**STUART HALL: ‘ART’ AND THE POLITICS OF BLACK CULTURAL PRODUCTION**

**ABSTRACT**

This article makes three specific and inter-related arguments, first that the power of Hall’s pedagogy can be understood as having established a ‘third space’ between political activism and academic research, a space which in the 1970s and early ‘80s permitted the development of British cultural studies as an anti-elitist, theoretically informed approach to the field of culture, in particular popular culture. As this space also opened itself up, from the late 1980s, to emerging young black and Asian British artists, and as it extended itself so as to engage with the work of key post-colonial theorists, so did a body of films and art works appear which expanded this space maintaining the integrity of a practice which refuted the distinctions between high and low culture, this being marked both in aesthetic terms and in the issue of address and audiences. The paper also argues that the advent of neoliberal political culture in the UK cuts short the conditions of emergence which had supported this group of artists, with all that this augurs for future generations of black and Asian artists today.

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“Identity politics has since, perhaps deservedly, acquired a bad name. However I want to argue here that in this moment the emergence of the identity question constituted a compelling and productive horizon for artists”

Stuart Hall, “Black Diaspora Artists in Britain: Three ‘Moments’ in Post-War History” (Hall 2006)

“Hybridity is the third space which enables other positions to emerge”

Homi K. Bhabha, “The Third Space: An Interview with Homi Bhabha” (Bhabha 1990)

“The challenge to assumptions of national identity posed by *Signs of Empire* (1983) signalled a turn among younger artists towards more pluralised subjectivities, configured through a re-articulation of prevailing political realities with cultural counter-memories and neglected diasporic histories that extended beyond national boundaries”

Jean Fisher, “The Other Story and the Past Imperfect” (Fisher 2009)

**Introduction: The Third Space of Pedagogy**

In this article I attend to three elements in the work of Stuart Hall. I take a concept from Homi Bhabha (bearing in mind that he and Hall were conversing and sharing ideas for many years) and, retrieving its meaning as bringing together both hybridity and capacity, I re-purpose this “third space” as a way of understanding the importance and lasting impact of Stuart Hall’s work as British cultural studies and post-colonial pedagogy. This is a space which Hall establishes in order to conjoin an activist engagement on various projects throughout his life, with his work as an academic in the UK university system. Indeed in keeping with his implicit and sometimes explicit critique of the Oxford and Cambridge system to which he was first exposed on arriving in the UK (and then again on many occasions subsequently) the space of pedagogy was also a subaltern space, a radical position to happily occupy in an academic context where the cloisters and the primacy of research were, and remain today, the standard markers of status and success. How marvellous then that Stuart was able to engineer this academic subalternality to such effect. It was a high risk strategy, but one which saw Stuart constantly champion a teaching mode in lesser institutions, such as the new universities[[1]](#footnote-1). The second topic I address here is Stuart’s close working relationships with a group of young black and Asian artists dating back to the mid-late 1980s and continuing thereon, indeed it becoming the defining feature of the later stages of his career, and thirdly I consider the way in which aspects of the rise of neo-liberalism across the landscape of British society (what Stuart originally called the “great moving right show”) have impacted deleteriously on the social conditions of both emergence and reproduction of this black and Asian arts flowering. I also reflect on the legacy of what we might call anti-racism undone as it has impacted and resonated across both academia and arts institutions.

In relation to the group of black and Asian British artists I will be discussing, I use the word “British” here reservedly, not to confirm some sort of movement, and not for sure to echo the nationalist-populist rhetoric of “Cool Britannia” that came into being around the self-promotional and brashly commercial strategies of the “Young British Artists” of the 1990s, including the now world-famous Damien Hirst. Deploying irony and ostensible humour, this YBA group was a right-wing counter to the serious and theoretically-informed art work (left, feminist and anti-racist) which preceded it[[2]](#footnote-2). In what follows I will show how the art practices of the British black and Asian group, both in terms of a diasporic emplacement in the UK, inside and outside the established arts world, and as regards an abiding concern with the politics of race and ethnicity, echoed Stuart Hall’s own style of “open pedagogy.” Stuart’s earlier influence in shaping the field of cultural studies was extended into the field of post-colonial art practice by means of a consistently anti-elite rhetoric, one which confounded the division between high and low culture, and refuted the centrality of the lifted-out and gilded cosmopolitan capital cities. Stuart often had Birmingham on his mind. To go further it could be argued that Stuart propagated an idea of the ‘popular arts’ as a distinguishing feature of the black British cultural assemblage[[3]](#footnote-3). This took place through the dialogues with the artists, with Stuart as the older teacher providing a set of working concepts, as well as being able to point these then young people towards other thinkers such as Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Paul Gilroy, Kobena Mercer and bell hooks. This was the seminaristic aspect of Stuart’s professional life. The warm and engaging way of speaking set a framework for his relationship to academic work, to the politics of pedagogy and to his own distinctive writing style.

Stuart Hall’s body of work; the forms his teaching took, his ways of conducting a seminar, his talks, and his broadcasts as well as more formal lectures, and of course his writing, could be seen as marking out a third space, it was the closest Stuart came to being an *auteur.* At the time this concept of third space was useful for reflecting on those practices of cultural mingling and hybridity. The vernacular activities gave rise to changes in the landscape of urban everyday life. Films, novels, poetry and pop music were the key cultural frames for providing critical reflection on and analysis of these emerging forms of social mixing. From the mid ‘80s to the mid ‘90s Stuart and Bhabha were in regular dialogue with each other, sharing ideas and cross-fertilising on various issues at conferences and on panels in many venues (Bhabha 2015). Recently Kobena Mercer has referred to Stuart’s ‘future-facing outlook’, and the way in which his sociological eye was finely tuned to capture and analyse things that were happening around him (Mercer 2015 p 4). I likewise reiterate this combination of qualities, foregrounding the institutional sites of education, and developing further, in the pages that follow the impact of Stuart’s voice in this new or emergent sector of the art world, indeed making the argument that it is the combination of both the sociological and the cultural studies elements which provide the key to a fuller understanding of the art works than the more conventional vocabularies of art history or indeed of visual culture can provide. Stuart Hall’s third space was an open-ended non-elite “teaching machine” through which he was able to be a specific kind of subaltern intellectual. In this space he brought together a prevailing commitment to radical politics, with his professional life as an academic. This is to attribute to a teaching style a kind of richness and productivity whereby new knowledge could be both produced and put into circulation for a wider section of the population than that typically envisaged in academic life. At the same time it inspired others to work in a similar kind of way, first at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and then at the Open University. However such a mode of operation was also of its time and it was made possible by an infrastructure of seemingly enduring social democratic institutional investments, but which are now dramatically curtailed.

Stuart’s evasion of the nowadays required process of academic individualisation, which in the recently labelled entrepreneurial university entails relentless and hubristic forms of self-promotion, (see Brown 2015) enabled a style of scholarship to emerge which was original and accessible. This permitted a sizable readership across the world, many translations, and a lasting influence over not just media and cultural studies, sociology and criminology, cultural anthropology, race and ethnicity studies and post-colonial studies, but also in what was art history, and is now more often referred to as the field of visual culture. One significant sector of this audience and readership was the group of young black and Asian “diasporic” artists and photographers many of whom were still students when first introduced in the mid-1980s to Stuart’s work. Some years later, on the occasion of being given an honorary doctorate, and in a self-effacing manner Stuart Hall downplayed, indeed overlooked altogether the key role he played in coalescing and galvanising this group, and so one of my intentions here is to reverse this by considering the generative dynamics of this Hallian third space (Hall 2006). To some, this close working involvement with the black and Asian British artists remains a kind of unknown Stuart, despite the many well-known and often quoted articles by Stuart on race, visual culture and “new ethnicities.”[[4]](#endnote-1) There are so many strands of continuity between the earlier work of Stuart and this later set of relationships. These included the policy-oriented activity he led first with *Autograph*, and then with the *INIVA* gallery in Rivington Street East London (which also formed his first major project on retiring from the Open University in 2000) as well as lectures, catalogue essays and simply working with people like Isaac Julien and David A. Bailey. One of the obvious connections between early and later writing can be seen in the way Stuart, eschewing the traditional idea of the artistic genius, talked not so much about “art” but rather about “black cultural production.” Stuart also referred to black cultural workers. Not only does this remind us of the “death of the author” debates which were prevalent at the time, it also implicitly reflected the anti-elite and radically collaborative nature of the undertaking as he envisaged it.

Stuart’s work was always less stamped with his own authorial signature than is the academic convention. The style was self-effacing, often submerged, registering at what Deleuze and Guattari would label a “minor literature,” and indeed this quality was also a critical aspect of its potency (Deleuze and Guattari 2004). He addressed others generously. The early days of collective authorship, in the context of producing journals, pamphlets and the Birmingham CCCS Stencilled Papers produced a mingled voice which was constantly in dialogue with his colleagues. Drawing on writers such as Stallybrass and White in relation to popular culture, Fanon, Homi Bhabha, Paul Gilroy, Kobena Mercer, Avtar Brah, Michele Wallace, Cornell West, Judith Butler to name but a few, Stuart, over the years, forged both his own open pedagogic third space style, and his distinctive contribution to intellectual work. So many of Stuart’s articles take place in the present tense. He is mapping a field, he is testing out a set of ideas, he is contributing, he is trying out and making sense of, he is explaining and explicating to a wider popular audience and in this way he is also always reaching into some space beyond the confines of the current socio-political circumstances. He is translating and synthesising, widening out and drawing together, in a sense assembling a new socio-cultural constituency. The third space of open pedagogy was interstitial, liminal, relatively undesignated, informal, on the edge of bigger institutions, carrying also within it traces of subordinated histories, traces of counter-cultures of resistance.

What came into being as “black cultural production” in the form of films, art works, and photography reflected something of Stuart’s pedagogy in that it was always a kind of work-in-progress. Drawing more on the popular culture of migrant populations, on the cut-n-mix of reggae sound systems, and on the drama of urban youth subcultures, than on the traditions of the avant-garde, no one to begin with, including the artists themselves, actually called it art.[[5]](#endnote-2) Rarely did this emerging body of work attract recognition from the art world, including curators, funding agencies and critics. In the early days it was only able to have an existence within that same cultural studies (and British Film Institute) circuit of workshops and seminars occasionally taking places in locations such as the ICA in London. Stuart would be talking about and writing essays for the nascent black photography movement. Other marginalised voices in Birmingham, in the West Midlands and in London found some ways of cobbling together funding bids to local regional councils, or they approached new organisations with an access policy such as Channel Four TV. By hosting events and talks, by showing short films and videos at off-the-beaten- track locations such as Wolverhampton in the West Midlands, the third space in socio-geographical terms constituted sites of popular participation. It is telling that the first films by John Akomfrah and Isaac Julien reported on urban unrest and racist policing in Handsworth Birmingham and in reaction to the death of Colin Roach in Stoke Newington. Arguably this was not community arts, coming as it did from a younger, more politicised generation, for whom such terms as these marked out container spaces of cultural subordination, though of course such spaces could also be re-functioned for the sake of grant applications. The early films offered a distinctive montage of sound and image while also registering a sociological voice by drawing from the work of Stuart and Paul Gilroy each of whom had written about the economic marginalisation of black youth, as well as the racist stereotypes which littered the media landscape creating ripe environments for intensifying policing and creating a law and order society.

Stuart’s conjunctural analysis during the 80s and into the 1990s, produced a series of concepts to reflect on the socio-political exclusions of black and Asian youth, and the attempts by the right wing press to consolidate traditional notions of Englishness against the seeming threat of multi-culturalism and a break-down of law and order (Hall 1978, 1979, 1988). Along with Gilroy’s *There Ain’t No* *Black in the Union Jack* there was an acknowledgement of the role of black music and style as affirmative and contestatory (Gilroy 1987). With Gilroy, Hall refuted the idea of ethnic absolutism and instead reflected on the third spaces of convivial mingling, while also constantly alert to the forces which aimed at defusing radicalism by co-opting black and Asian people into the world of consumer culture. From the late 1980s/early 1990s Hall began to comment on how the values of enterprise culture as promoted by the Thatcher government came to be taken up by young black and Asian people who otherwise found themselves more or less excluded from mainstream labour markets. This was one element within the idea of “new ethnicities”, it articulated three ways, first with the Thatcherite imperative, second with the longer tradition of, as Stuart put it, ‘hustling’, itself a marker of usually black masculine economic marginalisation, and third with the prevalent punk (and hence youth cultural) ethos of creating a DIY labour market (Hall 1989; McRobbie 1989).

This moment also marked out a point of convergence with Stuart and myself both sharing a sociological focus on the emerging subjectivising discourses and the ambivalent political formation of so-called Thatcher’s children, black, white and Asian. For the following two decades we conversed and sat on conference panels attending to the corrosive effect of the emerging neoliberalism, especially the Blair times and the sustained undoing of progressive alliance politics of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and class. For myself this later led to a borrowing of Stuart’s emphasis on articulation to reflect on the aggressively disarticulating strategies adopted by New Labour when it came to office in 1997, through its vocal disavowal of left, feminist and anti-racist work as no longer relevant, while also “taken into account” (McRobbie 2008). Through the joint forces of the popular press and the offices of New Labour and its favoured think-tanks, there was an attempt to engineer a disconnect, a disavowal of history through discounting the previous work of anti-racist groups and of alliances which had fought for equal opportunities and an end to workplace discrimination. Years of struggle and campaigning came to be trivialised and undermined, associated with the kind of out of date leftwing politics which made the party, or so it was argued, unelectable. As an alternative, by the early 2000s New Labour was championing a new kind of black or Asian high achiever, the “top girls/boys” who could make good use of the meritocracy and make their way into the boardroom or legal chambers or indeed the House of Commons. Given the proximity Stuart had previously with many of the people around Blair, one could almost argue that it was his radicalism that was being refuted, albeit with his presence continuing to haunt the edges of the New Labour vocabularies.[[6]](#endnote-3) In *The Aftermath of* *Feminism* (2008) I refer to this process as a “complexification of backlash.”[[7]](#endnote-4) What the public relations machinery around New Labour sought were “feel good” stories about successes in black and Asian business, not a radicalism which drew attention to racial violence, black urban poverty and unemployment, that all belonged to the past. Words such as poverty and unemployment virtually disappeared from the vocabulary of issues to be tackled by New Labour in office. Instead they were re-designated to become words of insult, used in a pejorative way to further stigmatise those people locked into “dependency culture” and welfare benefits. The repetitive power of single words and phrases and therefore the politics of language played a key role in the securing of consent, in this case, to a new form of corporate-political managerialism which had the de-democratising effect of discouraging people away from an everyday engagement in politics, including local politics. Paul Gilroy has also bewailed this de-politicising effect during and after the New Labour years (Gilroy 2013). These then were the socio-cultural contours within which the anti-racist movements of the 1970s and 80s, and the legitimacy of black anger in regard to policing in the inner cities, were reviled, in favour of notions of achievement, aspiration and success. As Sarat Maharaj argued this New Labour pathway replaced ideas of social justice with “multi-cultural managerialism” which with the growth of the creative economy also led to various high profile programmes in “cultural leadership” (Maharaj 1999 quoted in Fisher 2009).[[8]](#endnote-5) By the time Stuart had retired from the Open University and was dedicating a good deal of time to the new black arts venue INIVA he was also himself entangled in these changes to the landscape which could be defined in terms of the “undoing of anti-racism” and the “dismantling of multi-culturalism.” This moment also brought Stuart directly into the fraught terrain of arts and cultural policy-making where, with the support of Gilane Tawadros and Lola Young (now Baroness Young of Hornsey) he played a key role in bringing the past, present and future work of the black and Asian British artists into a more formalised institutionalised space at just that point in time when the arts and cultural fields were being re-structured under the rubric of the new managerialism endorsed by New Labour and presided over by the Minister of Culture at the DCMS, Chris Smith. Already in the air was a new vocabulary of leadership, enterprise and sponsorship as against previous ideas of support and subsidy for the arts.[[9]](#endnote-6) And yet Stuart found this immersion in the INIVA project deeply rewarding, he was working in a collective, talking endlessly with architect David Adjaye and photographer Mark Sealy, while trying to fend off the encroachment of various ambitious New Labour figures.

**Conditions of Emergence: From Arts Co-operatives to the Talent-Led Economy**

Throughout his lifetime Stuart retained an historical interest in the archival photography of Caribbean immigration to the UK in the 1950s. In the Journal *Ten-8* he wrote movingly about what a certain kind of genre of photographs said about the new life as it was to be seen by the folks back home. The eagerness and sense of expectations was simultaneously undercut by what Stuart also described which was the psychic ambivalence of fear and desire on the part of the host population which underpinned the intensity of their racial prejudice and hatred, which in turn rendered this portraiture as anxious as it was optimistic (Bailey and Hall 1992a, 1992b). The flow in Stuart’s engagement with visual culture moved from photography to film and then to art. Alongside this was the emphasis he placed on understanding the dynamics of socio-political change, understood in terms of conjunctural moments. As mentioned above, a key such time, in the UK by the mid-late 1980s /early 1990s, was what Stuart labelled the time of “new ethnicities”. Three seminal films at least partly triggered these considerations of Britain’s new multiculturalism, *My Beautiful Laundrette* (dir Frears 1985), *Looking for Langston* (dir Julien 1989) and *Young Soul Rebels* (dir Julien 1991), all of which opened up questions about visual culture and looking, youth culture/subculture, the black body, masculinity, gay sexual desire against a backdrop of economic hardship, homophobia and urban racism. Two defining features of these works are that they defy the stable boundaries of high and low culture and that they are inflected by the idea of subculture.[[10]](#endnote-7) The joyful moments in all three works also convey something of what Stuart was striving to give words to which was a sense of black and Asian desiring agency, of new subjects coming into being, “new ethnicities” albeit against a backdrop of racial violence and social exclusion. Thus we could say Stuart’s writing touched on the paradoxes of black cultural production, being outside and inside (bearing in mind Laclau’s notion of the constitutive outside), while also finding itself suddenly undergoing a shift from the “margins to the centre” at that point at which the art establishment woke up and began to engage, albeit in a critical vein as witnessed in the exchange between Salman Rushdie and Stuart following Rushdie’s hostile review of the film by John Akomfrah titled *Handsworth Songs* in 1987. The third space of black cultural production, including the early films of both Akomfrah and Isaac Julien and echoing Stuart’s own pedagogic style, announced a presence which was other than modernity, staking a distance from the avant-garde while also refusing the playful shiny surfaces of the postmodern. History here was reduced neither to pastiche nor to “costume drama,”[[11]](#endnote-8) instead it was urgently disputatious, a matter of non-chronological questions about temporality, confronting what Bhabha called the “time lag” of modernity. With original footage Isaac Julien had Langston Hughes dance forward with his poetry-rap of the Harlem Renaissance interrupting the slower and carefully composed images of black gay desire as played out in the spaces of contemporary club scenes.

To understand the coming-together of the third space of black cultural production we need to consider the socio-historical conditions of its emergence. The latter-day legitimation of and awarding of prizes to these works by painters, photographers, film-makers, and sculptors from David A Bailey, Sonia Boyce, Chila Burman, Isaac Julien, John Akomfrah, Yinka Shonibare, to Chris Ofili and Steve McQueen, took place after the event of their being present. The 1989 show at the Hayward Gallery *The Other Story* curated by Rasheed Araeen which showed works mostly from an older generation of artists (but did include Eddie Chambers, Keith Piper and Sonia Boyce) was, as Jean Fisher reminded her readers in her Tate essay from 2009, met with hostility and undisguised racial prejudice on the part of establishment arts writers (Fisher 2009). For example Brian Sewell wrote that these artists “parroted Western visual idioms they don’t understand as third rate imitations of the white man’s cliches” (Sewell quoted in Fisher 2009: 5). Nevertheless what created and sustained these younger artists in their practice were a set of conditions, the outcome of education and cultural policies pursued by social democratic and left-wing municipal local authorities from the mid-1970s for two decades, albeit in circumstances of constraint and with decreasing budgets until that point at which in 1997 the power of local government was curtailed and virtually halted by the incoming New Labour government. (This too was part of the anti-municipalism of New Labour, for the reasons of its capacity to foster new and rekindle old forms of radical democracy). There was a direct line of connection between this “educational-cultural” apparatus and the pedagogic third space of cultural studies. Isaac Julien, as a boy growing up in Bow in east London and attending a local comprehensive, was encouraged to apply through an access route to Central St Martins College of Art and Design thanks to a Hackney youth arts programme run along youth club lines. Chila Burman whose father was an immigrant from the Punjab forced to make his living with an ice cream van, grew up in working class Liverpool and got a first from Leeds Metropolitan University and then completed a Masters in the prestigious Slade School in London. Yinka Shonibare the British-African artist whose work won the preeminent place on London’s Trafalgar Square plinth in 2011 worked in the early days for Southwark Council in arts administration (SHAPE) and he too benefited from free higher education in the anti-elitist art school sector. Likewise, though from a younger generation Steve McQueen has talked a lot about his time in a White City (west London) comprehensive in a period where black boys almost automatically found themselves put into the lowest non-academic streams (Aikenhead 2014). Nevertheless thanks to a few inner city radical teachers he found his way into Chelsea School of Art and from there to Goldsmiths University. So it was not that these institutions offered some sort of anti-racist utopia, far from it, but they did provide publicly-funded avenues which have since been more or less closed down. For each of these artists growing up in times of harsh racial violence and inequality there were still routes for disadvantaged students which were made available through local democracy in the form of studentships, part-time jobs, and even the possibility of subsidised shared housing for artists under the remit of the Greater London Council. Secondary school teachers and youth workers also played a key role in supporting black and ethnic minority young people as part of various urban anti-racist initiatives. The removal of such provision and the rise of the commercial market and private sponsorship in the arts in the last fifteen years has arguably dire consequences for the reproduction of this generation of black and Asian artists, insofar as the tropes of excessive competition and the high personal costs which have to be borne in order to get this far in the new ‘talent led economy’ already excludes so many, while also stopping in its tracks a more collective ethos. These municipal environments were also the very spaces within which Stuart chose to associate himself with, for example arts organisations and photography workshops existing in a kind of extra-mural relationship with the bigger former polytechnics (now new universities). In this sense we can see continuities in the cultural studies tradition stretching from Raymond Williams’ involvement in adult education through to the involvement of Stuart and others around him in regional as well as London-based arts projects. These conditions of emergence depended then on a set of openings which decades of radical, often grass-roots activism, had made possible. What Stuart Hall did was to pitch in with the kind of debates and arguments which moved things forward, and this was most apparent in the “new ethnicities” and other articles which stressed the need for impurity and non-identity, for difference and “differance” for the necessary lack of fixity around the category of black or Asian.

Stuart offers one of the most succinct accounts of his engagement with the black and Asian British artists in his lecture at the University of East London titled “Black Diaspora Artists in Britain: Three ‘Moments’ in Post-War History” (Hall 2006). Here he offers a wider and more historical account of what I have called the “conditions of emergence,” that is, a conjunctural analysis which allows him to pay particular attention to two specific groups, what he calls the “last colonials” who arrived typically from the Caribbean in the UK (and also Paris) in the 1950s and for whom at least initially the space of international modernism and abstractionism permitted a sense of possibility even if for some, a few years later, such optimism came to be retracted. Hall cites the emergence of the second group, the post-colonials as a “discursive formation” whose coming together takes the form of a kind of clustering, in what, with Hall quoting David Scott could be seen as a “problem space.” This work (and he mentions a range of visual artists from Keith Piper and Sonia Boyce to Isaac Julien and Chila Burman) argues Hall, takes the form of a “constitutive outside to ‘our island story’. In the work itself the interrogative is entwined with the aesthetic. These practices take shape in the context of the presence of “race” as a key political signifier in post-war British urban life, and they find expression in the context of the popular anti-racist politics from the late 1970s and the rising tide of black anger in a social context of being “pushed around by the police” with the consequences that “nothing can protect the black body.” Stuart then goes on to herald this emergence of the new black and Asian arts movement as a kind of “coming out.” He points to “the polemical and politicised art” which broke down the space between image and language, which borrowed from urban forms such as graffiti and the music of marginalised youth subcultures. This intermingling contested the divisions between high culture and popular or vernacular culture and it also defined the work as a whole as hybridic, at odds with, or holding at a distance from, the need for recognition from the mainstream art world, which from the start could be perceived as hostile. This self-positioning as extraneous to the mainstream of the arts, is also what brings the work close together with Hall’s own preferred third space of cultural studies pedagogy.

The question is then raised as to what the future had in store for this group of subaltern artists with whom Stuart formed such a close bond? We could summarise some of the socio-economic transformations which they became subject to, under the heading to the new creative economy, spearheaded by the New Labour government with a remit given to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport to encourage growth within the sector which included artists, fashion designers, musicians, graphic designers and so on.[[12]](#endnote-9) This new focus on creativity was announced with great fanfares, but the underlying emphasis was on encouraging overall a more highly individualised and entrepreneurial outlook across this sector of young people, while also advocating self-employment and thus self-reliance. With the UK then priding itself on expanding its “talent-led economy” the so-called Young British Artists (with a figurehead in Damien Hirst) gladly occupied this space, singing the praises of the coming together of art and business.[[13]](#endnote-10) A new kind of vocabulary came into being, led by a political rationality of competitive individualism and enterprise culture. Indeed in the UK under the auspices of the new creative economy artists came to occupy a kind of pioneer role, the artist as “human capital” (McRobbie 2015). This ethos of personal ambition, the requirement to become an entrepreneur of the self, the need to multi-task (so to spread the risk, as the advocates of this ethos would advise), the need to search for sponsors and self-promote at every possible opportunity, clearly had consequences for the pedagogic, self-effacing, “third space”.[[14]](#endnote-11) The repercussions which this shift away from locally-funded and regionally-based arts provision towards a more fully market-driven and sponsorship-led model, has had for the artists I have been referring to, are as yet unclear, though for sure a valid topic for research. We would need to look closely at the artists’ CVs one at a time. We would also have to take into account the kinds of generic factors which Bourdieu alluded to in his analysis of the “art field” such as early youthful days being devoted to joint projects, where there is strength in numbers, giving way later on to more individualised professional careers (Bourdieu 1993). However in Bourdieu’s time the category of artist was also something of a professional rarity, allowing him to develop the argument that the long period of waiting for recognition while living on a pittance was something only possible for those with access to private means. Now that hundreds of thousands of young people are being trained to graduate level in the diverse field of creative arts, the question of how they can make a living becomes one of much wider concern. The BAME artists we are referring to here will have been exposed to both the earlier social democratic period of relative munificence, and the last 15 years of neo-liberal individualism as it came to be translated into an ethos for artists and creatives.

How then will a younger generation of black and Asian artists emerge given the sweeping changes across the landscape of the British universities and the gradual replacement of cultural studies with a more business focused curriculum (McRobbie 2015)? The entrepreneurial university not only champions a more competitive ethos but also requires students to take out loans to cover the cost of fees. How this has impacted on the ability of black and Asian students to train in fine arts, film, photography and so on, is yet to be fully investigated. The influence of the creative entrepreneurship pedagogy, cluttered as it is with a fine array of toolkits and modules as to how to commercialise ‘the work’, will surely diminish the generous, gift-giving dimensions of the “third space” which I have attributed to Stuart Hall’s academic oeuvre. Within the audit culture of the new university regime or bedded down inside the spaces of the art school today, there is an ethos which weighs against the giving of time where there is not, as Wendy Brown puts it, a “return on investment” (2015). In effect both the breadth and range of the curriculum and the teacherly style of its delivery is truncated or compromised when enterprise culture steps in. This does not augur well for future generations of artists from similar kinds of backgrounds to those we are currently discussing. Through the years the artists who gathered around Stuart had to negotiate pathways through these now standard requirements which emphasise not just self-promotion but the seeking of prizes, the search for sponsors, the relentless application for grants and the whole business of making a living in already difficult circumstances. In such a highly competitive sphere if one is not being short-listed for prizes or not being represented by a leading gallerist and not selling work then there is only something of an abyss of self-doubt.

**Conclusion: Precarity Politics and Black Arts?**

The impact of neo-liberalism in the arts would push established black and Asian artists further in the direction of bolstering their careers as best they could, according to the logic of prizes and prestigious international commissions, while leaving their younger counterparts to manage the debt-ridden avenues which have their own vivid disincentives. However the story does not quite end here. Since the economic crisis of 2008 there have been persistent efforts to dislodge the de-politicised art and the winner-takes-all ethos championed by the creative economy advocates. Citing movements and journals such as *Former West* and *e-flux*, Irit Rogoff has referred to this as the “educational turn,” that is the way in which art and museum spaces have become epicentres for the development of new radical political movements, they have become unruly spaces of assembly for a debate which shifts attention away from the singular magisterial work itself, to a less grandiose place for art where it exists in conjunction with some of the important social and political issues of the moment (Rogoff 2008). This gives rise to a new productive interface between social and cultural theory and artists who define themselves against the market, and who seek a new space/time of political engagement, identifying themselves within a frame of the ‘artist-precariat’ (Bain and McLean 2012, Lorey 2015). However the politics of precarity are not entirely unproblematic when viewed from the perspective of race and ethnicity.

The autonomist Marxist writing of Hardt and Negri which has been so influential for this largely white European precarity movement, marks a return to 1970s and early 1980s ideas of workerism, albeit a workerism defined by its desires to escape the factory floor by various means of flight or exodus or through the “refusal of work” (Hardt and Negri 2000). These ideas were developed through close engagement with Marx’s *Grundrisse* brought to bear on the industrial disputes in Italy particularly in the car factories of the North. The authors update this focus to engage with contemporary forms of cognitive or immaterial labour. It is understandable why this work has appealed to a younger generation of European radicals, not just for its attention to new forms of work and labour but also to processes of migration and to the political potential of the multitude. However the concept of multitude does not adequately engage with questions raised by feminist theory and from within post-colonial studies as well as race and ethnicity studies. One problem was perhaps there from the start insofar as the factory floor was always considered the uncontested centre for political consciousness as well as a place of white, male labour even if these young men were in flight from such spaces. Gilroy countered this argument forcefully back in 1987 when he posited the political spaces of the times as those of street and community, home and leisure environment ie youth clubs! This followed the Hallian British cultural studies tradition of envisaging the terrain of popular culture as a site for new political emergences and uprisings, outside the police stations and courts of law, inside the schools and on the streets (Gilroy 1987, McRobbie 2015). A recent polemical intervention, which, echoing the ideas of Hardt and Negri aims at bringing together the Operaismo work with that of critical writing on race, can be found in the co-authored work of Harney and Moten (2012). Under the idea of the “undercommons” there is an attempt to validate the autonomist *Operaismo* tradition by arguing that it in fact followed the lead from black US radical traditions including those of the Black Panther Movement. Alongside this claim, the poetic voice of Fred Moten argues that precarity art transcends the limitations of the European constraints of high and low culture, doing so, as Gilroy demonstrates so forcefully, through the bitter and painful historical experiences, of the Black Atlantic ( Gilroy 1993).

It would be amiss not to bring into this discussion the seminal work of Paul Gilroy who in effect attended to the gap in the early Birmingham cultural studies project of the ‘70s and ‘80s regarding the question of art, literature and music, doing so from the perspective of the black Atlantic (Gilroy 1993). Forceful exclusion from the European canon, from Kant to Adorno in fact created a space unstriated by the violent hierarchies of high and low which produced the various forms of black expressive culture as a “counter-culture of modernity” one of whose formal characteristics was to register a non-hermetic mode, antiphonal, open-to-the-audience, call and response address which echoed the slave songs and came to be formalised in the music of the black churches. There is a close relation between this black Atlantic aesthetic and the pedagogic style I have here attributed to Hall as a third space. If this openness also finds expression in art works themselves (and one could attend to this question more fully by considering, for example Akomfrah’s recent film/installation *The Stuart Hall* *Projec*t) and likewise to Isaac Julien’s recent *Playtime,* in which Hall makes a fleeting appearance, nevertheless to maintain a radical openness and a defiance of the dynamics of competition in favour of co-operation in times such as these, pushes artists into a difficult position when they are subjected to the full panoply of *dispositifs* which entail putting oneself forward for prizes, and finding oneself subject to the same kind of rankings and ratings processes that now prevail across all sectors of professional life. As Canclini points out, in the contemporary art world this means being endlessly ranked, or left un-ranked through the regular lists published in glossy magazines and newspapers naming the top ten or hundred artists in the world, or the top ten curators, or simply the top ten “players” in the gallery and museum sector (Canclini 2014). This intensifies the forces of individualisation, which in turn makes it difficult not to be anxious about fulfilling these benchmarks of success. So is the openness of Hall’s third space and the role it played in the lives of the artists I have mentioned now a matter of closure? What kind of language would be needed to understand the more recent conditions of artistic production in the new “problem spaces” of post-colonial art? For example the concerns raised by Nana Adusei-Poku in regard to recent debates, mostly conducted in the US, on “post-Black art”, flags up a double movement, on the one hand the desire of contemporary African-American artists to be considered in terms other than those of blackness, a generational riposte against identity politics, alongside the US inflection of what I referred to earlier as the neoliberal political sensibility which claims that the times of overt racial inequalities are now in the past, which in turn justifies the idea of the “end of multiculturalism” with its negative associations of publicly-funded provisions (Adusei-Poku 2012). In any case no sooner is this kind of facile proclamation made than there is an outpouring of black anger across many towns and cities in the US about police brutality against young black men and women, giving rise to the *blacklivesmatter* campaign and reminding us forcefully of the triggers for the earliest works by Akomfrah and Julien (Gilroy 2014).

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1. These were former polytechnics, which were given university status in the early 1990s, Stuart formed a close and lasting relationship with the University of East London. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. I am thinking here of the work of Victor Burgin, Mitra Tabrizian, Isaac Julien, as well as the American feminist art of the likes of Judy Chicago, all of which many of the YBA’ers would have been exposed to at university and then loudly rejected. Though please note the Saatchi Sensation exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1998, which showcased this so-called new generation, also included work by Yinka Shonibare and Chris Offili. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. I will return to this point at the conclusion but the film *My Beautiful Laundrette* was a key point of reference here, and prior to the Hanif Kureishi’s novel *The Buddha of Suburbia*, both of which were driven by the idea of British youth culture, a trope deeply inscribed within the Birmingham CCCS collective unconscious. The vernacular of the Caribbean and its infusion into the ‘punk n reggae’ mix, and the ethos of ‘rock against racism’ endured in Stuart’s approach to the idea of ‘art’. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This point was made when I presented an early version of this paper as a talk at the CSA at Riverside May 2015. Thanks to Jaafar Aksikas for the invitation and for his valuable comments. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
5. I am thinking here of Isaac Julien’s first films especially *Young Soul Rebels* (1991). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
6. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
7. Jean Fisher makes a similar argument in regard to the Cool Britannia moment and the way in which artists like Gilbert and George along with many of the YBA’s comprised a right wing backlash against these prior moments of political anger about racial inequality being mobilised by artists and film-makers such as those cited here (Fisher 2009). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
8. More recently see Sara Ahmed on “diversity management” (Ahmed 2012). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
9. The negative connotations of the word subsidy associated with the arts and culture is followed through to the current Conservative and previous Coalition governments in the UK, and more or less adhered to in the influential Warwick Report of 2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
10. This was a lasting hallmark of the work of this group for over nearly three decades, from the early 1980s on, one might for example also flag up the film *Babymothe*r (dir Henriques 1998) for its high-energy, collage-effect achieved through combining a seemingly popular narrative /feature film idiom with a strongly foregrounded sound-track and art-directed cinematography. Like the two films by Isaac Julien, *Young Soul Rebels* and *Looking* *for Langston, Babymother* drew directly on the black youth culture in London. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
11. Yinka Shonibare takes the popular genre of “costume drama” and mixes it up, creating sculptural pieces which re-write history from the viewpoint of the colonised other. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
12. Cool Britannia was the phrase used to promote these new cultural policies. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
13. Tracey Emin gladly collaborated with Becks beer, while Hirst embarked on various commercial activities including for a while a restaurant. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
14. I recall a turning point moment when invited to speak at the ICA with a panel of other guests from style magazines such as *Dazed and Confused* at the ICA (in 2005). Stuart was sidelined and barely given time to talk, in an atmosphere which was chaired in Blairite mode by the then director who was championing the “talent-led economy” and a new moment of supposedly post-political black art and image-making. Afterwards Stuart said that he regretted accepting the invitation, since the main idea was that post-colonial cultural studies was now out of date and no longer needed. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)