging in his work during the 1990s, can achieve the collective solidarity necessary to effect socialist change. This has led some critics to complain that Hall's espousal of New Times is a *trompe-l'oeil* (Mulgan 1998; Giddens 2000).[14] Perhaps with half an eye to the dilemma of wanting to have socialist change but propagating a range of theoretical observations that appear to pre-empt solidarity and collective agency, Hall has taken to describing his position as 'pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will'.[15]

Hall always recognized that socialism, and any radical movement, must be rooted in the recognition of difference. Arguably, the issue of race made this more acute for him during the rise of the New Left. Different by virtue of colour, Hall was doubtless sensitive to the immature New Left conceptions of belonging and recognition. His later work tries to envisage forms of collective agency and solidarity that are 'always conditional, never complete, always operating through difference' (Hall 1989h: 154). The paternalist, patriarchal connotations with the old New Left notion of 'Socialist Man' has been revised to incorporate feminist insights and issues of race. Although Hall claims that feminism led him to recast his whole way of thinking about identity, agency and politics, he has not written much directly on the subject. Instead, his writings about the revision and transcendence of 'Socialist Man' have tended to concentrate on issues of race. He maintains that Britain has become a more multicultural society since 1951 when he migrated to the country, but crucially he insists that multiculturalism co-exists with racism (2000b: 8–9).

The Parekh Report (2000) propounds a number of policies that government and local communities can implement to lower the racial barriers and inhibitions that prevent social inclusion. It parallels the Macpherson Report (1999) on the racially motivated murder of the black teenager Stephen Lawrence, which identified the presence of 'institutional racism' in British society. Institutional racism refers to 'unwitting', 'unconscious' racial stereotypes and prejudice which inhere in the organizational structure and routine

practices of public and private bodies. Hall rightly notes that the term is problematic in at least two respects (2000b: 8). Firstly, the emphasis on the unwitting, unconscious nature of prejudice underplays the real levels of conscious racism in British society. Secondly, by applying the term indiscriminately to private and public bodies, it is in danger of attributing racism as a universal fault of society, a fault that is so widespread that some people will think that we must live with it rather than take active steps to uproot it. True to the Gramscian maxim, Hall is a 'pessimist of the intellect and optimist of the will' in this matter. He evaluates Macpherson's recognition of institutional racism in the Metropolitan Police as 'a real advance', but regards it as one episode in 'a long campaign which is unlikely to have many short term or any total victories' (2000b: 8). In general, Hall eschews the celebratory sentiments that are found in some versions of multiculturalism (McLaren 1997). Radical by inclination, but stoical by temperament, Hall prefers instead, as with his work on socialism, to emphasize 'the long hard road to renewal'.

A crucial element in this campaign, reviewed at length in the Parekh Report (2000), is the need to revise the concept of British heritage from the perspective of multi-ethnic Britain. Part of this involves engineering a new cultural habitus in Britain which recognizes social inclusion regardless of race, and revises the concept of national heritage to fully reveal the contribution of people of colour. The challenge for the Left, Hall wrote elsewhere, is 'to *constitute* classes and individuals as a popular force – that is the nature of political and cultural struggle: to *make* the divided classes and the separated peoples – divided and separated by culture as much as by other factors – *into* a popular-democratic cultural force' (1981b: 239; emphasis in original).

The Parekh Report calls for a re-examination of British heritage, a great national debate, in order to explore the roots of multi-ethnicity and hybridity in Britain. The object is to produce a new and more inclusive conception of what it might mean to be British, a conception which recognizes hyphenated identity around colour (Afro-British, Asian-British, Caribbean-British, Chinese-British) on a par with white hyphenated identity (Anglo-Irish, Anglo-Welsh and Anglo-Scots).

In this respect Hall's thought has come full circle. The New Left, he recalls, was not a socialism of political dogma, but a socialism of 'the social imaginary' (1989h: 153). It was, he continues, a quest to construct a radical perspective that refused to be locked into the language of the present, and sought to engage with the, frequently

conflicting and hectic, political, social and cultural realities in which people are moving. It allowed different experiences and different senses of oppression to puncture the terms of the traditional British debate between Left and Right. Hall argues cogently that the problem for the Left is to engage and respect difference without replacing a politics of articulation with a politics of infinite dispersal (1993d: 137). However, his solution of constructing 'unities through difference' is obscure. His growing interest in visual culture (1991b; 2000c), especially black photography, suggests that he may regard aesthetics as one avenue through which that unity-through-difference might be solidified. If so, it parallels the later work of Herbert Marcuse (1978) on the radical potential of art to operate as a catalyst for constituting classes and individuals into a 'popular-democratic cultural force'. Hall would doubtless object to the 'bourgeois' solution of aesthetics as an instrument of unity, on the grounds that it fails to engage adequately with the material realities of inequality and exclusion. Be that as it may, the mantra of 'unity through difference' leaves many difficult questions unanswered.

In some ways, the emphasis on hybridity and the politics of difference that is accentuated in Hall's later work should be regarded as the culmination of the inherent anti-essentialism that distinguishes his approach to culture. In the 1980s his engagement with Thatcherism and analysis of the failures of the Left played a part in creating the intellectual and political climate that allowed New Labour to flourish. But as we shall see presently (pp. 153–5), Hall was later very critical of many aspects of New Labour policy, thus providing further ammunition for critics who regard his work to be prone to modishness and slippage. A coherent view of the kind of society and culture that Hall wants to see is still absent from his work. Arguably his role as a public intellectual has dissipated his energies.

The next three chapters explore Hall's contribution to understanding representation and ideology, state and society and culture and civilization. I submit that his attempt to relate representation and ideology to material questions of inequality and exclusion constitutes the most distinctive feature of his contribution to cultural studies. Similarly, while his approach allows for a variety of extra-state networks to exert political influence, he never departed from the traditional Marxist premise that the state is the key tool of socialist transformation. His accounts of the rise of the interventionist state, and his analysis of the capitalist state under Thatcherism and

New Labour, provide important insights into the uses of the state apparatus to both promote and hinder socialist change. Although questions of civilization pervade his work, especially in relation to his critique of the West, Hall assigns to the concept of culture the lion's share in his analysis. This has led to some misguided and misleading turns of thought in relation to 'the West' and the potential of the politics of difference to fully erase the conventional politics of emplacement and embodiment.

Although all three chapters consist of an effort to critically engage with Hall, they are also structured as an exposition of his ideas. In my own undergraduate and postgraduate teaching I have found that today's students often find it hard to understand the sequence of Hall's analysis. In part, this reflects the fecundity of Hall's writings. Over the years he has contributed to so many areas of academic and popular debate, from the role of the media in shaping public opinion to the challenges of hybridity to identity thinking, that it is often difficult to see how the various strands are connected. By working through the sequence of Hall's writings, from his early contribution to encoding/decoding processes in the media, through the contributions of Gramsci and Althusser, to the work on the interventionist state, authoritarian populism, the West and the politics of difference, both the range of his intellectual activities and the interconnections between them will hopefully be made more apparent.