



2006

Remarks on Stuart Hall

Panel with Bill Schwarz, Wendy Brown and Ulysses Leonardo.

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I won't be saying anything systematic about the legacy of Stuart Hall's thought—though in the current American political context his thinking about the volatile, non guaranteed, nature of the Gramscian “national popular” seems all too relevant.

I'll be speaking from personal experience.

Stuart was a friend and mentor to me—after 1986 or so, when we founded a center for cultural studies at UCSC and then had to figure out what that meant.

Not another Humanities Center, but something open across the divisions. And political.

Ian Chambers and Lidia Curti, Paul Gilroy and Vron Ware, Avtar Brah and Stuart, himself, several times. He gave us his blessing,

And I think he was interested in what could be made of a cultural studies legacy he never wanted to represent or administer, out on the Pacific Rim.

He was very supportive of my own work engaged with cultural anthropology and Pacific History. (Social anthropology was strangely absent in the British context, at least in the early decades. Why?)

Recently I've put his ideas to work in contexts of emerging "indigeneity" (in the 80s and 90s) in ways that were challenged and renewed by his diasporic (and if I may say so, "Caribbean") sensibility. For me, and many of my Native American, Island Pacific and South Asian graduate students a dialogue that has revealed both synergies and tensions stemming from our different "politics of location." (That phrase, from Adrienne Rich grappling with the irruption of race inside feminism, was in the air during the 1980s at Santa Cruz)

Stuart's openness to our experiments out here, his lack of any defensiveness, his wonderful curiosity, have guided me since.

Not long after his death, I organized screenings of John Acomfreh's film "The Stuart Hall Project" at UCSC and Stanford.

The two screenings... An overflow audience in Santa Cruz. But Stanford was very thin. This confirmed my prejudice—a filthy rich, entitled place, in the belly of the beast.

I've been teaching at Stanford, part time for Anthropology (with students from MST, Communications, History and several other disciplines).

I made Stuart's life and times the thread of my seminar this past Fall.

Stuart Hall and Co. (Williams, EPT, Carolyn Steedman, Ian Ang, Paul Gilroy, Kobena Mercer, etc, etc.

And we found ourselves discussing, with Stuart's help, ALL the big themes and events of the postwar period.

The Cold War and Decolonization (1956 Hungary and Suez—1st New Left)

--American hegemony in the postwar boom. Consumption and the re-alignment of the "working class". New Left cultural politics, the birth of NSM's in the anti-Nuclear Movement (CND).

--New media like TV. Encoding, Decoding.

--Capitalist economic crisis in the mid 70s. Thatcherism's turn to a new kind of conservatism and the making of a hegemony... (Hall's Gramscian perspective so relevant today...)

--Migration and racialized crisis in Nation spaces of the displaced Imperial West. Emergence of "Blackness" (in Stuart himself and more broadly)

--And the prominence of new subjects from the margins -without romantic illusions of inclusion or freedom. New Ethnicities, sexualities, gender relations...

Thinking with complex subjectivities, under the sign of "diaspora" ...
Making possible a way of thinking about "post-identity politics..."
(Which is *not* anti-Identity politics!)

--Then the rearticulation of Thatcherism/Reaganism as "globalization" in the 90s and "Neo Liberalism" now. Stuart's rather darkly pessimistic view of the latter, in some of his later essays.

You can all add to my list of historical developments with which Stuart Hall's changing thought was continuously and restlessly engaged.

In our seminar we read, and listened to, him grappling with his times, always seeking the lineaments of a "conjuncture." A new moment...

Listening: the interviews with Les Back and others. The talk at Lidia Curti's retirement in Naples 2006, perhaps my favorite lecture: A history of Cultural Studies told through a friendship! (Lidia, more than anyone, brought Gramsci to Birmingham.)

The deconstructed/decentered world of globalization circa 2000: "**Are we still there?**" I always seem to hear Stuart asking "Where are we now?"

Stuart Hall's profoundly "oral" sensibility. One always hears a voice (even in his most technical theoretical discussions). And increasingly his writing is a kind of speech, thinking audibly...

This written voice (so teachable. And a model for me, in my late career)

What do I mean by orality:

--Always an **intervention**, someone/sometime is being addressed, questioned, called forth...

--Relational ideas in emergence, coming together (Why he mistrusted the finished book)

--The mimeographed CCCS occasional papers: Addressing a specific community about some problem they share...

Never the abstract, distanced authority.

In our seminar we explored the limits of the Stuart Hall discourse, it's specific (British/Caribbean, "North Atlantic?") worlding—in ways that I think he would have found interesting.

At the end we read some works on new indigenous cultural politics, contexts where I had imported articulation theory.

Could articulation replace invention (in "the invention of tradition")? It carries no debunking tone. Just ordinary political processes of connecting/disconnecting—dis and re- articulations. A way of thinking about "becoming indigenous" in the late 20th century.

Like all traveling, and translated, theories and concepts, the trouble became apparent before long. Could articulation account for very old and deep attachments to land and place. To a profound ancestral connection?

Ancestral connections that have been updated, yes. Translated, and made new, but ALSO a deep, if often interrupted continuity.

The “Caribbean” perspective. All the roots there have been violently cut? All of them? Hall’s “New World”--in his great essay “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”, The invader’s view of “new worlds,” as it appears from indigenous perspectives.

Contemporary indigenous politics is a global (local) phenomenon that hasn’t had a lot of salience in Britain or (until lately) the Caribbean. In our discussions, I felt that Stuart was interested in my attempts to think indigenous articulated continuities in CS ways...

Again, his profound openness to **the emergent, the unwoven...**

He would certainly have been interested by the way students in our seminar last fall took up and ran with his thinking...

Especially the Chinese students who had come to study anthropology at Stanford..

One was working (with Lisa Rofel) on “entrepreneurs’ and “start ups” in the new enterprise economy. She used Stuart’s writings beautifully, to focus on everyday cultural practices and to show the negotiated nature of a hegemony that we might be too quick to simply label—and prematurely understand--as “Neo-Liberal.”

Another, working on youth cultures in “post-Olympic” Beijing, learned a lot from Stuart’s subtle way of periodizing, of seeing complex transitions and re-articulations, rather than epochal shifts.

There’s a lot more to say about their engagement. Hall and Gramsci may be having a new life in Stanford Anthropology gatherings thanks to them!

Or so I like to think...

