SELECTED WRITINGS ON VISUAL ARTS AND CULTURE

Detour to the Imaginary

Edited by **Gilane Tawadros**

Stuart Hall

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ON VISUAL ARTS AND CULTURE

BUY

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Stuart Hall: Selected Writings

A series edited by Catherine Hall and Bill Schwarz

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Detour to the Imaginary:
Stuart Hall's Writings on the Visual Arts and Culture

Questions of Culture: "Absolutely Deadly Political Questions"

In 1994 Stuart Hall participated in the "Race Matters" conference at Princeton and delivered a paper that was subsequently published as the essay "Subjects in History: Making Diasporic Identities."[1] The essay acts as a prologue to this volume, which is the first publication to assemble a significant number of Stuart Hall's writings on the visual arts and culture. At the conference, Hall urged his audience to give up their commitment to the "politically pure" and embrace the fact that "cultural politics and questions of culture, of discourse and of metaphor are absolutely deadly political questions." To those wedded to the idea of political purity, he insisted that questions of culture were not secondary to questions of economic and political change but "*constitutive* of them" (my emphasis).

Hall's writings on politics, race, and media are familiar to readers, but less well-known are his writings on the visual arts and culture. Yet Hall's engagement with the visual arts can be traced back to his commentaries in the late 1950s in the journal *Universities and Left Review*. However, it was in the 1980s when his involvement with the visual arts, and in particular with a younger generation of black British artists, filmmakers, and thinkers, deepened, blossoming into a series of close collaborations and friendships. It was also manifest in his significant practical commitment to two

arts organizations that he chaired throughout the 1990s and the 2000s—Autograph (Association of Black Photographers) and INIVA (Institute of International Visual Arts).

This anthology brings together essays, lectures, reviews, catalog texts, and conversations that provide an insight into why Hall immersed himself in what he described as the "radically different" intellectual and aesthetic space of the visual imaginary. The project with which he identified was one in which diaspora artists, filmmakers, and thinkers in Britain sought to "challenge certain erasures and marginalizations inscribed in the visual field itself, to try to establish a certain 'presence' within the frame, to come 'into the field of vision.'"[2]

The Turn to the Visual Arts

Why then are Stuart Hall's writings on the visual arts and culture so little known among readers and scholars who are otherwise intimately familiar with his other writings? As early as 1958, Hall made an impassioned defense of Picasso and modern avant-garde art more generally ("a tradition of revolution, experiment, and change") in the face of the stultifying and regressive conservatism of the Royal Academy of Arts at the time, embodied in the figure of Sir Charles Wheeler, then president of the Royal Academy, and in his desire to uphold the "strictest standards of traditional teaching."[3] Yet Hall's relationship to the visual arts continues to be viewed as a less significant, post-academic activity that occupied the twilight years following his retirement as professor of sociology at the Open University in 1997. This volume seeks to counter the view that Hall's involvement with the visual arts was peripheral to his other intellectual and political preoccupations and positions. Hall's engagement with the visual was a critical part of his intellectual armor, in many instances framing his insights into race and politics.

As the founding editor of the *New Left Review* (*NLR*) (formed from the merger of *Universities and Left Review* and *The New Reasoner*, two journals that emerged out of the political repercussions of Suez and Hungary in 1956), Hall set out the agenda for the new journal in his introduction to the first issue in 1960. The journal, said Hall, would embrace a broader conception of politics, one that would include discussions of "the cinema or teen-age culture," alongside traditional political and economic analyses, because the former was "directly relevant to the imaginative resistances of people who have to live within capitalism—the growing points of social discontent, the

projections of deeply-felt needs."[4] Hall's deep understanding of the work of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci and what he describes as the "Copernican revolution in Marxist approaches to the state" that Gramsci initiated also sowed the seeds in his own thinking about the profound significance of culture and cultural formations to political discourse. Hall embraced in his work (and in his collaborative intellectual inquiries at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham) the constitutive role that culture plays as the arena in which breaks and discontinuities with the status quo are played out, making it possible to "identify the turning points, when relations are qualitatively restructured and transformed—the moments of transition."[5]

Writing about the Partisan, a coffeehouse and center for the New Left in Soho established in 1958 by the young historian Raphael Samuel, a coeditor with Hall of the *Universities and Left Review* (*ULR*), Mike Berlin has recently drawn attention to the importance attached to the visual arts by the New Left, and he emphasizes its adoption of emerging forms and radical practices in graphics, typography, and illustration as well as painting and photography. The Italian graphic artist Germano Facetti was employed to design the covers of the *ULR* and *NLR*, and the publicity materials for the Partisan were produced by the acclaimed letterpress printer Desmond Jeffrey. The walls of the Partisan coffeehouse "were regularly decorated with paintings, prints and drawings by artists and a *ULR* Artists Group was formed by John Berger, Peter de Francia, Peter Peri and Michael Ayrton."[6] The photographer Roger Mayne, who documented working-class communities in North Kensington and London's emerging youth culture, also documented the young patrons of the Partisan and wrote for the *ULR* on the problems of realism in photojournalism.

The Partisan coffeehouse closed in 1963, and both Hall and Samuel moved on from the *New Left Review*. In the years that followed, Hall continued to write about the visual arts, particularly film and photography, and in the 1980s, he chaired the Commonwealth Photography Award, became a trustee of the Photographers' Gallery in London, and gave the keynote speech at the launch of Autograph (Association of Black Photographers) in 1988, later becoming chair of its board of trustees and chair of the board of INIVA (Institute of International Visual Arts), where I worked with Hall for more than a decade.

From the late 1970s, Hall began to see race as a prism through which to understand wider currents in British culture and society. In the 1980s, particularly, he came to recognize race and representation as a route through which to understand how race was constructed politically and culturally, and the ways in which a new generation of black artists and filmmakers were

challenging these constructions and mapping new subjectivities and positions that held the potential for political and social change: "One of the most critical sites in this work is the intersection of racial, ethnic, gender and sexual difference; and in particular that of *the body* itself. The body is at one and the same time the 'container' of identity and subjectivity, the overdetermined point where differences collide, the epidermal surface on which racism etches its mark, and a ground of resistance from which alternative counter-narratives can be produced."[7] The problem of living with difference, argued Hall, was *the* problem of the twenty-first century: "If you are interested in a society which somehow learns, painfully, how to begin to learn to live with difference, to recognise the way it has constructed the other as the opposite of itself, you have to understand how the culture is working. In the arts things get said in ways in which they can't get said in any other domain."[8]

Hall's engagement with the visual arts, and more specifically with the black artists, thinkers, and organizations with which he became immersed, was his path to the revolutionary and experimental space of imagination where he identified the contours of a new conjuncture, a significant turning point in the discourse of race and nation that would give rise to profound insights about identity, difference, and globalization in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century: "I'm interested in what people imagine, how they imagine, how they represent themselves, figurally, in the visual and literary field, how they position themselves in the narratives of self and society. And I am committed to the wider society having a greater access to these visions and dreams and nightmares and traumas and fears. So, the turn to the visual arts."[9]

Detour and Indirection

The subtitle of this book comes from a conversation between Stuart Hall and Bill Schwarz that took place at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in 2007 and that was subsequently published in *Soundings*. Asked by Schwarz whether, in this particular historical moment, the black visual arts in Britain represented a privileged way of looking at questions of race and diaspora, Hall explained: "If you want to learn more, or see how difference operates inside people's heads, you have to go to art, you have to go to culture—to where people imagine, where they fantasise, where they symbolise. You have to make the detour from the language of straight description to the language of the imaginary."[10]

The word *detour* draws from the lexicon of phrases and concepts from the Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser, which Hall deploys—"peppering so many of his writings and interviews," as Gregor McLennan notes in his introduction to Hall's writings on Marxism.[11] Here, however, the detour is not an Althusserian detour from experience and the concrete to abstraction but a movement away from the "language of straight description" to the more fluid and slippery "language of the imaginary." Hall was attracted to culture because, in his words, it constituted "the domain of indirection," which paradoxically provides direction: "As Shakespeare once said, 'By indirection find direction out.'" In order to enter the domain of culture, Hall argues, "we have to step back and go through the imaginary." Together with Shakespeare's "indirection," Hall uses the term *detour* to characterize his intentional rerouting away from the seeming "purity" of political and economic questions to the space of culture and the visual in order to *come back* with new insights and understandings regarding the "real" world of political and economic relations of power.

On different occasions, Hall sets out to distinguish between the space of the "real" and that of the "imaginary," locating the "mysterious place where art arises from experience, [which] is at the same time different from experience and reflects critically back on it." The world—real, historical, political—influences culture, but culture is not a mirror of the world. Looking back on black artistic practice in the 1980s in his essay "Assembling the 1980s: The Deluge—and After," Hall rejects a simplistic connection between politics and culture. Culture, he argues, doesn't exist in a vacuum, but politics cannot be understood outside of questions of representation:

> We are still not that far advanced in finding ways of thinking about the relationship between the [art]work and the world. We either make the connection too brutal and abrupt, destroying that necessary displacement in which the work of making art takes place. Or we protect the work from what Edward Said calls its necessary "worldliness," projecting it into either a pure political space where conviction—political will—is all, or into an inviolate aesthetic space, where only critics, curators, dealers, and connoisseurs are permitted to play. The problem is rather like that of thinking the relationship between the dream and its materials in waking life. We know there is a connection there. But we also know that the two continents cannot be lined up and their correspondences read off directly against one another.[12]

Race as a Prism

To understand how visual culture and the work of visual artists and film-makers operate as a critical part of Stuart Hall's intellectual tool kit, it is necessary to go back to the 1970s to consider how race and racial politics in Britain acted as the lens through which Hall was able to understand a profound shift in British politics at the end of the 1970s and early 1980s. In the 1970s, Hall was working as a professor at the Centre for Cultural Studies in Birmingham, where he and his colleagues carried out research into race, mugging, and the criminal justice system, which resulted in a book published in 1978 called *Policing the Crisis*. The book was produced in the context of a deepening political and social crisis in the 1970s in Britain and the rise of a new right-wing, free-market politics that was spearheaded by the Conservative politician Margaret Thatcher. The book is a forensic study into the different contributing factors that gave rise to the moral panic about mugging—crime statistics, media reporting, the courts, police attitudes toward young black men in Britain's cities—all of which contributed to this moral panic and provided the opportunity for the new Right in Britain to assert itself as the means by which order and authority could be restored.

It is important to emphasize that the deepening political and social crisis at that time was not all about race but that race *was* a recurring motif and that race and crime were at the center of what Thatcherism—Stuart Hall coined the phrase—could focus on as a way to try to roll back the social democratic consensus in Western Europe in the postwar period. By studying the rise of new Right politics and the increasing authoritarianism of the state through the lens of race, Hall was able to identify before many others how Margaret Thatcher's rise was not just a political victory for the new Right but—critically—that this marked a profound change in political culture as well as a shift to a new historical conjuncture. As Hall later wrote, Thatcherism was not simply a British manifestation; it was the beginning of globalization and a new stage in the global capitalist economy.

A Critical Decade

Six years before the "Race Matters" conference in Princeton, Hall had addressed the Black Film/British Cinema conference at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London, convened by Kobena Mercer, at which he drew attention to a profound shift in black cultural politics that signaled a

wider transformation in the politics of race and nation in postwar Britain. The move from the relations of representation to the politics of representation itself, argued Hall, went beyond a simple strategy of reversal ("putting in place of the bad old essential white subject, the new essentially good black subject"), opening up "a continuous critical discourse about themes, about the forms of representation, the subjects of representation, above all, the regimes of representation" without guarantees. Critically, this involved a "recognition that 'black' is essentially a politically and culturally *constructed* category, which cannot be grounded in a set of fixed trans-cultural or transcendental racial categories and which therefore has no guarantees in Nature."[13] The shift away from an essentialist notion of blackness to an understanding that "black signifies a range of experiences" meant that the act of representation required more than the decentering of the subject but "actually exploring the kaleidoscopic conditions of blackness."[14]

Thinking about black British photography in the 1980s, Hall identified a struggle on two fronts: the first was the question of access to the means of representation ("the relationship of black photographers to the institutions, visibility and exclusion"), and the second was the question of what photographers did with the opportunities that came their way once the door had been opened. In the latter decades of his life, Hall was occupied in a sustained way with both questions: with the practical work of building new cultural institutions from the early 1990s onward—primarily Autograph and INIVA—that would provide access to black British artists and photographers, and, simultaneously, with the work of establishing "a wide, active dialogic community" that would be engaged in "interrogating, evaluating, reconstructing histories" and "putting back in place invisible discursive conditions which make new texts possible." This intellectual work, involving "scholarship, criticism and political and cultural interrogation," would be "part and parcel of a well-articulated theory and practice of black representation— doing it, writing about it, arguing about it, theorising it, writing its history and so on—it is all crucial work."[15]

In the 1980s Hall began to see in the struggle for representation by black artists, filmmakers, and writers questions that shaped the contours of the wider historical conjuncture: how was a generation of young, black British people primarily from Afro-Caribbean, African, and Asian backgrounds, who had been born and brought up in Britain, going to articulate their experiences and identities against the grain of fixed national and racial identifications? How were these "diasporic subjects" who were "the product of several

histories, cultures, and narratives" and belonged to "several homes, most of them at least in part symbolic . . . to which there can be no return" going to construct new imaginaries which "cut across and interrupt the settled contours of race, *ethnos* and nation"?[16]

As Kobena Mercer points out, by turning his attention to the meaning of "black" as a subject position in the face of racial violence in all its forms, Hall identified the latent potency of a "transformational act of resignification" that could be the generative source of political rupture and social change.[17] Hall would later elaborate these questions in his important Du Bois Lectures at Harvard University in 1994. But it was in the late 1980s that he saw in the practice of black British artists and filmmakers a "new diasporic consciousness" that not only articulated unresolved conflicts and struggles in postwar British society but also gave rise to new ways of seeing and thinking differently, which offered up the possibility of social and political transformation.[18]

A Radically Different Intellectual and Aesthetic Space

A few years after the ICA Black Film/British Cinema conference in 1988, Stuart Hall became chair of Autograph (the Association of Black Photographers), and not long after, he became chair of INIVA (the Institute of International Visual Arts), two organizations with which he remained closely associated until the early 2000s and the establishment of Rivington Place, a new purpose-built building in East London designed by the architect David Adjaye to house both Autograph and INIVA (figs. I.1–I.3). In the intervening years, Hall's close friendships and collaborations with black artists, filmmakers, and curators, including David A. Bailey, Sonia Boyce, Mark Sealy, and myself, continued to grow, and key among those collaborations was the one with the artist Isaac Julien, which endured over a number of decades.

The first chapter of this book begins with a text Hall wrote for the publication *Isaac Julien: Riot*, an intellectual biography of the artist that was published in conjunction with an exhibition of Julien's *Ten Thousand Waves* at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York in 2013–2014. In "Isaac Julien's Workshop," Hall recalls their thirty-year friendship, in which he was in conversation with Julien about his work and, occasionally, playing small walk-on roles in his films. Hall closes his essay by reflecting on the distinctive nature of the visual as a mode of thinking and the profound difference between the visual imaginary, as an aesthetic and intellectual thinking-and-making space, and Hall's own critical and analytical work. Just before his

Figure I.1. Rivington Place, London, 2001. Exterior view. Courtesy of Adjaye Associates.

Figure I.2. Rivington Place, London, 2001. Stuart Hall Library at the Institute of International Visual Arts (INIVA). Courtesy of Adjaye Associates.

Figure I.3. Rivington Place, London, 2001. Main gallery space. Courtesy of Adjaye Associates.

death, both Stuart and his wife, the historian Catherine Hall, had been engaged in a series of conversations with Isaac Julien and his partner, Mark Nash, about a new work that Julien was researching on capitalism. The discussions revolved around "an effort to identify the distinctive characteristics of contemporary global capitalism," on the one hand, and on the other, "the problem of how to visualize an abstraction."[19] These conversations involved Stuart Hall more intimately than hitherto in Julien's creative and intellectual processes and the transformation of ideas into visual form:

> Confronted by another mode of thought made me acutely aware how radically different are the visual languages in which Isaac thinks and the critical, discursive, and analytic work I do. It made me reconsider, especially, the limits of the way I think. I think in a linear, sequential way, one idea provoking another. . . . Isaac is often thinking about the same problems, but his thought has entered a space or mode where ideas like mine, developing along what we may call a horizontal axis, immediately trigger or translate into an associative or analogical set of images, visual sequences, and narrative devices along a vertical axis, which obey a logic

of their own and are in no sense simply illustrative. This is the visual imaginary at work.[20]

Thinking-with/in the Image

Writing about a recent body of work by the artist Mitra Tabrizian that puts forward a pointed critique of the corporate world and its systems of representation (chapter 3, "The Way We Live Now"), Hall is at pains to emphasize that Tabrizian's works are not illustrations of ideas or concepts but are rather "visual concept-spaces" in which "ideas are worked through and 'realised' in a series of scenic tableaux, expanded and developed in another register—a kind of 'thinking-with/in the image.'"[21]

Stuart Hall's involvement with artists and art institutions brought him into the sphere of the visual, where he became intimately engaged with the process of "thinking-with/in the image," and this detour to the imaginary enabled him to circle back to pressing political questions: democracy, global capitalism, migration, diaspora, and difference. Throughout this volume, texts on individual artists and specific bodies of work are interweaved with reflections in which Hall steps back to survey pressing social and political issues, demonstrating his distinctive ability to combine multiple interpretative lenses, from the aesthetic to the institutional. As I witnessed at the board of trustees meetings that he chaired when I was director of INIVA, he moved effortlessly between practical conversations about the mechanics of institution building (finances, staffing, funders) and theoretical discussions about the organization's artistic and intellectual program.

In part I, "Thinking-with/in the Image," Hall's essay "Democracy, Globalization, and Difference," on the fate and future of democracy, is placed between texts in which he discusses specific bodies of work by the artists Isaac Julien and Mitra Tabrizian. Both artists were deploying visual language to interrogate contemporary global capitalism in very different ways: Julien through his films *Playtime* (2014) and *Kapital* (2013) and Tabrizian through her large photographic tableaux, such as *Silent Majority* (2001–2002) and *The Perfect Crime* (2003–2004). Hall's essay originated in a series of conferences, public debates, and film and video projects convened by Okwui Enwezor as part of the public inquiry that framed Documenta 11. As artistic director of this edition of the ambitious and extensive international contemporary art exhibition held in Kassel in Germany every five years, Enwezor programmed a series of five "Platforms," beginning in Vienna in

March 2001 and concluding in Kassel in September 2002. Hall participated in two of these platforms, which brought together interdisciplinary groups of artists, writers, theorists, philosophers, historians, activists, and others to radically rethink and enlarge the space of contemporary art. In his talk on Platform 1 ("Democracy Unrealized"), Hall maintained that democracy was "haunted by the ghost of its idea" and at the beginning of the twenty-first century faced "a radically new double demand," embodied in the presence of the stranger who staked a claim simultaneously for equality and social justice *and* for the recognition of difference. Julien and Tabrizian, in this perspective, are the "artist-strangers" interrogating democracy and calling out the "democratic deficit" *through* the visual.

The Creolizing Moment

Hall also contributed two papers to Documenta 11's Platform 3, held in St. Lucia in January 2002, which took as its overall title "*Créolité* and Creolization." Here we have been able to include only one of these papers, "*Créolité* and the Process of Creolization," which is in part III, "Fanon, Creolization, and Diaspora." Choosing between these two talks was not an easy decision. In the paper we present here, Hall explores the concepts of creole and creolization, recounting the time shortly after he arrived in Britain, when he immersed himself in the contending interpretations of the formation of post-enslaved cultures that had developed in Caribbean culture. He returned to "the African survival versus creolization debate" and began to fashion the analytic tools to "understand how the culture of Caribbean migrants in the new diaspora would evolve."[22] Hall described this as the "'creolizing' moment in Cultural Studies." It is difficult to overestimate how critical this "creolizing" turn was in shaping Hall's theoretical outlook, opening up critical insights about identity, diaspora and migration: "The perception arose that identity is not just 'being' but also 'becoming'—always continuing to emerge in response to different historical circumstances; formed in that place where vicissitudes of subjectivity (where the 'subject' as a subject-of-culture first emerges) is positioned by, and repositions itself in, the narratives and discourses of a culture and a history. This idea has been formative for my understanding of how the already 'creolized' migrants emerged as 'new subjects' under the new conditions of diaspora-formation."[23]

Hall's essay acts as the anchor for the two other texts in this part. The first, "The After-Life of Frantz Fanon," looks at the renewed interest of black

artists in the Martiniquan psychiatrist and philosopher Frantz Fanon, in the context of the exhibition *Mirage: Enigmas of Race, Difference and Desire*, curated by David A. Bailey, which took place at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London in May 1995. The second, Hall's "Legacies of Anglo-Caribbean Culture: A Diasporic Perspective," first appeared in a major monograph on the nineteenth-century Jamaican artist Isaac Mendes Belisario in which Hall draws out the long *durée* by which diasporan artists today address slavery's afterlives. He goes on to map the work of several black British artists who undertook Belisario's diasporic journey in reverse, "returning to some of the thematic ground that his work occupied" and articulating the broken, decentered legacies of slavery, "ruptured by a turbulent history and the traumas of migration, and unsettled by the 'play' of nostalgia and desire that haunts every 'return,' real or symbolic."[24]

Diasporic Subjects

In the 1980s Stuart Hall began to write and speak about the visual arts with increasing regularity, addressing how these "new subjects" represented themselves through a variety of visual forms from photography and film, through to painting, installation, and sculpture. This anthology combines writings in a range of registers and voices, from the conversational to the academic. There are short-form writings on films—such as Isaac Julien's *Young Soul Rebels* (1991) and Julian Henriques's *Babymother* (1998)—which appeared in the British Film Institute's influential journal *Sight and Sound*. And alongside these I include his intervention "New Ethnicities," originally delivered at the seminal ICA conference, Black Film/British Cinema, and subsequently published in the ICA Documents series. All three of these texts appear in part II, "The New Politics of Representation," alongside his essay "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation," which was originally published in a volume on Caribbean cinema in which Hall characteristically strays away from talking about film per se to asking a question: who is the emergent new subject of "Caribbean cinema"? In seeking to answer this question, Hall concludes that cinema is not "a second-order mirror held up to reflect what already exists" but "a form of representation that is able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects and thereby enable us to discover who we are."

The anthology is organized thematically rather than chronologically to reflect the way in which Hall critically explores new territory in one essay and then returns, on later occasions, to similar terrain, honing and amplifying

his arguments. A decade separates the essays "The Vertigo of Displacement: Shifts within Black Documentary Practices" (cowritten with David A. Bailey and published in "Critical Decade," a special edition of *Ten.8* devoted to black British photography), and "Preface to *Different*." These appear in part V, "Photography, Representation, and Black Identity."

The earliest text in this volume, "Reconstruction Work: Images of Post-war Black Settlement," was first published in 1984 in the photography journal *Ten.8*. Here, Hall returns to the "creolising moment," addressing the question of how his generation of West Indian migrants were captured through the prism of photography at the moment of their arrival in Britain. The essay works as a keynote for part VI, "Reconstruction Work: Histories, Archives, and Diaspora." It is followed by "The 'West Indian' Front Room," in which Hall deconstructs, object by object, the iconography of the Caribbean front room, reassembled as an installation by Michael McMillan, which Hall identifies as "a creative cultural act . . . of that doubly-inscribed, hybrid or creolised kind . . . a cumulative migrant space, the result of a movement between two places, two cultures." Moving from the intimacy of the archive of black vernacular culture to the blind spots of race in the official culture of the archive and the museum, the essays "Constituting an Archive" and "Whose Heritage? Unsettling 'The Heritage,' Reimagining the Post-nation" engage with the absences and elisions of the dominant institutions of the art world that have persistently ignored the black British presence, resisting its imprint on the construction of Britishness. Here is Stuart Hall at the coal face of institution building, moving between the aesthetic and institutional, the theoretical and the practical. Making artworks, creating new archives, curating exhibitions, writing new art histories, reimagining the museum: all these activities are part of the "critical work" required to unsettle and disturb the grain of official culture and established museum historiography.

In the essays "Modernity and Its Others: Three 'Moments' in the Post-war History of the Black Diaspora" (part VI) and "Assembling the 1980s: The Deluge—and After" (part IV, "Assembling the 1980s"), Hall takes on the mantle of the art historian, but eschewing the lofty, progressive logic of traditional art history in favor of a narrative of black diaspora visual arts in postwar Britain in which "the artwork itself appears as a constitutive element in the fabric of a wider world of ideas, movements, events, while at the same time offering us a privileged vantage point on that world."[25] In assembling the 1980s through the frame of postwar black visual arts in Britain, Hall was simultaneously mapping the journey leading to "a profound 'conjunctural

shift'" in the late twentieth century, a significant rupture in the global order of things. This loosely assembled "movement" in black artistic practice was, Hall writes, "driven by the struggles of peoples, marginalized in relation to the world system, to resist exclusion, reverse the historical gaze, come into visibility, and open up a 'third space' . . . in cultural representation. It . . . belongs to that uneven, contradictory, and bitterly contested transformation of cultural life now in progress across the globe, which attempts to de-centre Western models and open a broader, more transcultural and 'translative' perspective on cultural practice and production."[26]

The Offshore, Postcolonial, Diasporic Imaginary

In recent years, museums in Europe and the United States have been seeking to redress the blind spots that relegated so many artists to the margins of the official histories of modernism. Challenging these omissions was key to the political project of INIVA, with which Hall was so energetically and intimately involved for more than a decade. Together with Autograph, it frequently provided the institutional context where he drew attention to the racist and colonial legacies that continued to frame the exclusionary outlook of contemporary art institutions (see part VII, "Museums, Modernity, and Difference"). "The history of modernism," wrote Hall, "has been written as a set of triumphal practices, located in the West. In reality the world is absolutely littered by modernities and by practising artists, who never regarded modernism as the secure possession of the West." Writing some years later in his memoir, *Familiar Stranger*, Hall made explicit the political imperative for contesting official narratives of modernism and modernity: "The idea of modernity has had to be recast, not as a pure disinterested fact but as an exercise in what Foucault, borrowing from Nietzsche, calls 'the will to power.'" By challenging the established accounts of modernism and modernity, it was possible to articulate alternative relations of power that did not relegate the global majority to the margins of history and knowledge.[27]

In the final part of the volume, "Dreaming in Afro," the selected essays return Hall to the subject of Africa, "not Africa recollected in nostalgia, or site of redemptive return," but Chris Ofili's reimagined Africa, "not remembered but dreamt in its translated 'Afro' idiom." Here, says Hall, "the imaginary at work is irredeemably 'off-shore', post-colonial, diasporic." In 2003 Hall was involved in two projects at the Venice Biennale: Chris Ofili's project with David Adjaye for the British Pavilion, for which Hall wrote the essay "Chris Ofili: Dreaming in

Afro," and my exhibition of African and African diaspora artists, *Fault Lines: Contemporary African Art and Shifting Landscapes*, to which he contributed the essay "Maps of Emergency: Fault Lines and Tectonic Plates," where, once again, he challenged simplistic conceptions of Africa as a uniform, undifferentiated and static geographical and historical space. He sought here to assess individual artworks in relation to how each "speaks out of a specific historical conjuncture, is engaged in a labour of remapping . . . [and is taking] a new sighting on Africa's present 'state(s) of emergency.'"

In the later chapters, Stuart Hall repeatedly locates visual art practice as one of the key sites of contention and resistance in late capitalism, where one kind of globalization, from above, is being contested "in an as yet unequal struggle" by another kind of globalization, from below. The "radically different" intellectual and aesthetic space of the imaginary became a crucial site for Hall's theoretical deconstruction of the logics of late capitalist globalization. In the work of at least two generations of black British artists and filmmakers with whom he was deeply engaged, Hall discerned the contours of an emergent historical and political conjuncture that reflected the struggle between two opposing forces, as yet unresolved, which would shape the "culture wars" of the new phase of globalization: "In the cultural field as in others, what counts is 'the balance of forces.' And those processes of resistance, though they do not add up to a single, solid 'block' but have a matrix and network character, do reflect themselves in the unexpected rise of new forms, in the proliferation of differences and the deployment of new artistic languages, as well as in the contestations which occur around lived popular culture. These are the 'culture wars' of the new globalisation and they are every bit as intense and distinctive as occurred in the first phase of globalisation."[28] Just as he had anticipated the political configuration that he christened "Thatcherism" through the prism of race, Stuart Hall anticipated the significance of the "culture wars" in late capitalism through the lens of black British artistic practice. The struggle remains as yet unresolved.

NOTES

1 See Wahneema Lubiano, ed., *The House That Race Built: Black Americans, U.S. Terrain* (New York: Pantheon, 1997), 289–300.
2 Stuart Hall, "Legacies of Anglo-Caribbean Culture," this volume.
3 Stuart Hall, "Big Sir and the Oranges and Lemons," *Universities and Left Review* 4 (Summer 1958): 79.

4 Stuart Hall, "Introducing NLR," *New Left Review* 1 (January–February 1960): 1–3.

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15 Bailey and Hall, "Vertigo of Displacement."

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Subjects in History:
Making Diasporic Identities

I am the only participant from another part of the "black diaspora," and, as a consequence, what we in England know as the "burden of representation" lies particularly heavy on my shoulders. As a consequence of that burden, it seems to me incumbent in some ways to try to add to an ongoing discussion; my function, it seems to me, is partly to bring to bear on the discussion a perspective that adds a transnational, global, "diasporic dimension" to what is inevitably U.S. terrain. I'm going to do so, in part, by referring to a number of points that have already arisen in the debate simply to bring to bear on them some experiences, some similar and parallel lines of approach and political work elsewhere in the "black Atlantic."

I don't want to get into details, into particular aspects of ideological analysis, or cultural production, although I'm going to draw some examples from cultural production. Instead, I want to outline something more general; I want to express some views about the place of cultural politics in the present racial conjuncture, about how it is shifting and changing, and about the problems thrown up in our attempts to theorize and define adequate strategies for dealing with the place of cultural politics. That is what is required by the moment the conference itself addressed, and to do so I want to return to that conference's "electric opening," which I'll never forget, not to rerun the West-Steinberg conversation,[1] but partly to explain the reason for my own brief intervention in that debate in order to spell out the grounds on which I made it. To those of you who weren't there, I simply said, "Please

remember that questions of culture are not superstructural to the problems of economic and political change; they are constitutive of them!"

What does it mean to take seriously, in our present conjuncture, the thought that cultural politics and questions of culture, of discourse, and of metaphor are absolutely deadly political questions? That is my purpose. I want to persuade you that that is so. And that we ought to sort of preach on this occasion, no, not only to give up the bad habits of smoking and drinking and whoring and gambling, but to give up certain forms of political essentialism and the way in which it makes you sleep well at night.

There are two basic reasons at this point why I wanted to suggest to you why questions of culture and representation, of cultural productions, and of aesthetics, politics, and power are of absolute centrality. There are many other reasons, but I can't deal with them now. I want to deal with two particular reasons because they are central to how we need to conceptualize the question of race itself. You see, if indeed, as we mouth the mantra, race is indeed a sociohistorical concept, not a transhistorical discourse grounded in biology, then it must function not through the truth of the "biological referent" but as a discursive logic. That is to say, as a logic in which, of course, the biological trace still functions even when it's silent, but now, not as the truth, but as the guarantor of the truth. That is a question of discursive power. Not a question of what is true but what is *made* to be true. Such is the way in which racial discourses operate. To use a familiar Foucault phrase, it is a "regime of truth." I want to insist that its logic is discursive in this sense, that racial discourses produce, mark and fix the infinite differences and diversities of human beings through a rigid binary coding. That logic establishes a chain of correspondences both between the physical and the cultural, between intellectual and cognitive characteristics; it gives legibility to a social system in which it operates; it allows us to decipher different signifiers from the racial fixing of the signifier "race"; and through that reading it organizes, regulates, and gives meaning to social practices through the distribution of symbolic and material resources between different groups and the establishment of racial hierarchy.

To say that is to say that race is a discourse, that it operates through the movement of the signifiers, and yet, at the same time, to say that the whole historical organization of human social practices through the binary coding of race is dependent on the meanings that it is able to give to the relationships of power and representation between human societies.

The second reason culture is absolutely central to our concerns, in my view, is that it constitutes the terrain for producing identity, for producing

the constitution of social subjects. It is one of the social conditions of existence for setting subjects in place in historical relations, setting them in place, in position. They are unable to speak, or to act in one way or another, until they have been positioned by the work that culture does, and in that way, as subjects they function by taking up the discourses of the present and the past.

It is that taking up of positions that I call "identities." You see the consequence of turning the paradigm around that way: the political question (for there is always a political question, at any rate, in the way I pose the issue) is not "How do we effectively mobilize those identities which are already formed?" so that we could put them on the train and get them onto the stage at the right moment, in the right spot—an act the Left has historically been trying to do for about four hundred years—but something really quite different and much deeper.

How can we organize these huge, randomly varied, and diverse things we call human subjects into positions where they can recognize one another for long enough to act together, and thus to take up a position that one of these days they might live out and act through as an identity? Identity is at the end, not the beginning, of the paradigm. Identity is what is at stake in political organization. It isn't that the subjects are there and we just can't get to them. It is that they don't know yet that they are subjects of a possible discourse. And that always in every political struggle, since every political struggle is always open, it is possible either to win their identification or to lose it.

Indeed, for those of you who have been in politics for as long as I have, usually it is possible both to win and to lose it, and then to win it again and to lose it again, in an infinitely recurring struggle. That is the open-ended, contingent nature of political struggle, and just as a warning to intellectuals, there isn't any final theoretical solution, any grand deconstructive scheme which we can pull out of the air, which we can ensure will tell us that the subjects are going to stay like that, that the subjects are in place and the moment is going to come. And then the intellectuals can go home and get on with their business. It isn't like that. Remember: identifications, not identities. Once you've got identification you can decide which identities are working *this* week.

I speak of the process of identification, of feeling yourself through the contingent, antagonistic, and conflicting sentiments of which human beings are made up. Identification means that you are called in a certain way, interpolated in a certain way: "you, this time, in this space, for this purpose, by this barricade with these folks." That's what is at stake in political struggle. And you can't ahead of time either know that or know how to recognize that,

or know how to imagine the collectivity that all those folks together might make. For how else would you know them? They weren't there before, or they weren't gathered together in the proper place. You can only come as you were, come together because somehow you can represent yourself and begin to share an imagined community of some kind with others which without representation and culture you could not express to anybody else.

The idea that somehow, out of some space, a politics of antiracism will arise without our giving thought as to how the subjects of it are to be formed is, to my mind, unintelligible. So then the questions that arise are, how and what kind? What are the natures of the cultural, social, and political identities that can and cannot be formed in these processes so as to conduct a political struggle, a cultural and social struggle that has the possibility of affecting something in the world? I want to insist that that is an open question, because I think at some level it remains more difficult than we think to take on the implications of what I've just been trying to say. Because when that rigid binary, racial logic is being used against us, we certainly know what's wrong with it. But when it seems to be working for us, we find that it's extremely difficult to give it up. We just can't let go of it in good moments, it makes us feel together; we can't imagine what a politics would be like if it wasn't there. How would you mobilize, what would you say to people, on what basis would you appeal to them, under what banner would you get them together? The whole thing begins to disintegrate, polarize, pluralize, get away from us, and we find ourselves confused by it. So, unfortunately, I think, people who know in their hearts that if you say race is not biological, that it is historical, cultural, and political, know you must follow the logic of that provision in terms of the alternative strategies you try to develop. Then, just at one minute to midnight, you're not beyond reaching for the final guarantee, and the whole biological fix actually slips back into place. Therefore, I want to explore what I think are the difficulties of what I'm going to call the end of the essentialized black subject, the end of an essentialist conception of the black experience.

One of the problems that confront a politics of this kind is that it affects some of our most central cultural and political concepts and images. Take the notion of tradition, for example. It is almost impossible to think of a cultural community as shared cultural meanings which exist over any period of time, which persist and have persisted over any period of time, which have managed to survive against all the odds, without thinking of the element of tradition that has enabled that community to hold together. Nevertheless, I

think one of the implications of what I've just been saying is, indeed, that the question of tradition itself has to be conceptually rephrased.

Let me (walking dangerous waters, I know) talk about civil rights. Could one imagine the civil rights struggle of the sixties without the long traditions of black struggle that historically go back at least as far as the beginning of slavery? And yet, is there anybody here who wouldn't want to describe the civil rights movement as a movement that produced new black subjects? But new black subjects—now, what is that "new" then in the light of the tradition? Would it have happened without that tradition? Absolutely not. Where would traditions of struggle, where would the accumulated knowledge, where would the expectivity of human values that kept people going in dark days, where would that have come from if there hadn't been languages and historical traditions of one kind or another that sustained them across time? That sustained human beings in their lives of struggle across time—and yet the particular way that black people occupied that identity, lived that identity, and struggled around it, produced something which had never been seen before.

This is not the game you know, of trading "your victimage is bigger than mine," "my heroism is bigger than yours"—you don't have to say it's greater than what has happened before. That's not my argument; but my argument is that it was, and is, significantly different. And what was different about it was a particular reworking of that tradition under the force of the present conjuncture, not of a tradition which is simply a transmission belt that takes you from the past teleologically marching through to the future. A reworking that precisely delivers the much more complex idea that is a phrase you know well, "the changing same." That reworking transmits the capacity to be both the same and different, both located in a tradition and yet not constrained by it. Able to think freely on the basis of the particular ground. That reworking is almost musical and it has to be. What else is any successful blues, any successful jazz standard, or any gospel song but the given ground and the performance that translates it? But you couldn't listen to it if all there was was just the same damn thing once over again. It has to be that process of reworking the elements of a tradition, of taking forward what has been left, or engaging what is new, and of trying to put together a new kind of configuration. If you don't believe me because you think civil rights belongs to you, let me tell you that it didn't simply belong to you and it didn't simply produce some new black subjects here, it produced a lot of new black subjects elsewhere.

In the place where I came from in Jamaica, the conjuncture of the civil rights movement and the black consciousness movement of decolonization,

the naming—the possibility at last to name the unspeakable fact of slavery and the imaginative, metaphorical connection with Africa—made Jamaica, where I was born, a black country for the first time in the 1960s. I don't mean it was the first time any black people were there. I mean black as a political category. I mean black as a culture. I mean black as a sociohistorical fact. It was the first time that I ever called myself that. I had called myself thousands of things before, but until that historical moment, it had been a word that I would never have applied to my own identity. So, if your own identities don't change, believe me, mine certainly have. They keep going on and on, and not only that, I most recognize them when other people say something different. In the sixties, after having been in England for ten years over that period when Afro-Caribbeans came to Britain for the first time, I went home and my mother said to me, "I hope they don't think you're one of those immigrants over there." I had never called myself an immigrant in all my life, and suddenly I said, "That's what I am." After all, I've gone to the people's place, I'm going to stay whether they like it or not, I intend to get a job if they're going to give me one. What am I but an immigrant? My life, far from the unfolding of this great identity I always knew about, this fabric endlessly unfolding but not changing toward some particular end, changes drastically, and when I get to the end, I can't say "There you are, you've always been like that, God help me, always been like that." No, the transformations have made me something different. Because historically, to say suddenly that you know we are black people, and to name the names, meant that the cultural terrain on which those names worked and struggled was thereby transformed. Cultural change is constitutive of political change and moral awareness of human consciousness.

And I want to say a word about political history as a way of passing on to another element and its complexity. In the 1970s, the signifier "black" was adopted as a political category of struggle, both by Afro-Caribbean migrants and by migrants from the Asian continent. People who manifestly were not, in any of the significant ways in which the term "race" had ever been used, the same race called themselves by the racial signifier. They said, "Since the British can't tell the difference between us, we must be the same." We might as well call one another by the same name. That's what identity is; it always has a constitutive outside. Those people didn't know about a "constitutive outside," but they knew one when they got it. Since they were manifestly not white, they were black. They called themselves black. They organized under that *political* roof.

It was a very important moment politically in Britain. It isn't the moment that we're in now. That significance has gone. It is partly dissolved into a variety of new, more ethnically specific signifiers. People now call themselves not only Asians, but Indians, Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, and indeed, South Indians. Things have moved into a new kind of ethnicized politics of difference. And that has presented certain profound difficulties of political organization when the signifier "black" has disappeared.

Still, I want to speak about this moment that I've just mentioned. What is this moment of the pluralization of cultural difference? Sometimes it is a racialized kind, sometimes an ethnicized kind—which is in my view increasingly characteristic of social antagonisms on a world scale. These antagonisms are a product of huge, planned, and unplanned world migrations—the greatest and most constitutive cultural fact of the late modern world, the planned and unplanned, forced and unforced movements of peoples, taking up hundreds of years later after that first forced migration of slavery with which modernity began. Here we are in late modernity, and what is happening is exactly the same kind of proliferation of movement as peoples. They are torn apart by poverty, by drought, by civil war, by the international arms trade, and they are moving, moving, moving from their settled homes to somewhere else.

Let me put that in cultural terms. They're moving like we have done before into the narratives, through which they will have to tell their history of migration, loss, displacement, redefining themselves, of home, of another home, of the question of where is home, of all of the images and metaphors of a perpetually unsettled people. That is the modern fact that is transforming this society; it is transforming Europe, Western European society. It is a world-historical fact of astonishing proportions and partly because it goes by different names—now refugees, now economic migrants, etc. And partly because it happens in this completely unplanned late-modern way, where people just calculate for themselves that the only thing to do is to buy a one-way plane ticket and get on a plane for paradise or, you know, the South Bronx, or wherever paradise is these days, in that way trying to resolve what is the global maldistribution of material and symbolic goods.

One of the consequences of that fact, within different national societies, has been to pluralize and complicate the terrain of social struggle. For what you find in each society is the integration of different forms of racialized and ethnicized difference, marked in different ways with very different and discrete histories. Nevertheless, it is part of the long history of the dialectics of

"othering": these are all others of one kind or another, those that weren't othered through slavery were othered through colonialism or othered through imperialism. And some were othered through all three. Each of these people cling to the particular homes and identities that were formed through those histories. But what is most dramatic about them is that they are now convened in the very center of modernity, in the very "hotbed" of the modern, and what we find then as a consequence is that what the modern itself now means is precisely this conflict, this struggle, this complicated and differentiated line of struggle, between those who have had to move, and go on moving to survive, who have constantly been "the racialized other" of some system of supremacy, and on the other hand, the cultural nationalist racism that is the backlash against this multicultural drift, which is evolving in every society of the advanced, modern, Western industrial world.

I won't at this stage try to tell you what it means to us to see active fascism in the streets of London, to see the fascist right in alliance with a respectable center, to hear what we've heard before said about blacks, now said about North Africans, now said between peoples who call themselves European, who are hastily cobbling together in these societies that are hybridized and mongrelized to their roots. I couldn't find a "pure folk" anywhere. One would have to go into the museum to dig up the pure Bosnian-Serbian folk. Haul him out, mount him, etc.

Nevertheless, cobbling is a kind of defense against the modern world, a defense against living with difference, this retreat into the bunker of cultural and racist nationalism. I call it by that name, because although in its many respectable forms it doesn't recognize itself as such, this racism exists as a defense of "Englishness," of "Britishness," and of "Americanness." How could anybody object to Americans, or some Americans, defending a certain kind of "Americanness"? Who could argue against the possible claim that American children might not speak the "American language" first in American schools, and what is racist about that, what could possibly be racist about that?

I told a story recently in the Du Bois Lectures at Harvard, of a very close friend of Mrs Thatcher's, Lord Tebbit, who has devised a simple kind of handy test for deciding who culturally belongs to whom and who does not (call it "the Tebbit test"). It is a very simple one. It's a question of whether or not the migrant families cheer the Pakistanis and the West Indians when they come touring for cricket. You have only to go to the cricket match and pavilion, and look around when the West Indians get to six hundred or whatever it is, and the "black stands," the ones closest to the Oval, start to jump up and down,

you know you can identify them. Because clearly their hearts cannot be in the right place. On the other hand, it is a very serious business indeed, this question of reconstructing a "little Englandism," reconstructing a little Americanism, through the struggles that are sometimes called "the culture wars."

Don't fool yourself that this is some superstructural, marginal question. At the center of this is the question of who can belong, who has access to the transmission belt through which Britishness, Englishness, is carried and can be inculcated. And who doesn't belong. And whether or not they have yet arrived at the moment when the lines are going to be drawn in blood and fire. Symbolic lines are being drawn, and what we know about culture is that once the symbolic difference exists, that is the line around which power coheres. Power uses difference as a way of marking off who does and who does not belong.

That is the shape of a new kind of cultural difference that impacts and sits atop another older kind: the politics of cultural difference. Today people sometimes say, "Of course, politics is a very confusing game, because there aren't those old stabilized identities around which we used to mobilize, and there aren't exactly those old kinds of struggles that we used to know how to fight." It is not, I warn you, because things are going through a little postmodern shake, and then they're going to settle down; then we're going to go back to the stabilized, well-organized, clearly demarcated frontiers of the past. We are in a new political conjuncture not without racism, not a conjuncture without difference; it is not a conjuncture without poverty and deprivation and marginalization on a world scale. But it is one in which the marking of difference, the careful and overlatticed marking of finely drawn distinction, can't be easily convened under a single political roof and fought in a simple battle. It is a much more differentiated, sophisticated, positional kind of struggle that has to be developed, to be conducted, if we are serious about refusing its human cost.

Sometimes the term "diaspora" is used as a way of conjuring up a kind of imagined community that would cut across the configurations of cultural nationalism. And I'm not only very much in favor of that, having contributed in some way to giving the term "liftoff." But let me warn you and warn myself that after all diaspora, too, has been the site of some of the most closed narratives of identity known to human beings. It is a word that has lodged there for a people who are not going to change, who sat on top of a sacred text and erected the barriers, and who then wanted to make the return exactly to the place where they came from. And who have gone back and sat on the head of

all the other people who were there, too. If you open yourself to the politics of cultural difference, there is no safety in terminology. Words can always be transcoded against you, identity can turn against you, race can turn against you, difference can turn against you, diaspora can turn against you because that is the nature of the discursive.

I am trying to persuade you that the word is the medium in which power works. Don't clutch onto the word, but do clutch onto certain ideas about it. The diaspora is a place where traditions operate but are not closed, where the black experience is historically and culturally distinctive but is not the same as it was before. We are to move from one end of the diaspora to another and be ready to move from differently translated worlds, each with its own inflection, places where the law is almost certainly the law of syncretism, of taking in influences, of translating what has been given, of disarticulating and rearticulating, of creolization. And here I give my last injunction: to give up smoking and give up the idea, the commitment to the politically pure. The future belongs to the impure. The future belongs to those who are ready to take in a bit of the other, as well as being what they themselves are. After all, it is because their history and ours is so deeply and profoundly and inextricably intertwined that racism exists. For otherwise, how could they keep us apart?

NOTES

This essay first appeared as "Subjects in History: Making Diasporic Identities," in *The House That Race Built*, ed. Wahneema Lubiano (New York: Vintage, 1998), 289–300.

1   During the discussion following on Steinberg's critique of Cornel West's ideas about the "underclass," and after a few additional criticisms leveled from the floor, I stood up to intervene in order to address what I saw as an unhelpful reduction of culture to the conditions of the economic.