

Stuart Hall (1932 -2014): A Personal Tribute

By Peter Brooker

The obituaries posted across the press and radio with the news of Stuart Hall's death on 10 February this year suggested that he has been known chiefly as a political theorist, above all for his analysis of Thatcherism as a form of 'authoritarian populism'. This appeared, in what now seems another era, in *Marxism Today* and in *The Politics of Thatcherism* (1983). The left, he argued, had no answer to the way Thatcherism tuned into and exploited popular attitudes so as to govern under a new right-wing consensus. He was to extend this analysis to Tony Blair's New Labour, which he saw as colluding with the Thatcherite programme after John Major. With others, including Martin Jacques, he framed the alternative of 'New Times' and has since co-authored a response to neo-liberalism, known as 'The Kilburn Manifesto', with the editorial group associated with the journal *Soundings*. This argues that the financial crisis of 2008-9 has reinforced the power of the financial and class elites and calls for a coalition of oppositional groups, new and traditional, to rethink strategies for defending the principles of an egalitarian, participatory democracy.

Stuart Hall was indeed, then, a significant political thinker, public intellectual, and activist. He was also a teacher, at the Open University and before that at the University of Birmingham where he joined Richard Hoggart as a Research Fellow at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies which Hoggart had founded in 1964. He had previously abandoned his study at Oxford of Henry James and had, with others, founded *Universities and Left Review* which was to become *New Left Review*.

I met Stuart when I joined the first group of research students at the Centre in 1968, then housed in a hut which was set in a telling position below the English Department housed in the main Arts Building. Cultural Studies had not at that time gained sufficient respectability for the Centre to be placed in the Arts Building or permitted to award PhD degrees. My preparation, such as it was, had been Roland Barthes' *Writing Degree Zero*, Stuart Hughes's *Consciousness and Society* and an enthusiasm for Black Mountain College and the poetry of Ed Dorn. Stuart and Richard Hoggart were my supervisors on what soon seemed a bizarre MA thesis of 50,000 words on 'Stylistics and Cultural Studies' which included a case study of Basil Bunting. Along the way, I discovered Chomsky's transformational grammar and Stuart said, yes, go ahead with that. Around me were students, research fellows, and associates working on rock music, advertising, the press, everyday life, football and gay film. I joined a subgroup studying the Western and attended research seminars on readings in the definition of culture, the Frankfurt School and on Structuralism and Semiotics. The very first joint seminar, though, as I remember it, was on Blake's 'Tyger', chaired by Richard Hoggart with Stuart in attendance. Later the same day they led a discussion of the representation of women in advertising. Hoggart was then Director and his *The Uses of Literacy* and a pamphlet on 'The Literary Imagination and the Study of Society' (1967) gave impetus to the foundation of the Centre. He had not wanted to omit literature and nor did I. When he left after a year for UNESCO and Stuart became Acting Director, the Centre's work shifted to the study of the mass media and continental theory, along with the continuing question of the methodology of Cultural Studies. I wrote my first ever 'paper', a structuralist analysis of the 'B' Western and was the first student at the Centre to complete a postgraduate degree. Like other Centre students I had also started teaching classes in popular culture in FE colleges. This wasn't 'Cultural Studies', which didn't exist outside the Centre, but 'Liberal' or 'Complementary Studies'; not unlike the teaching Stuart had been doing at Chelsea College before his appointment to Birmingham.

My two years at the Centre had comprised two days of seminars, speakers and group project work a week, the last being at the time a quite distinctive innovation. The scheme of work was orchestrated by Stuart who was also careful to bring students together intellectually and socially. My time there ended with a conference where E.P. Thompson, Leslie Fiedler and Peter Wollen were speakers. The whole experience was challenging, formative and unforgettable. I left Birmingham for London in 1971 and used Stuart and Paddy Whannel's *The Popular Arts* and Stuart's *Teaching Film* in my own teaching. The Centre publications also had begun to appear as at first stencilled A4 pamphlets, then the journal of Working Papers, then a book series and individual studies. The Cultural Studies agenda accordingly moved in the 1970s and 1980s, and then beyond, through theories of ideology, language, feminism, post-Marxism, postmodernism, and race and ethnicity, changing its course and character, sometimes radically, under the impact of new thinking. There always remained, too, the question of what purchase the study of culture could have on real life events. But, if anything, Cultural Studies grew stronger, and it was in the period under Thatcher that Stuart and the Centre gained a more public, indeed an international reputation.

I met him and we chatted half a dozen times after I left Birmingham. I wish it had been more. He had a personal grace and great charm and was always generous and interested and on the button. On most of these occasions he was an invited speaker at an academic or public event. Richard Hoggart's access to cultural meaning had been by way of what he called 'reading for tone'. In Stuart's case one had only to listen. An early characteristic move had been to 'map the field' and this was what he did: beginning gently, laying out the co-ordinates, critiquing and synthesising positions in a delivery laced with humour and intent which then rose to a rich and decisive analysis that showed a way forward. It was exhilarating and magnetic. This is what I and many, many more will remember. Recently I saw the documentary film of Stuart's life and ideas by John Akomfrah titled *The Stuart Hall Project*. I wrote a note to Stuart to say how moved I was by the film, personally, intellectually and politically. I'm pleased I did. Because this is what I would always have said. He was and remains, for me and countless others, an inspiration. We have yet to catch up with him.

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Stuart Hall

3 February 1932 – 10 February 2014

By Steve Woodhams

The sad loss for us all has inspired tributes around the world. A longer piece for the Raymond Williams Society and Foundation will appear shortly, and this briefer passage is offered as remembrance and celebration. Because so much of what is being written rightly celebrates the distinguished public figure, the focus here is on earlier times, reminding some and informing others of Stuart Hall's long road, some of the values that underpinned his life and the special connection he has for those associated with the name Raymond Williams.

Stuart Hall, writer, political critic, speaker, academic, transcended boundaries that could keep separate thought and action. Coming from outside an old country presuming to be at ease with itself, Stuart Hall had a vantage point from where he could see the consequences of such a neat tidy binary. Stuart was born in 1932, and attended Jamaica College, gaining a typically classical English education. Yet he recalls that teachers offered a wider perspective, James Joyce, Freud, Marx, Lenin. If, abroad, Caribbean history was struggling to be heard, there were names (CLR James, Eric

Williams), and histories (*The Black Jacobins*, 1938, and *Slavery and Capitalism*, 1944) that would be torch bearers. CLR James's discovery of the first, and only ever, successful slave revolution, and a hero in Toussaint L'Ouverture, has been inspirational for generations since. Years later, Stuart was to engage the grand old man in a film by Mike Dibb, producer of *Beyond a Boundary*. Academic malice and fashion has tried to hide the fact that for Stuart Hall, as so many others, CLR James was both intellectual and political father. It perhaps explains why, on the death of Raymond Williams, Stuart could with equal truth write of 'those of us ... formed intellectually and politically in his shadow' and how 'he was the most formative intellectual influence on my life'.

'Jamaica has had a Rhodes Scholar every year since 1904.' So reads the proud inscription at the top of a Rhodes Trust Register of names. For 1951, the entry reads HALL, Stuart Henry McPhail (Merton). The presence of the name McPhail bears something of the history of the Caribbean. Stuart recalls how later Rhodes Scholars tended to be older: men sent across to learn the tools for successful administration. In Stuart Hall's case, this passage, and seat at the heart of the old country, was unfortunately to result in a room full of people, radiating out from Wales to India, with, Stuart remarked, not an English person present. If other Caribbeans at Oxford, like his exact contemporary, VS Naipaul, found their own route, for Stuart Hall socialist club life called, with the anti-colonial movement the inspiration. The mid fifties were the years of the Bandung Conference and the Third World Movement led by India, Yugoslavia and then Egypt. 1956 may have been a re-awakening in the British Isles, but elsewhere the sway of anti-colonial action had long caught imaginations. Yet 1956 and the Suez War did come, and the impact could not have been greater. The whole conniving plan, drawn up in France, accepted by Britain, put into action by Israel, and sunk by the USA, has been subject to debate ever since. That it served as cover for the Soviet crushing of a socialist revolution in Hungary burned the date into the very soul of a generation. Marching to Aldermaston was a response, and Stuart amusingly recalls the innocent way they set off, not quite sure what they intended to do when they got there, or how to prepare for the weather. By the following year CND was in place, Peggy Duff was organising, and marching became a bit more disciplined. The Trafalgar Square rallies were among the first great public demonstrations since the war. They caught the imagination, the black and white footage of the marchers, the Ban-the-Bomb placards, the skiffle bands at one point and the jazz at another, and of course that circle with the upside down cross – the Aldermaston marches were at Easter – have become synonymous with the period.

This was the atmosphere which, with a push from Raphael Samuel, catapulted Stuart into 7 Carlisle Street. Raphael Samuel was something of a genius for big schemes, with a constructive operational naivety and, as Eric Hobsbawm and Clancy Segal recall, a knack of persuading people against their better judgement. For Stuart that persuasion had become real when, having booked Isaac Deutscher and naively set out some chairs for a meeting, they found a queue stretching away round the corner of the building where he was to speak, and the New Left born. Stuart became Editor of the pedantically named *Universities and Left Review*, which meant being at the centre of a Board precariously balanced between communists - mostly ex - independent socialists, and some historians who were fundamentally changing what history was thought to be. Fortunately Stuart had long mastered the language and sounded the unifying lingo – jazz. Miles Davis was the means to saving his soul - and in Soho-Fitzrovia 1958, that meant you belonged.

Peggy Duff has commented that CND used up the New Left and wore it out. That may be true but not before 7 Carlisle Street was stage to a galaxy of speakers, that would be impossible to connect in one place at any time since. It was in the midst of this confusing and exhilarating atmosphere that Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams came together, recognising a common experience that remained

with them through their lives. Each knew what it was to come in the shadow of those old colleges, to enter from outside and be present, yet never be accepted, and more importantly, to never accept. Years later in another moment of celebration, 1968, they were pushed together by popular enthusiasm, to form the May Day Manifesto group, out of which came the remarkable Penguin special, now available again as an e-book (http://www.lwbooks.co.uk/ebooks/mayday_manifesto.html). Stuart recalls how, for the others, writing this socialist tract in Raymond's rooms at Cambridge seemed incongruous. For Raymond it was just a good place to do serious thinking.

It was the steadying hand of Raymond Williams that went to save the earlier venture when, in 1962, what had become *New Left Review* was taken over by new management and the old Editorial Board eased out the door. Stuart Hall's move to Birmingham, and all that followed, will be the subject of most of the writing that is appearing. Other, more interesting pieces will focus on Stuart Hall the young Jamaican, and it is there that perhaps the real foundations of the man are to be found. Here the focus has been deliberately otherwise, on a little known episode between the Caribbean and the fame of institutionalised cultural studies. It was however a few years when more of Stuart Hall's values and beliefs were formed than is now realised. The work at 7 Carlisle Street, is worth exploration; the Notting Hill 'riots' and the Rachman struggles went through that place. It was the time of *City of Spades*, *Absolute Beginners* and a new rhythm somewhere just off Ladbroke Grove. The Partisan was a living university, where conversation, speakers and debate were means to learning. It was incubator and cauldron, albeit that temperature and pressure were not too well regulated. To this Stuart Hall brought awareness born of place and an internationalism forged of experience. So much is being spoken and written of the later renowned cultural theorist; yet Stuart Hall from CLR James to Trafalgar's Square, Anti-Apartheid, Carlisle Street and so on to Notting Hill deserves acknowledgement

Further references

- An amusing personal recollection of jazz, Stuart Hall and the years recalled here, is offered by his friend Clancy Sigal in *London Review of Books* (<http://www.lrb.co.uk/blog/2014/02/14/clancy-sigal/stuart-hall>)
- Keywords: Exhibition at Tate Liverpool, 27 March – 17 May 2013. Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall (http://www.iniva.org/exhibitions_projects/2013/keywords_investigations/ryamond_williams_and_stuart_hall)
- Keywords: Art, Culture and Society in 1980s Britain (http://www.iniva.org/exhibitions_projects/2013/keywords)
- For many, perhaps the best way to appreciate Stuart Hall will be through films of Mike Dibb:
Personally Speaking, A long conversation with Stuart Hall, Dibb Directions, 2009
CLR James in conversation with Stuart Hall (Channel 4, 52') 1983-85
Beyond a Boundary (Omnibus, 60') with CLR James, 1975-76
The Miles Davis Story (Channel 4/DD, 124') SONY DVD. 2000-1
The Country and the City (Where We Live Now, 60', with Raymond Williams, 1979

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Stuart Hall - Obituary: Influential cultural theorist, campaigner and founding editor of the New Left Review. By David Morley and Bill Schwarz. *The Guardian*, Monday 10 February 2014
(<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/feb/10/stuart-hall>)

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Stuart Hall - Obituary: Stuart Hall was a cultural theorist who coined the term 'Thatcherism' and profoundly influenced New Labour. *The Telegraph*, Monday 24 February 2014
(<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/10629087/Stuart-Hall-obituary.html>)