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Stuart Hall, peerless mediator

**Gregor MacLennan, Bruce Robbins, Angela McRobbie, Brett St Louis,
Catherine Hall**

A discussion celebrating of the publication of *Stuart Hall, Selected Writings on Marxism*, chaired by Catherine Hall.ⁱ

Catherine: This book is one in a series of edited volumes of Stuart's work over the years, edited by Bill Schwarz and myself.ⁱⁱ Stuart and I shared a life for fifty years, and as a personal note, I could say that I witnessed, at second hand, the writing of these essays, from the incessant clacking of the typewriter keys in the long nights of the 1970s to the quieter work at the computer in the later decades - a quiet that was frequently interrupted with despairing exclamations as to the horrors of new technology ... There are many different kinds of memories associated with this body of work. I'd like to ask Greg to open our session by telling us something of his thinking about the book, the issues he wanted to focus on, and the selection he made.

Gregor: As Catherine said, there's this mega series that she and Bill Schwarz have edited, coming from Duke, but there are other publications too, which testify to Stuart Hall's increasing, indeed remarkable, renown these days, and his repute, and the spread and reach of his work continue to grow all the time. But I meet a lot of people, maybe especially students or younger colleagues and readers, who seem surprised when I say that for the prime middle years of his career and life - which I would point out is the period in *other* thinkers' work that Stuart himself often most liked, he was unquestionably - and I'm talking about at least fifteen years - centrally and deeply engaged in the question of Marxism. Now, I nearly entitled this volume, 'Stuart Hall on the *Question* of Marxism', rather than 'On Marxism', because I think it's fair to say that even if you want to conclude he's a neo-Marxist, in my view that's still a form of Marxism that's of vital significance to the life and nature of Marxism as a discourse. So, Hall was constantly wrestling in a very intense way with Marxist concepts, problems and readings.

Of course, this volume just testifies to something - it can't contain all his relevant writings - but I hope it gives a good flavour of the different ways in which Hall engaged with central questions of Marxism and indeed transformed them in his distinctive way of handling them. So, I'm seeking to encourage everyone to read and engage with Hall engaging with Marxism. It's an absolutely central dimension of his overall trajectory. This might be particularly relevant now, because - although Marxism declined amongst left theoretical and political circles in the 1990s and the early part of the Noughties - since the so-called global financial crash of 2008 there's no doubt that Marxism has achieved a certain wider understanding, attraction and readership than those decades where it was rather out of fashion. Neither Marx nor Marxism has been, as it were, fully rehabilitated, but that just poses the question even more sharply: what *kind* of Marxism or neo-Marxism seems important to the contemporary era? and how crude, subtle, or complex do we think it needs to be to continue to have an intellectual life, and distinctive consequences?

I hope, then, that the volume poses that kind of general issue, not least because my sense of appreciation of Hall is that if you want a complex Marxism, a subtle Marxism, an agonistic Marxism where nothing is taken for granted in any corner of

debate, then there's no one that embodies that spirit of enquiry and engagement better than Stuart Hall. That's the fundamental rationale for the volume.

Secondly, within that, I wanted to illustrate the different ways in which Hall articulated his evolving sense of Marxism and the type of text and context in which he did that. That's reflected in the structure of the book, so that Part 1, the longest part, features four sustained theoretical encounters where Hall's working with Marx - in Marx, for Marx - against some aspects of Marx himself and against other kinds of Marxism. I stress that these are theoretical '*readings*', and I bring this out in the commentary, because this is something about Stuart Hall's method of understanding that's very important to him. He likes to work with the grain of thinkers through careful textual progression, even if in due course he wants to take some distance from them. And this naturally applies to Marx as well, along with later thinkers, not least Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramsci - his favourite Marxist; and the most politically consequential for Hall. So that's the first part of the book.

Part 2 is more 'applied', for want of a better term; it's more thematically focused and organised, offering slightly more concrete overviews of problem fields. So, for instance, the writings I excerpt from there include classic 'Birmingham Cultural Studies' work - *Policing the Crisis*, a long and complex book, and *Resistance through Rituals*, a canonical volume on subcultures and youth, together with one of his many, extraordinary Open University set textbook overviews, this one being on Liberalism as the quintessential political discourse of modernity itself.

We're coming down the levels of abstraction here, if you like, even if Stuart Hall is still taking things in a big sweep, and many readers over the years have found these works of huge 'conjunctural' value without any very specific implications concerning Marxism as a whole. But I've edited these readings to show that, especially in retrospect, these 'Birmingham School' era works represent committedly Marxist framings, albeit, as always with Hall, in broad and encompassing style.

The third part of the book then brings along a little light relief, if you like. Its pieces are shorter and slightly more polemical, directly involved in encounters with other thinkers in the Marxist tradition, bringing out with some clarity what Hall thought about the business of theory and theorising, about core questions of culture, structure and ideology. Those exchanges are with E.P. Thompson, the great historian, with political and cultural economy scholar Bob Jessop and associates, and with Nicos Poulantzas, the Greek Marxist structuralist thinker.

Towards the end, in the last two chapters, I tackle the issue that many people familiar with Hall's overall work and persona will want to pose, which is, 'Hey, yes, a kind of Marxist, but come on, surely Hall pulled right away from Marxism in the 1980s so that certainly by the early Noughties he couldn't really be thought to be a Marxist in any serious sense?' Well, that's a valid and challenging question and I address it by selecting two readings from Hall which pinpoint two different ways in which this question of his departure from Marxism emerges quite sharply. One is in relation to postcoloniality/post-colonialism, and that's essential because not only is the essay I've chosen excellent in itself, and worthy of a place in these volumes of his most distinctive papers, but of course the main observational and political fact is that it was postcoloniality, ethnicity, race, identity, that steadily came to the very centre of Hall's

attention, substantively and politically constituting ways of thinking that indeed represented a point of departure from the earlier Marxist or neo-Marxist Hall. At least in important respects. Yet, without denying that shift of focus and emphasis, my selection and commentary is meant to remind us that, as so often with Hall, this is a fascinatingly complex matter, and that while he works through the issues with typical astuteness and eloquence, there are telling *tensions* within his discourse too.

And then the other point of departure from Marxism I try to bring out in the selection is based on a thesis Hall put forward in the later 1990s to do with the increasing *centrality of culture* to both the social formation that we live in, and also to our analytical categories of understanding. And I try to indicate that there are important ways in which the ostensibly bold headline thesis turns out to be somewhat misleading or compromised, simply because Hall never quite lets go - never quite wants to let go - of a residual Marxist commitment, the residual Marxist commitment of his earlier period, of the Part 1 readings in this book. Those who knew Stuart Hall well will I'm sure acknowledge - and it's there in his writings - that whilst he could be among the first to radically question older positions and styles of thinking, he was most reluctant to ever actually abandon anything or anyone that he considered useful or important. Raymond Williams would be a key instance of this: Hall developed some quite profound reservations about Williams, but he never deserted his general project and example. He (Hall) was a wonderfully inclusive persona and thinker.

Okay, but here comes another thing I wanted to get across, something that hasn't been talked about much, at least directly. It seems to me that just *because* Stuart Hall was a radiant, charismatic personality, we tend to assume that his distinctiveness as a thinker needs no further explanation; it just comes down precisely to that compelling winningness of his, especially perhaps as a great speaker. Without wishing to deny all that - it was of formative importance for my own development - I develop the slightly more theoretical notion of Hall as *mediator*. Now this idea of mediator probably needs a bit of upgrading - it can sound too soppy, a bit of this and a bit of that, 'getting to yes', tension-less intellectual cuddling. Well, no, that's not what I mean. Mediation includes hard work and hard arguing by way of synthesising inclusivity in the journey of ideas, respecting *aspects* of a position without endorsing *whole* positions; and in so doing transforming the problem under consideration. In other words, it's an intellectual *style*, a modality, and not (only) a personal characteristic. In suggesting this I draw a little bit from Bruno Latour, who is certainly not a Marxist, and a bit more from Jean-Paul Sartre, who I'm not otherwise a tremendous fan of. But in Sartre's short book *The Problem of Method* - which Hall liked - there's a stimulating series of reflections about what it means to be a mediator and why Marxism in particular needs to be seen as a series of mediations rather than a propositional philosophy. And Hall exemplifies both that mode and that location brilliantly, mediating *within* Marxism - structuralism versus culturalism; economism versus ideologism; class and non-class phenomena relative to the cultural and ideological spheres - and *between* Marxism and other discourses, mediations that constitute ongoing zones of engagement. For Hall, of course, this meant ethnicity and race, cultural studies itself, feminism, psychoanalysis in various ways, post-Marxism in the form of Foucauldian thinking, and so on. None of these formations and interventions are 'Marxist' as such, in fact they can often be posed as anti-Marxist and not just non-Marxist; but Hall wanted them all to be part of the same universe of discourse and progressive horizon, to be as closely intertwined with Marxism as possible.

In sum: I wanted to illustrate from the selected texts, and bring out in the commentaries, that Hall was a peerless, dialectical (neo-)Marxist mediator; also to suggest that, in a strange kind of way, although he critiqued and revised and drew away somewhat from Marxism, Hall needed Marxism too. It gave him a kind of anchor, some consistent terms of reference, without which his notably pluralistic mediations might have risked slipping into mere eclecticism, with a loss of ultimate coherence and integrity.

Catherine: Thank you so much, Greg. I completely agree that Marxism did indeed do a lot for Stuart, and not only did he never abandon it as some kind of anchor, it also became increasingly important to him in the last years in the context of neoliberalism and his thinking around that. We'll now welcome Bruce Robbins to the discussion.

Bruce: Greg's description of Stuart Hall as a mediator seems to me spot on - like all the commentary in this brilliantly edited volume. But I want to put a slightly different spin on the idea of mediation. In fact, I'm going to do some of the upgrading that Greg just mentioned. I want to tug this idea of mediation gently in the direction of a concept that may seem played out, or closer to flattery than to serious analysis - Gramsci's concept of the organic intellectual.ⁱⁱⁱ

The obvious objection to describing Stuart Hall as an organic intellectual - aside from his own repudiation of the idea - is that what Gramsci had in mind was intellectuals thrown up by the working class and helping to organise both the class's consciousness and the activities of the political party that represented it. It's in this sense, I assume, that Stuart Hall says, speaking with his signature modesty about his work at the Birmingham Centre, 'We were organic intellectuals without any organic point of reference' - 'organic point of reference' meaning, I assume, class and party. In order to make the concept of the organic intellectual work under such different circumstances, the premise we would have to accept is that what defines the concept - relationship with, accountability to, a given political constituency - can be stretched beyond class and party so as to cover the diverse social collectivities that composed the new left. In other words, the non- and post-Marxist discourses that Greg sees Hall as mediating between. So, no assumption of a shared class, no assumption of a shared party - though you might indeed have both.

Mediation in the case of the collectivities that animated these discourses and movements was obviously a challenge. The idea of serving them as an organic intellectual is an even greater challenge. It would entail trying to discover or impose a political unity on collectivities that didn't just *happen* to be diverse - for many of them diversity or difference was arguably a principle of self-definition. This kind of mediation is a bigger job than trying to bring together the so called class fractions that were the potential components of the unified working class. In the context of race, gender, sexuality and so on, the very idea of political unity can no longer be taken for granted. As Hall says in the essay in the book on the Post-Colonial: 'Isn't the ubiquitous, the soul-searing lesson of our times the fact that the political binaries do not (any longer) - did they ever - either stabilise the field of political antagonism in any permanent way or render it transparently intelligible' (p295). It's the challenge posed by the multiplicity of the post-60s movements. If political antagonism can't be defined in binary terms, do you still have political antagonisms?' My point here is not

to give my blessing to the idea of Stuart Hall as the godfather of multiculturalism, but to be more precise about both the multiplicity of multiculturalism, and about the Marxism that is, after all, what we're here to discuss.

On the one hand, difference was not the exclusive defining principle of the 1960s movements. It was certainly not the defining principle of the anti-war movement, the anti-imperialist movement, the environmental movement; and - as comes out in this collection - even the movements associated with race, gender and sexuality were not committed in any absolutist way to identity, subjectivity or culture: this is why, when Hall expressed his impatience with those who'd like to replace an economic reductionism with an exclusive or overriding concern with identity, subjectivity or culture, as he does in the passage just quoted, he knew he had an audience. Where was he trying to take that audience? That's the point on which the concept of the organic intellectual adds something to the concept of mediation.

As Greg says, the idea of mediation may suggest asking everyone to compromise a little in the interest of peace and tranquillity, asking them to listen to everyone else, asking them to play nice. But what Hall means by mediator corresponds, more or less, to what Bruno Latour means by it: it does not mean an intermediary who takes the social and its problem fields as given - let's say takes identities as given. True mediators 'reconstitute the very concerns being addressed, in effect, they propose and co-produce a new social in and through their acts of problematisation and the network effects they trigger' (p342, 'Editor's discussion of the Part III writings'). In this sense, Latour says, mediators are game changers. One might also say, as Latour would not, that the work of mediation Stuart Hall did was the work of a Gramscian organic intellectual. It was doing something to the players and the identities, helping to create a collective self-consciousness, reconstituting them in order to prepare them to take power.

For Gramsci, an organic intellectual was defined by 'a capacity to be an organiser of society in general, including all its complex organisms of services right up to the state organism, because of the need to create the conditions most favourable to the expansion of their own class'.^{iv} The function to which such an intellectual aspired, in other words, was 'organising social hegemony and state domination'. The phrase 'state domination' is not sloppy or accidental. Gramsci's abstract description of the working class is 'any group that is developing toward dominance'. The phrase 'any group' may have been there only to avoid censorship - he couldn't say 'class'. But it also leaves the door open for us to shift the notion of the organic intellectual from class to the 1960s constituencies, including class. The problem is that most, if not all, of the 1960s constituencies did not see themselves as developing toward dominance. Dominance was what they suffered from, not what they were seeking. That's where Stuart Hall's Marxism comes in, in my view. For better or worse, his Marxism does not come in the form of an insistence that the other constituencies should follow the lead of the working class. And it does not come in as an insistence on economic determination in the last instance, though there are certainly places in this volume where that's what Hall seems to assert, and maybe rightly so. It comes in as the simple, if mainly unarticulated, proposition, that there must be a coalition, that the eventual goal of the coalition is to take power, and that in order for this to happen, no one can rest content with their own given identity, their own given subjectivity, their own given experience. There would have to be some reconstituting.

When Hall defends theory against E.P. Thompson, and in particular against Thompson's invocation of historical experience, I can't help feeling that behind Thompson's reliance on experience Hall is seeing all the present-day social collectivities that are putting a great deal of weight on *their* experience.^v If so, then theory would stand in for the necessary coerciveness, or, if you prefer, the impoliteness, not of Marxism as such, but of Marxism as the reminder that the goal of the project, however delayed, is taking power - something that can only be imagined at the eventual result of a successful coalition of collectivities that have no single antagonist and no pre-given form of unity. Bowing down to the sacredness of anyone's experience is inconsistent with the project of developing toward dominance.

The project of developing toward dominance also makes sense, retrospectively, of Hall's trademark concern with the state. The prospect of successfully taking over the state was, of course, never close enough to make the articulating of that goal seem like anything other than a bad joke. But as a long-term goal, the putting together of a coalition that would be capable of governing and capable of governing differently, seems a better way of understanding Hall's career than, say, his concern for culture, which has frequently sucked all the oxygen out of the discussion. About the state, there was no established Marxist orthodoxy in the name of which Hall could be dismissed as a shameless revisionist. There was controversy, as Greg points out, and he contributed meaningfully to it.

There was also controversy, maybe even more of it, on the other side of his mediating efforts. The philosopher who was most consistently affirmed by the new social movements was Foucault, who, as Greg says, refused to trace power back to any single organising instance such as the state. Whether you think of Foucault as anti-statism, as sinister and neoliberal, or as anarcho-libertarianism - which could also be seen as sinister - there is no doubt that his position was utterly alien to the project of developing toward domination. Which means, in effect, that Hall was fighting Foucault for the soul of the movement.

As this volume brings out, it was in wrestling with Nicos Poulantzas's theory of the state, especially what Poulantzas called authoritarian statism, that Stuart Hall came up with the alternative formula, authoritarian populism. I think he was fascinated by authoritarian populism - maybe there was even some excess in that fascination beyond his epoch-making insight into its extraordinary political success. If so, the obvious reason is that, like Gramsci, he thought the left could learn from the right's capacity to bring popular feeling into a new ruling coalition, riding it into state power. So, yes, the idea of taking state power and governing might have seemed to him grandiose, ruled out for the moment, both because it was too far from the immediate goals and concerns of the new social movements and because of the weakness of the organised working class, but I don't think he was ever not informed by that idea.

And under present circumstances I cannot help adding that even at non-revolutionary moments there is nothing reprehensibly reformist or revisionist about saying that we need the state to take on certain functions that private individuals and local collectivities cannot take on for themselves. One does not need the world historical incompetence of Donald Trump, and the hundreds of thousands of unnecessary deaths that resulted from it, to bring that point home. It's not just in the US that you have to

factor in the importance of the state to the anti-war movement - which was obliged to come to some understanding of military violence - or the importance of the state as an interlocutor for the women's movement and the civil rights movement, which were trying to get their constituencies protected by legislation. Do we really think this was a mistake? If not, then the fury over culture and culturalism fades somewhat into the background.

It's possible that everything I have been saying is shameless, special pleading for my own generation. Call it the 60s generation. What Stuart Hall called 'generational consciousness' is obviously not the soul prerogative of youth. At the same time, I'm consciously trying to balance Stuart Hall's powerful and uncompromising commitment to the present conjuncture - to what could be done and had to be done here and now - with his commitment to the historical long term, which is a signature move of Marx and of Marxism.

For Stuart Hall it mattered that patriarchy, racism and military violence all have non-capitalist sources, and pre-capitalist as well as capitalist trajectories. It's that long term as well as the generational short term that permitted him and permits us to entertain the unfashionable idea of progress - an idea that the new social movements have been reluctant to acknowledge. Stuart Hall ends the piece on Edward Thompson by focusing on 'the complex moment of 1968, a contradictory inheritance which has to be neither simply revived nor simply denigrated, but reckoned with'. As usual, I think he was too modest here. He was not merely reckoning with that inheritance but reconstituting it, teaching the movements of 1968 a Gramscian lesson. Getting the generation to acknowledge what he called, in a significant phrase, 'theoretical gains'. I think it's fair to say that not all the gains were purely theoretical.

Catherine: Thank you so much, Bruce. How pertinent your comments are to now and to the decades that have gone. We're now going hear from Angela. We look forward very much to what you have to say.

Angela: Re-reading the work which Greg has so meticulously gathered and so judiciously edited has been a great pleasure. One can see the threads of a 'complex unity' (a phrase favoured by Stuart) across the breadth of the work here, just as one can also see Stuart immersed in the process of working with and wrestling with Marx in a quite sensuous way, as a kind of intellectual craftsmanship. But I would also say that there is a sense of excitement which pervades the volume. There is a clear project that Stuart was constantly working on. And it was also risky work dedicating such time and energy to Marx's writings, in a context where such endeavours did not win friends in the academy. (I must say however I depart from Greg's emphasis on Stuart's engagement with Sartre, which I would say was fleeting. Rather I would suggest Stuart was looking, quite far and wide, for writing which would permit a fuller phenomenological engagement with everyday life and with questions of subjectivity after the various 'culturalist' dialogues with Hoggart, Williams and indeed E.P. Thompson. He then quite quickly shifted in favour of European structuralism, language and the politics of meaning.)

One of the first points I was thinking about was who were Stuart's interlocutors within the left in the early 1970s when he was preparing the first article in this volume. What was the constituency for this particular body of work? Was it the *New*

Left Review crowd still? Was it his colleagues in the anti-imperialist movement? Or was it just himself and some students and a few academic scholars here and there across the world? It was different with the works that make up the middle section of the new volume. *Resistance through Rituals* and *Policing the Crisis*, when they were first published, had an immediate readership within what were seen as exciting new debates in sociology including the so-called New Criminology. Stanley Cohen in the UK had published his very well-known work *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, and there was also, of course, the long tradition in youth cultural studies of the American Chicago School of Sociology.

What made *Policing the Crisis* and *Resistance Through Rituals* (which were joint-authored within the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies) distinctive, was that both books foregrounded Stuart's insistence on a study of the historical conjuncture, something that did not go down well in sociology at the time. I remember this quite distinctly, the charge being that attempting some sort of historical analysis meant that the work could not be considered as properly sociological. But for the CCCS writers there was a need to look more widely over the years and to try and grasp something of the 'social totality'. *Policing the Crisis* paved the way for Hall's subsequent work on Thatcherism, and the scale of the study allowed him the space to rehearse a full range of concepts. In each of these studies, the authors (myself included, re *Resistance through Rituals*) introduced a specifically Marxist vocabulary, including elements of continental Marxism in the form of Althusser's theory of ideology and, of course, Gramsci's notion of hegemony.

Greg's choice of chapter from *Policing The Crisis* 'Black crime, black proletariat' is laudable for the reason that here we see Stuart reflect on the position of black unemployed youth in the UK in the 1970s within a neo-Marxist historical frame which refutes their being understood as simply a 'reserve army of labour' at capital's disposal and hence part of the lumpenproletariat, pulled in when capital might have some need for them and expelled when no longer needed. Hall writes:

The 'wage-less' are not to be equated with the traditional disorganised and undisciplined 'lumpenproletariat'. This false identification arises only because the black working class is understood exclusively in relation to British capital. But, in fact, black labour can only be adequately understood, historically, if it is also seen as a class which has already developed in the Caribbean - vis-à-vis 'colonial' forms of capital - as a cohesive social force. In the colonial setting 'wage-lessness' was one of its key strategies. It is not surprising that this wage-less sector has reconstructed in the metropolitan 'colony' a supporting institutional network and culture.

Hall provides a historical gloss on the importance of a cultural politics of race and resistance on its own terms. And then in a move I found surprising, Hall digresses to reflect further on the *Race Today* writing and its engagement with the autonomist strand of Italian Marxism. Actually this is surprising only for reasons of my own amnesia. I had entirely forgotten that at Birmingham in the mid to late 1970s (albeit in this instance percolated through debates in the journal *Race Today*) there had been animated discussion about this writing, particularly for its emphasis on work, labour and industrial action. The Italians had drawn on Volume 3 of *Capital* to develop a fuller understanding of capitalism's post-war expansiveness across so many

institutions. Hall explains how this brought to attention the idea of ‘reproduction’,⁰ with ‘the transformation of the whole of society into a sort of “social factory” for capital’. This ‘massive concentration of capital’ which is smoothed over and ‘harmonised’ by the state leads to a mass proletarianization effect and the degradation of labour. This envisages popular alliances and forms of class and race struggles beyond the factory floor. Stuart shows how the idea of the recomposition of the working class, especially as understood with reference to the black working class in 1970s Britain, can portend new forms of resistance. Hall is especially prescient here, suggesting that there has been a progressive integration of labour into low skill jobs such that the boundaries between unemployment and ‘hustling’ almost break down.

This is of course more fully developed in his later writing on Thatcherism, but he hints early on that this situation (the degradation of labour) prompted Capital to ramp up the ideological work being undertaken ‘in the superstructures’ to disguise the pervasiveness of low skill work, and instead to decoratively re-brand and upskill such work with a constellation of aspirational and lifestyle values, especially at that point where women fully enter and remain in the labour market. (We might think about what used to be called pink collar work.) Back in the late 1970s Hall is envisaging a breaking down of the boundaries between unemployment, under-employment, zero hours jobs etc. He uses the word proletarianization (as does Maurizio Lazzarato writing on ‘immaterial labour’ many years later), which points to a potential for alliances and new forms of resistance, and there were indeed glimmers of this in the punk-n-reggae youth cultures of the 1980s including Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League.

Stuart was at the forefront of a group of thinkers (often in dialogue with Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe) who were developing a neoMarxism, in his case without grandiosity, and which later into the 1980s and 1990s became a Marxism ‘without guarantees’ which also insisted on moving away from meta-categories of political economy to look forensically downwards to the politics of language and the vernacular of everyday life. It was this that allowed Hall later to warn the left about the ways in which the working class was being successfully wooed by the right. His methodologies relied on an open-ended mode of inquiry, including a non-directive, self-questioning, de-centred, non-authorial, template for future work and study. In short, a kind of ‘écriture’ which has Marxism at its centre but which pulls into play and foregrounds a post-structuralist sensibility, with no absolute beginnings, no linear narratives and no tight conclusions, and a search for a theoretical mode which gives depth and shape to empirical details and history. In many ways his distinctive post-structuralist Marxism is more fully displayed in the later writings published in *Marxism Today*, where he in effect invented what is nowadays referred to by the new and alt right (we can assume Steve Bannon read and took notes from Hall) as ‘cultural Marxism’. This too was among his major achievements.

I want to conclude, then, by pointing to the power of ideology - the way Hall’s writing from the mid-1970s engages with the right’s deployment of so many ideological strands in the form of popular vernacular, and how these are organised, orchestrated, assembled and reassembled in determinate ways, while at the same time they also seem to be loose and free-floating. Analysing the orchestration of these elements - which have accumulated over time so that they become sedimented as common sense - has helped us to understand the popular hegemony of the right over the decades. In

the *Aftermath of Feminism*, published in 2008, I very consciously adopt a kind of Hallian conjunctural analysis, looking at the relationship between the New Labour government in the decade 1997 to 2007 and the thematics of that time as genres in popular culture - where young women were being brought forward as subjects of 'female success' but on the grounds that feminism had to be repudiated. Tony Blair reportedly could not abide the 'f word'.

In my most recent book (*Feminism and the Politics of Resilience*, published in 2020) I turned to Hall's phrase which he reclaimed from the title of a right-wing pamphlet from the 1980s, i.e. the slogan 'breaking the spell of the welfare state'. Hall then used it as an analytic for decoding some of the key elements of the Thatcher agenda. I use it to understand the media attacks on welfare through the idea of poverty-shaming. Then shortly before his death in his writing on neoliberalism, Hall referred to the use of the vernacular by George Osborne, then the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to further turn the tide against the welfare society by describing recipients as 'sleeping off a life on benefits'.

My final point this evening is to slightly challenge Greg's comment at the very end of the volume, where he refers to Stuart, with characteristic modesty, conceding some ground in reflecting that he and others like him ought perhaps to have paid more attention to the economic. He was maybe referring to the attacks from various quarters arguing that cultural studies had been 'merely cultural'. Stuart reflects and thinks, 'Well, maybe we should have spent more time with the economic'. But, at the same time, when Stuart took part in Isaac Julien's film *Kapital* in 2013, he absolutely took a stand against David Harvey, to a huge sigh of relief on my own part and many in the audience. Harvey said that we should have stuck to his particular kind of economistic Marxism all the way along, and Stuart opposed that in a characteristically polite and eloquent way. So I would suggest that we might benefit also from looking at Isaac Julien's *Kapital*.

Catherine: Thank you Angela. We turn now to our final speaker, Brett St Louis.

Brett: The structure of what I want to do in my fifteen minutes is to first of all briefly sketch two of the main issues that jump out at me in relation to this volume, and then to offer some remarks that seek to bring these points together, and to say something about their significance to our present moment.

The first of the two main themes I want to discuss concerns the methodology of theory - the methodology of theory in the sense of theory in its social, political, cultural and critical formulations. I want to say something about the nuanced valances of understanding the social in its complexity that is crucial in relation to this volume.

Then I want to say something about what I see as an implicit - perhaps more implicit than explicit - humanistic and ethical intervention at play within this volume. One of the things that it is possible to see, to read, in this collection, is the way in which it pulls together various analytical commitments and practical concerns in relation to the deprivations and affirmative potential of human social lives. I think that there's a humanistic and ethical intervention running throughout the volume that's worth considering.

I also want to offer a few personal framing comments, and to say that my own intellectual preoccupations and concerns are largely focused on sociological questions of racialisation and racism, and on these questions as they emerge within and across given social situations. It seems to me obvious that Hall's work is important in this regard, and indeed, as Greg points out in his introduction to the book, the distinction sometimes suggested between Hall's 'earlier' Marxist work and the later work on ethnicity, on representation, on cultural politics, is somewhat of a misunderstanding: the concerns with ethnicity, with representation, with cultural politics, in their elegant critical theoretical formulations, cannot be considered or dismissed as idealist theoretical abstractions, even when one takes into account their occasional psychoanalytic flavour. Rather, we can see them as empirically informed, and with a material referent - and I'll say more about this shortly. It's in that sense, then, that Hall's Marxism constitutes an ongoing thread in his work, albeit one that takes different forms at different times.

I'd like to also agree about the wonderful work that Greg has done, not just in collecting these chapters together but also in the commentary that he offers. One of the important aspects of Greg's commentary is that it situates Hall's work within its formative context in a way that is suggestive of its continued relevance and its applicability - though I don't mean applicability in the literal sense of utility, but more in terms of a style of thought and a style of engagement. And this question of thought and engagement is what I want to focus my brief observations on, particularly in relation to what Greg has characterised as Hall as mediating Marxism.

So first I'll say a few words on the methodology of theory, and the interface between the social, political, cultural and critical dimensions of theory. I want to look at two examples, starting with the 'Subcultures, cultures, and class' chapter, an extract from *Resistance through Rituals*. What we see in that chapter is an attention to the distinctiveness of youth culture and the cultural aspects of youth. Youth is characterised as emergent within a given social moment and relations; and it is understood as being reflective of a distinction between dominant and subordinate social classes. There's this sense of youth as subject to hegemony and struggle over cultural power. And subcultures are understood as emergent, and in a certain sense as solutions to problematic social class experience; and as being distinct from, and yet linked to, 'parent cultures'. And there is that key idea of subcultures as formed through the activities of groups - their rituals, the ways in which they occupy space, their embodied and expressive styles, modes of relations, and so on. In short, what we have here is the foregrounding of social context, of social relations, social interests, social agendas, social processes.

To move on to a different example, let's look at the excerpt taken from *Policing the Crisis*, the 'Black crime, black proletariat' chapter, which Angela also discussed. And this chapter, for me, is notable in terms of the thoroughgoing discussion that it offers of the debate over the position of the 'criminal' classes in relation to labour, largely in terms of the extent to which they might be understood as outside of, and without, class consciousness; it discusses the argument that the lumpenproletariat could possibly constitute a counterrevolutionary force, that they have been incorporated by capitalism; and the issue of the criminalised sector of the social class, as well as how that corresponds to both the waged and the unwaged members of the black labour force. And this question is then used to stage a distinction between, and discuss the

relationship between, a sectoral (black and antiracist) struggle perspective, and a social-class (that is, working class, workerist and class conscious) struggle perspective.

What I see here, in terms of the methodology of theory, is Hall undertaking a balancing act, combining commitments to both analytic and practical observation, combining the explanatory and the critical, being prescriptive but also seeking accord and consensus building, if that's at all possible. And there is a sense also of being cautious of the dangers of reductivism, scientism, historicism, obscurantist idealism but also wary of sense, experiential, impressionism, intuitive speculation - what might be characterised in some quarters as mysticism. So, one of the key things that's happening in this work is Hall addressing the problem, assuming the challenge, of conceptualisation regarding social description.

I want to say a little something about what I understand to be a humanistic and ethical intervention - and I think sometimes, within debates seeking to understand race, ethnicity, racism, within a Marxist framework, this kind of humanistic and ethical intervention can be overlooked. One of the things that is clear, to me at least, is that Hall's work is populated by people, by subjects, by actors, so there's a concern with agents, a concern for their lives, which are impacted by economic, social and cultural forces. While this is not a soft moralism, for me there's nonetheless an underlying sense of human immiseration and resistance animating Hall's concerns and works, and as such there's a humanistic undercurrent and ethical thrust. So, if we think of the 'Subcultures, cultures, and class' chapter, there's this sense of subcultures taking shape through collective activity, and that there are these key areas of education, work, leisure, which give rise to the generational specificity of youth subcultures. So in terms of generational consciousness, a wonderful way in which Hall phrased this is to say that 'Youth felt, and experienced itself, as different'.

So, there's this humanistic undercurrent and ethical thrust, and within 'Black crime, black proletariat', we have a rehearsal of the significance of Marx's hierarchy of labour powers but done in relation to black youth, and this discussion is framed within a debate over, on the one hand, their self-activity, and on the other hand, their subjugation. But notably here, black youth are not simply a social category or a process in relation to labour: they are also agents expressing themselves, or having that capacity actively suppressed. It's this understanding of them as agents, with their own self-activity, or collective activity, that demands attention.

For my last few points, I want to try to draw this together, and it seems to me that there are two key issues here. First is the careful and detailed exposition that Hall offers, that he's acutely appreciative of authorial context and intent. Second, that there's a measured and balanced approach, giving disparate positions what we might characterise as a 'fair hearing', and I think this is really important, that the theoretical work undertaken by Hall engages in the question of how to conceptualise groups, not as empirical and demographic facts, or as normative and nominalist, but with a regard for formative complexity, and it goes beyond simply being an intellectual ambition, it is something that is achieved through the work. So there's a constant attention to how groups emerge and exist within given social contexts and relations, and consideration of the impacts of those groups' individual and collective experiences of those social

contexts and relations, as well as how groups respond, and their own individual actions.

And I'm also struck then, lastly, by the issue of debate and tone, and this, I think, is crucial in terms of the point about Hall's measured and balanced approach, giving disparate positions a fair hearing.

That 'Black crime, black proletariat' piece is deeply significant - in that chapter Hall very carefully rehearses the distinction between the *Race Today* and *Black Liberator* positions. The *Race Today* position focused around the refusal to work, while the *Black Liberator* position focused on the question of the reserve army of labour as super-exploited, as an underclass. But both of these positions are presented fairly. They're presented in a nuanced and balanced manner, and I think this is an important commitment and undertaking. Angela made the point about the open and generous character of Hall's work, and its being in a non-didactic formulation that serves as an invitation, and I think that's a crucial point that I would also want to take away here. That this is something we can reflect on in relation to our own approach - and when I say 'our', I mean progressive, leftist political culture, which can be deeply adversarial and antagonistic. To say this isn't to preclude discussion and debate, but rather to consider the register of our discourse and communication, and I think this is also part of the discourse of mediation that Greg refers to: how Hall's mediation brings together the analytical, practical and polemical commitments of left politics.

Panel discussion

Gregor: All three speakers have made me think that I haven't brought out enough that Stuart's investment in the cultural is not simply an academic, or a cultural studies priority. It is a political project, and I'm wondering if I brought that out enough. After all, one of the chapters in the book is a response to Bob Jessop and colleagues' arguments about ideologism, which have been more or less repeated in a recent essay by Perry Anderson in *New Left Review* called 'Heirs of Gramsci'. In which Hall is 4th on a list of 4, really, in terms of getting all the ticks. Whereas I think what you've all brought out, in different ways, that that's really not right. Hall's investment in culture is deeply political, including in the way that Brett suggests, in his notion of group life, and humanist self-constitution, which goes beyond class.

That's why Hall's not an orthodox Marxist. That these are political cultural forms of bringing things into existence. In my commentary I try to draw attention to Sartre's idea that part of Marxism, should be, not just respecting, but bringing to light, the profundity of the lived as a political impulse. And Hall had that in bags, and all three colleagues here have brought that out very nicely.

There's so much to talk about, I just wanted to say about method, which Brett and Angela particularly touched upon. And Angela's mentioned this before in a very stimulating way in her chapter on Hall, in my view the best book on cultural studies, where she talks about the importance, in general, as well as the importance to Hall, of a certain kind of creative messiness. Not bringing things to a rounded, validity-seeking coherence, but leaving some strands open, partly because who the hell can solve everything in the head? Stuart was very clear that he didn't, but no-one else can

either. So that's another invitation for everyone reading him to join in the project of keeping debate open.

And I think one self-criticism in the book is when I discuss Hall's reading of the 1857 introduction, I'm so fascinated by the intellectual and philosophical multiplicity and tensions in it, that I don't think I actually simply say what a marvellous, creative, ongoing, unfinished thing it is, and it's great partly because of that. He's got this marvellous ability to come back at the end and round things off, remind us of what he's done and what he's not done. But there is something constitutively open about his thinking. And I think my commentators here have reminded me of a few things, so maybe I didn't bring that out quite well enough.

Angela: I also wanted to ask you about what I saw as perhaps a slight glossing-over in the text of issues that I remember, or think of, as being formative on Stuart's work, for example, his debates with Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. I thought - but you seem to disagree - that their book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* was enormously influential on the way that Stuart's path through neo-Marxism developed - through the chains of equivalence, through alliances, coalitions, through contingency.^{vi} But you suggest in your notes that Stuart was actually much more influenced by the earlier work of Ernesto and Chantal.

Gregor: Yes, that's really interesting. When I revisited some of the work, I was surprised by how firmly Stuart says I want the early stuff, and I don't really want the later stuff so much. Which was not my perception. I thought the later stuff, or the mid-1980s, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* influenced and troubled him quite profoundly, but he seems to just hold the line a bit, in terms of his own recounting of it, rather more firmly than I remember. And of course, we all have our views on these things, and I've already included quite a lot of commentary in there, and a few little critical comments of my own. Because you know, the great classics - which Hall now is - should never be simply admired, and left at that. But I couldn't really go into it too much, because if I did there would be too much of me in the book. But I take your point, and I agree with it as well.

Catherine: I think, Angela, you're right about the chain of equivalences. Stuart really used that in his analysis in *The Fateful Triangle*, which of course wasn't published until much, much, later than the time when the talks were given.^{vii} It was very important to him in his analysis of how race works. And it's interesting that these things he wrote were then published decades later - of course one of the reasons that happened was that he never wanted it to be complete, he never thought it was finished, he was always revising. So, Greg, you say when you went back you found that he was clear on this, but on another occasion he might not have been, and he might have said something different about Laclau and Mouffe.

This is part of what all of you are talking about - the openness, the conviction that he would never have finished, that he'd never have it all right, and nobody else would have it all right either. That the whole point is to be engaged in critical dialogue. That's what's valuable, that's what's important.

I agree with Bruce that the work was about 'how might we ever win power?' - which was always something far off in the future, as it is for us now. But that has to be the

question: how are coalitions going to be made, how are alliances going to happen? Once you no longer have any certainty about class, how is that going to change? How is the new common sense to be secured? And I think that's the question that always underpinned what he was thinking about.

Questions from the audience

In Hall's work in the 1970s and 1980s, did he fundamentally change his reading of Marx via Gramsci, alongside his reading of race and blackness? And I ask this deliberately to think across this wonderful volume, and the volume on Hall and Race?^{viii}

Catherine: I'd like to say something on this. One of the points that Paul Gilroy and Ruth Gilmore Wilson make so central to their volume is a refutation of the idea that Stuart wasn't thinking about race until the 1980s, which of course, is absolutely not true. He was thinking about race from the moment he was born, when he experienced what it was to be in a colonial family, and what it was to be a colonial subject in Jamaica. And he wrote about it in different ways, from that moment onwards, and some of the writing that hasn't appeared anywhere yet is his writing when was in Oxford. His fiction, his poetry. A lot of it was about race. So, it's there as part of what he's thinking about, from the very beginning, and I think it's very important to know that, and to see how the particular kind of turn to questions of race and ethnicity in the 1980s is, of course, in response to what was happening in Britain, and the politics of race in Britain at the time.

Gregor: I think that's true, and you can see it in the chapter that others have highlighted, taken from *Policing the Crisis*, 'Black crime, black proletariat'. Retrospectively, I was bowled over by the fact that Stuart is not just, as it were, adding a dimension of black politics to an underlying Marxist analysis. He's transforming the categories themselves, as Brett brought out, in terms of wage labour, wagelessness, and the politics of that. There's a lot of reasoning going on in that essay that's giving a different reading of the economic categories, such that it becomes much more culturally open to the politics of race, and the politics of gender. There's a lot in it on the categories of production and reproduction. And Hall didn't just make those arguments up on the spot, they must have been with him a long time, and he finally found a way of articulating all those dimensions. It's just a terrific piece in that regard. But he didn't then make a big deal of that. He didn't then say, 'And by the way, don't you see what I'm doing, I'm actually transforming, extending, modifying and, in a way, critiquing Marxist economic categories'. Why? Well, because he's never been a polemicist for the sake of it. He's keeping all the relevant political audiences together under one space.

Catherine: One of the reasons that Gramsci was so important to Stuart was Gramsci's analysis of the South, and the way in which that brought up a whole set of different questions about region and regional culture, which then opened up Marxism in a different way, and gave him other kinds of access to thinking with different categories.

Can Brett say a little more about the emotional and relational nature of Hall's mediating the complexity of a hostile British post-war society?

Brett: I'd like to say something in relation to that but combine it with another audience question: *I'd love to hear a reflection on how Hall might've turned to this moment in time, seeing Covid as a conjuncture that might be a point for the left to change the conversations, specifically in terms of neoliberal economics.*

One of the things I have been trying to think through in relation to Covid-19 is ethnicity and risk, and this offers us a useful illustrative example of some of the key interventions that are staged in this volume. One of the issues that is really coming out is that we are seeing the central issue of where and how people live and work. Even when we think we're talking about race - which we are - we're also talking about how people live, how people labour. A report from the Runnymede Trust, *Overexposed and Under-protected: the devastating impact of COVID-19 on black and minority ethnic communities in Great Britain*, published in August 2020, details how people from UK black and minority ethnic populations are more likely to work outside of home, to use public transport, to be in key-worker roles, to have poor access to PPE; and to be more likely to live in overcrowded, intergenerational homes, making it harder for them to shield, harder for them to self-isolate. So, in terms of the social conceptualisation of Covid-19, ethnicity and risk, we have seen that ethnicity is a key marker of Covid-19 risk, but it's not a causal determinant in and of itself.

But at the same time - and this is where it links to the question about the emotional and relational nature of Hall's writing - it reminds us that when we are thinking about the experience of risk, it is an *experience*, it is felt by individuals, by groups and by communities. We might consider these risks as embodied, but they also involve multiple factors. And another point here is that the Public Health England report of June 2020, *Disparities in the risk and outcomes of Covid-19*, pointed out that black, minority ethnic, people reported low levels of satisfaction with their experiences of healthcare provision.

So, that account of the experiential, and emotional, understanding of risk is as important as the social context within which people live and work. And the bringing together of these different facets of social, individual and collective life comes through in many of the analytical and practical commitments that are staged within the book.

Angela: One of the things that I found interesting in Greg's commentaries was his reference to Stuart finding Raymond Williams's concept of 'structure of feeling' unsatisfactory, perhaps because of wanting to get the balance right between structuralism and culturalism. I wondered about that - in the light, for example, of feminist theories of affect, and the attention given to emotion within more recent cultural studies, as in the work of the late Lauren Berlant. So I wondered, Brett, if there was more that you would like to say about feeling and emotion in Stuart's Marxism?

Brett: In some debates emotion and feeling are seen as something that is incompatible with theory, as irrelevant. But thinking back to those responses from interviewees in the Public Health England report - these are people's stories, they are accounts of experiences. They aren't simply woolly and intuitive impressions. And these experiences have an impact on the decisions people make in relation to how they access healthcare, and how they treat public health advice. That's what's

important, and that's why there's an ethical aspect here, insofar as it's not the story, or the narrative, in itself, that is significant or meaningful; it's its political and social reference. It is not a question of wanting to validate any kind of intuitive, sense-experience commentary. Something outside of the experience, outside of the account, has to have some kind of political and social relevance.

Gregor: Angela and Brett are right that Stuart does later move away from an Althusserian dismissal of experience as a dubious, empiricist, resort, compared with the higher realms of correct theory, etc. But then, later on again, his critique of Williams takes a slightly different turn. If experience is seen as a holistic thing - if people are 'Bespeaking' their worlds, where the worlds seem to have a kind of precious and perhaps even inviolable meaning-making status - then that is something we've got to be careful about. There's an aspect of Williams's resort to 'structure of feeling' that Stuart later sees as validating a rather narrow, parochial fight - British or Welsh culture. So, either way, you can't go all the way with affect, because of the dangers of a purely self-reaffirming notion of one's identity.

And yet, of course, you're entirely right, Brett, Stuart's humanistic sensibility, and his sense of what Sartre called 'the profundity of the lived', meant that he never bought into a hard-nosed Marxism of the 'if it's not class experience, what use is it?' kind. He has to be sensitive to the power and the potential of transformative agency, which if it lacks an affect dimension, goes nowhere.

An essential question for Marxism in the twenty-first century has been how to reconcile the question of ecology with the ongoing struggle for social and political emancipation. A pivotal moment in Stuart's own political engagement was an engagement with an environmental movement, namely, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. How can we use Stuart's thought for theorising the current eco-social impasse?

Catherine: I would immediately recommend a book by Mark Harvey that's coming out at the end of next month, which is on the climate emergency and which is absolutely about the relation between the social, the ecological and the climate.^{ix} The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament was certainly a huge commitment of Stuart's, for many years. And he kept me waiting for many hours while he attended long, and difficult, and dialogic, meetings of the committee of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. And it was a critical moment of politicisation for many people of my generation certainly. But that doesn't really speak to this moment. Can any of you comment on that?

Angela: I would suggest that we can fruitfully re-read Stuart's work from the viewpoint of the politics of contemporary protests and activism, and his attention to the intersections and alliances that emerge across different social movements, in ways that can be contingent, but can also be expansive. We're living in an incredibly interesting moment of new and diverse forums of struggle and activism, including, for example, the new feminist politics from the global south, which has had very different perspectives on issues such as violence against women, femicide and neoliberalism from those, say, of traditional feminists in the global north. I think Stuart would absolutely be interested in that. We're all the time learning from diverse and different

experiences, from across the globe. And obviously the climate movement is one of the best examples of that.

Bruce: The environmental question is a really good one to raise at this point, because it's the point that all the movements feel they have to be committed to, and this is a movement where different movements are exploring their commitments to other movements. I have been very moved for example by the way Black Lives Matter in the US came out very strongly in favour of Palestinians. I don't think that ever would have happened in the same way before. In a sense, it's a very Stuart Hall moment, because the movements are communicating with each other, and passionately so, in ways that he must be smiling upon as he looks down from the heaven we don't believe in.

Gregor: I think something to hang onto is that, if Hall had a complex Marxism back in the 1970s, it would have been bound to have been even more super-complex today, when what we've called the zones of mediation between Marxism and non-Marxism, different angles of politically important things, have become compounded. And his underlying, very simple message is, in some way or another, that these things *are* all connected, and we should never give up the integrative pluralism of political thinking. The great danger is fragmented pluralism, where the politics of difference, wherever the differences are, leads to political de-alignment, rather than to what Angela's called coalitional unity. No matter how complex the world got - and perhaps, like most of us, he didn't feel that he had the answer to it - the project of integrative, progressive pluralism would, I think, be one his fundamental emphases.

Catherine: I think that seems a really good thought to end on. It refers back to different aspects of what all of you have said, very helpfully. And that sense of the connections that make up the whole - we don't understand it in a simple way, it's extremely complex, but the struggle to try and make the connections between one arena and another, one side and another, one movement and another, has to be the political project for all of us.

This article is an edited and abridged version of a discussion organised by the Stuart Hall Foundation in partnership with Duke University Press.

Catherine Hall is Emerita Professor of History and Chair of the Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery, University College London. She has published extensively on questions of race, gender and empire. She is co-editor (with Bill Schwarz) of the Duke University Press series of specialist collections of Stuart Hall's work.

Gregor McLennan is Professor of Sociology at the University of Bristol. He was a graduate student in the 1970s at the Centre of Contemporary Studies in Birmingham, and was a close colleague of Stuart's at the Open University through the 1980s and early 1990s. He is the author of several books on Marxism, pluralism and social theory, and is editor of the Selected Writings of Stuart Hall on Marxism.

Bruce Robbins is Old Dominion Foundation Professor of the Humanities at Columbia University, and he previously taught at the universities of Geneva, Lausanne and Rutgers. His most recent books are *The Beneficiary*, published by

Duke, and *Cosmopolitanism*, co-edited with Paulo Horta. He's also the director of two documentaries, *Some of My Best Friends are Zionists* and *What Kind of Jew is Shlomo Sand?*.

Angela McRobbie is professor of cultural studies at Coventry University and a emeritus professor at Goldsmiths University of London. She studied, as Greg did, at the Birmingham Centre in the mid-1970s, and her research on girls' magazines was widely seen as path breaking. Her most recent books include, *Be Creative: Making a Living in the New Cultural Industries*, and *Feminism and the Politics of Resilience*.

Brett St Louis is senior lecturer in sociology at Goldsmiths, University of London, having previously been lecturer in sociology at Bristol University and assistant professor in ethnic studies at the University of California, San Diego. He is the author of *C.L.R. James' Critique of Modernity: Race, Politics and Poetics* (2007) and is currently completing a book on racial eliminativism that develops a critical genealogy and analysis of post-racial thought.

Notes

ⁱ Stuart Hall, *Selected Writings on Marxism*, edited by Greg McLennan, Duke University Press 2021: [open access introduction by Gregor McLennan](#).

ⁱⁱ The series also includes: *Cultural Studies 1983*, edited by Lawrence Grossberg and Jennifer Slack (2016); *Selected Political Writings*, copublication with Lawrence & Wishart (2017); *Essential Essays* (two-volume set) (2018), edited by David Morley; *Selected Writings on Race and Difference* (2021), edited by Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Writings on Media* (2021), edited by Charlotte Brunsdon.

ⁱⁱⁱ For more on Gramsci's conception of intellectuals, including organic intellectuals, see David Forgacs (ed), *The Antonio Gramsci Reader*, L&W 1988, pp300-301.

^{iv} Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed and trans Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, L&W 1971, pp5-6.

^v In chapter 9, 'In Defence of Theory'.

^{vi} Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, Verso 1985, re-issued 2013.

^{vii} Stuart Hall, *The Fateful Triangle, Race Ethnicity, Nation*, edited by Kobena Mercer, Harvard University Press 2017.

^{viii} See note 2 for details.

^{ix} Mark Harvey, *Climate Emergency. How societies create the crisis*, Emerald Bingley 2021.