

An interview with Stuart Hall, December 2007

COLIN MACCABE Stuart, I'd like to start in 1959, the year of *Critical Quarterly's* beginnings. Where were you? How did you see yourself? What were you professionally and what did you think you were doing at that moment?

STUART HALL It was still a kind of transitional time for me in two senses. I hadn't quite resolved the question of whether I was going to go back home or not. Though, looking back now, that decision was taken much earlier on. But I was still in the moment of illusion that it might be different. And professionally I was teaching, of course, and making my living by teaching, first of all, secondary school and adult education. These were not full-time professions. I didn't go to Birmingham to start the Centre for Cultural Studies with Richard Hoggart until sixty-four. So I was principally editing *Universities and Left Review* and then *New Left Review*. Professionally I was an editor of a political journal, which made me no money, and I was a secondary school teacher, which paid me money but couldn't nourish the mind or the politics.

CM And the secondary school teacher was teaching English literature?

SH Oh, Colin, it was everything. I taught English and mathematics, though I could hardly add up. I taught geography. I remember a point at which the geography master came in and pointed out gently to me that my diagram on the board managed to reverse the north-east and the south-west trades. But still I persevered with my geography. I was, of course, teaching literature and I was teaching swimming. I had to take these boys from Kennington to the public baths, and I remember I was required to teach lifesaving, something I'd never done in my life, and I thought, 'I'm going to drown these boys'. So before I took them to the baths, I took them onto the hall floor upstairs. And while I read the

book of words on lifesaving, they practised on dry land. And eventually I did have to go to the swimming baths and nobody drowned; indeed, one of my teams went on to win a swimming cup. Anyhow, this was a secondary-modern school and it was a very interesting period for me because one of the things that happened in that period was that I got involved in Notting Hill at the time of the riots. I was travelling from school in the afternoon to Soho to edit the journal at half past four. And suddenly I noticed that the kids from our school, who were south-London kids, destined to work in the print because their fathers worked in the print, but who hadn't yet ever been north of the Thames, were suddenly on the tube with me going north, and I said, 'What are you doing here? Where are you going?' 'Over to the other side, sir.' And I asked, 'What's going on?', to which their answer was 'trouble, trouble'. They were going with lots of other kids to Ladbroke Grove to stand in front of the pubs to barrack mainly black women coming out of the tube station and going back home to places like Powis Terrace. It was an incredible sight, with the kids jeering outside the open pub doors and their father inside egging them on. So I got involved in a tenants' association and that was sort of an extension of new left politics.

CM And you'd got there from Oxford and a degree in English.

SH Yes, got there from Oxford. I went to Oxford in 1951. I stayed on until 1957 to do graduate work. I'm still putatively writing my thesis on Henry James and the international theme in the novel. So I did graduate work, but really my graduate work was my involvement in politics (we started *Universities and Left Review* which was kind of a forerunner of *New Left Review*) and my growing interest in questions of culture. I was trying to understand what my relationship was to Jamaican culture and what Jamaican culture was about because, basically, I'd left it behind, and then it came to meet me. It came on *The Windrush* and there it was in Paddington. So I thought, 'This is not a question you can suspend. You'd better understand what your relationship is, and it had always been a very troubled relationship, and you'd better understand what this culture's like and what's going to happen to it in this new diasporic situation.' And that is really the beginning of cultural studies for me. I went to Rhodes House Library in Oxford and read about slavery and the debate about African retention and Brazil et cetera. So that's when I really began to be interested in culture generally, though not so much Western European culture or English culture, which is later and more directly linked to the development of cultural studies.

CM And have you just left English literature behind now?

SH Well, I decided I really didn't want to teach English literature. And in the period after I graduated, 1954 to 1958 or 1959, I was much more involved in politics. I was engaged in an argument with the Communist Party and the Marxists in Oxford, with Raphael Samuel, Peter Sedgwick, Gabriel Pearson, et cetera. I tried to carve out a little path of my own.

CM Can we examine that little path? When you came over in 1951 were you already in debate with the Communist Party.

SH I came as an anti-colonial student, as it were. Straight from school as a Rhodes scholar, I'd not been to university before. So I came at 18½ or 19 with a passionate commitment to Jamaican independence and to anti-colonialism in general. But I didn't know very much about politics. And I'd not been very deeply engaged in Jamaican politics because of my family culture, which was brown and middle-class. My parents basically thought that the end of the empire was the end of the world. So though my heart was elsewhere, I didn't have a kind of direct experience. I had a very troubled relationship with what I would think of as Jamaican culture at that point in time, Jamaican politics, the rise of the nationalist movement and so on, before and after the war.

CM So, in your sixth form, although you identified yourself as anti-colonialist and pro Jamaican independence, you weren't heavily involved in politics.

SH No, I wasn't heavily involved in politics then. I had actually read some Lenin, because in the sixth form I did A levels twice. I wanted a scholarship to go abroad and, because you had to be a certain age to get a scholarship, I took A levels a second time. And the second time, you were able to do a thing called modern history. But there were no textbooks. There was a wonderful English master who had come with the English Corinthians football team and stayed to teach us history. And he sort of tried to inoculate us against the Russian Revolution. So every boy said, 'Got to read about what's actually going on.' We got some British Council pamphlets on Lenin and Trotsky and the Russian Revolution. So I began to read a bit then. I didn't know much Marx. And, for a time when I came to Britain, I was involved very much in West Indian politics, the West Indian society in Oxford et cetera. So it's not until my graduate period that I really read some Marx. And I remember my first engagement: I offered to do a paper on class for

a Communist Party meeting which developed into an argument with Raphael Samuel about the changing nature of class.

If you asked me about what interested me at that time I'd say that one very important interest was in the Labour movement, in working-class politics in England, which I was just learning about, which I had no direct experience of at first hand. But I understood that in that period, certainly, change depended upon a politics, which engaged my sentiments about oppression and poverty instinctively. So I was on the left in that sense. But critically on the left, in relation to arguments with Marx, really, or some aspects of Marx. I was never an economic reductionist, never. I was never a communist, because I thought in a Stalinist-type society I would be among the first to be sent to Siberia. I never had a longing for the Soviet Union; I couldn't join a party that was blind to what was going on. So I was sort of in the position I've been in the rest of my life: engaged, critically disposed, believing some things but wanting to question others. So when today, after many many years and many many developments, people say to me, 'Well, you used to be a Marxist, and now you're a poststructuralist,' it's not true, really. I was sort of critical in relation to Marx and I've obviously moved and developed since then. I haven't moved solidly to any other thing. In my sense, I've been kind of working on expanding an inadequate paradigm from the first time I engaged in it. I thought, Marxism understands about oppression, understands a little bit about imperialism, but not enough. It doesn't understand about culture. It has a reduced notion of ideology, and therefore class interest, but I don't think there's no ideology, and I don't think there's no class interest. I just think the wider domain of culture cannot be reductively explained in that way. So I started to work on it. I've been working on it ever since.

CM OK, but let me take an example where I suspect you have changed your mind. You must have been at that period a totally enthusiastic backer of national liberation struggles in the third world.

SH Yes, I was. I remember having a celebratory dinner on the fall of Dien Bien Phu when the French were defeated in Indo-China. And I was very engaged in the problems of Guyana, of Jagan's government, which was the first elected Marxist government in Latin America (before Chile). It was a properly legitimate government of a rather economic kind. And the British government sent the troops in. Of course I was knowledgeable about Kenya, knowledgeable about what was happening in Malaysia. So I knew that the end of empire was a huge thing that was happening in front of my eyes.

CM I'm younger but I do remember in the early sixties a total identification with the anti-colonial struggles. But now you have to account for the entire leadership of the African Union giving Mugabe a standing ovation at their recent meeting. What do you say to that?

SH Of course it's deeply wounding in many ways. I thought Mugabe was a terrific political figure. I thought he would really do something about the situation in Africa. So of course it is a deep disappointment. But I would say two things. One is that I now understand that the moment of decolonisation was a moment when the deformations of colonialism had not been deeply interrupted. There'd been a shift of political power and domination. But, take the Caribbean. It remained a poor, one-crop, economically dependent region. Nothing had changed with the hauling down of the flag so I began to understand that it would be a much longer process. It wasn't just a political passage of arms as it were. That's one sense. And the second thing is that I came to understand the way in which the attempt to build new nations was deformed by the Cold War. These new nations trying to resolve these huge historic problems emerged in a world already polarised between East and West. Between two systems, who then fought out the third world war on their terrain. They fought it out in Vietnam, they fought it out in Korea, they fought it out in Eritrea. On and on and on. And so I think that, to put it simply, they never had a chance. They never had a chance of an independent national formation over a slow period of time, changing the terms of relations with the Western world, changing the terms of relations with global economic capitalism, et cetera. They certainly never had a chance to do that. So I think these deformations show why Fanon was right. You have to have your nationalist moment. But the nationalist moment can never be enough. It can never be enough. And Fanon has wonderful passages on what happens then. The attempt to build a unity for developing the nation leads to the emergence of single figures or one-party states. No contradictions, no place in the ideology for opposition. Why should you have an opposition? How can there be an opposition between the national liberation movement and its own country? So within, there's no contradiction. It's complete nonsense, of course. Then the internal problems begin to assert themselves. The politics never comes right, it reverses to a kind of tribalism; the army becomes the government of last resort. This has been going on for a very long time.

CM Yes, but to take an even more pessimistic view, if you look at the figures like Nyerere and Mandela and you compare them to the

Mugabes and the Mbekis, there seems to be a lessening of confidence, a lessening of . . .

SH Oh, there's been a real degeneration; there's no question about that. But all that I would point out to you is that I think there is a moment of the nation. You couldn't have decolonisation struggles, national liberation struggles, without the notion of building the new nation. And those struggles did produce many farsighted leaders. Nyerere was certainly one, Kenyatta was that kind of leader, Cabral, Mandela. So that's the generation of the nation. The generation now is the moment after the nation. The nation is no longer a potential solution for any of the problems, not of Zimbabwe, not of Jamaica. They're in their post-national moment. And at that point you need a new kind of leadership with a new kind of understanding of what is the nature of the dependencies of these societies on the global economy. It's completely different from when the exploiters governed our country producing sugar and selling it abroad. It's a completely different relationship, so I'm not surprised that this generation of leadership is far below in far-sightedness, in attachment to democratic ideas. In people like Nyerere and Mandela you see a deep-seated understanding of, feeling for, democratic politics.

CM But there was also a deep-seated confidence in themselves, whereas now there's a very deep-seated inferiority complex, which explains every problem in terms of the colonial past.

SH Yes, of course there is. But you seem surprised by this and I'm not surprised by it. I think I can hear what people were saying at that moment: 'Jamaica for the Jamaicans, a new Jamaica, the Caribbean coming together'. There was a belief in the beyond of colonialism. And that's the utopia, that's what people were looking forward to. And of course they were confident about it because those movements had been growing in different ways around the world for a long period of time, and everybody knew their moment had come. The post-war moment was going to be the moment. A lot of those movements had been lying low during the war, after gaining a lot of momentum during the thirties. But as soon as the war was over, everybody knew decolonisation was going to happen. So of course that's a moment of huge confidence. When that doesn't happen and when people realise, for instance, that the dependency of those countries on the mother country, or on Britain or the British economy, is very different from the forms of dependency of globalisation, of the new global economy, they have to learn, what is this new global economy? They have to find the popular

language for explaining what it is. They have to be able to project; they have to have a utopia for what might be beyond the global economy. Well, Colin, we don't have any notion of what's beyond the global economy. So imagine yourself as the leader of one of these poor societies now. You're marking time, you're dependent, and you're heavily loaded by debt that the IMF in the early stages of the global economy loaded on your head. You don't have popular movements; your parties are divorced from the people and popular consciousness and popular culture. I think they're not the conditions for really far-sighted leadership in those societies.

CM If we go back to that moment of the early sixties, you're teaching in school, you're editing a political journal. How did you get from there to the Birmingham Centre?

SH Well, of course, those are not the only things I'm doing. I was writing *The Popular Arts* with Paddy Whannel. Indulging our love of movies and jazz every weekend. We began just by reading things to each other, playing things to each other. And then we thought we might write a book. So I was interested in popular culture.

When I was a child, I went to the movies every Saturday or every Monday afternoon of my life. I saw the entire range of American, mainly American, cinema in that period. Then just before I left Jamaica there's the beginnings of an elite interest in European movies, French and Italian. I saw those. And I continued. When I came to Oxford, I still went to movies quite often in the day or in the early afternoon, especially when I was a graduate student. We used to deliberately break the week, look at each other in the Bodleian and say, 'Are we going? Is it time?' And always with an interest in jazz. Jazz was the new music for me when I was an adolescent. I was introduced to modern jazz, and I thought that I could hear the sounds that were in the blues, so I identified with a kind of black music. And of course I loved the sophistication of it. I loved its complexity; I loved the fact that it wasn't easily accessible. This is different from reading Romantic poetry, a kind of taking on an alien world, if you understand me. Jazz spoke to me within and reverberated emotionally. I just never developed the traditional intellectual division between popular and elite culture. I just thought there was a kind of continuum. I always thought film was a serious form. I always thought popular music was serious. It had to do with, of course, a certain relationship with America. Not as a world power but as a culture. As an alternative to the more conventional, hierarchised, bourgeois cultures of Britain, which I'd been educated into. So all of that was going alongside *New Left*

Review. The first sentence in *Universities and Left Review* is about the widening of politics. Politics is embedded in the wider culture, that is political too. You might think that's a sort of insight of cultural studies, but it didn't begin there for me.

CM And how was this work with Whannel related to Raymond Williams, E. P. Thompson, Richard Hoggart?

SH The timetable is slightly different. I was teaching in London, 1959, 1960, 1961. I was doing work with Paddy in the education department of the British Film Institute, going around the country showing Westerns, talking about films, listening to jazz, et cetera. I had met Edward Thompson in 1956. I was still at Oxford in the period of Suez and Hungary, and this is a very important moment in the formation of the New Left because of two principle things. One was, contrary to what everybody was saying, imperialism was not dead. Send the gunboats alongside the French to the Suez Canal and blow it open again, and put that Nasser in his place. So all the prognostications about the end of empire went up, too. On the other hand, Hungary showed you the complete degeneracy of the Soviet system. That's the New Left. It remains critical of capitalism, critical of imperialism, but does not see communism as an alternative. So it's that in-between space. I met Raymond in Oxford. He was an extramural tutor, we started to talk. I used to go to Freddy Bateson's critical seminars; Raymond was there. He let me read the first early chapters of *Culture and Society*. And it played into our interest in politics and culture. *The Uses of Literacy* was published in 1957. Well that played into the debate about what is happening to the working class, where is working-class culture now. I edited the Oxford Labour Club's journal called *Clarion*, one issue of which is entirely devoted to *The Uses of Literacy*. Cultural and political change is what everybody was arguing about. It may be because a lot of people around that New Left centre in Oxford at the time were doing literature or history or were in the humanities, so there was a kind of living interest in the cultural question. But it's also because we were already part of a debate which begins to emerge in the Labour party specifically; namely, will the new affluent capitalism undermine for ever the social base, the working-class base, and working-class culture that has supported the labour movement since its formation? So you can't get any more political – do you understand me? That's a very political question, but it touches cultural issues and you can't talk about it only in terms of the rate of profit. You also have to talk about what are the forms of consciousness which had enabled some alternative voice, however reformist, which was beginning to be

institutionalised in the welfare state. And yet, one could feel that there was another logic at work in the new capitalism, which was unravelling all of that. One of the most important ambivalent cultural sites in all this was television. This is really the beginning of television. I can remember seeing my first television programme. I never had a television, but we hired a television to watch the coronation, a very colonial thing to do. It was those debates about affluent consumption, consumerism, et cetera, which we then crystallised later in *New Left Review*, and particularly in *Universities and Left Review*. The question was: what is the nature of this new capitalism? And what we understood by that was the shift of the paradigm instance of capitalist development from Britain to the United States. Therefore one had to understand consumerism, one had to understand how the working class and working people were inscribed in the system through their capacity to consume, you had to understand the degree to which Henry Ford had built working-class ambitions and consumer desires into a market which will sustain them. You have to understand the nature of managerialism because this was corporate capitalism; it wasn't just run by industrialists and landed aristocrats, et cetera. It's a new corporate class with a long-term investment in building a corporate world, in building a corporate culture. You had to write about that, read about that. Wright Mills, the new capitalism. So the cultural and the economic-political were just never separated out for us – at least for me. Edward Thompson I met as a result of the breakup of the Communist Party and the formation of the *New Reasoner*, which then connected with *Universities and Left Review* to form the *New Left Review*. I met Hoggart, and then later on, in 1964, Hoggart invited me to come to the Centre for Cultural Studies.

CM You go to the Centre. It's 1964, and a new Labour government. How do you see what you were doing in political and cultural terms then?

SH I suppose, retrospectively, I think I saw it as continuing that debate that had been going on partly in the New Left, partly in other places. The New Left as a political movement had begun to run down by 1964. In the aftermath of 1964 I was involved with Raymond and Edward Thompson in producing the *May Day Manifesto*. It's an interesting book because it places the cultural questions centrally and it understands the social forces changing around those questions. In that sense it's a very prophetic and insightful piece of work. But of course it's profoundly wrong about what will actually lead to the break. It doesn't understand students. Suddenly, 1968 emerges. When we wrote about it

in the May Day Manifesto we didn't get any of it. Things were changing very rapidly indeed in that period. So I did understand, therefore, that the movement that was associated with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the founding of New Left clubs, and so on, was beginning to run down. I was leaving London. But these questions had to go on being pursued somewhere, and I thought the Centre was as good a chance as I would have in an intellectual circle to continue to pursue them. Remember, nevertheless, that the Centre was committed to singling out the cultural domain from the other questions. And to be honest, I don't think Hoggart would have seen it in the terms I'm talking about now. He, of course, saw the question about what is happening to working-class culture, and he understood the cultural underpinnings of politics. But he didn't see that there were issues about the nature of the relationship between culture and capitalism in a longer more structured sense. I don't think that he saw the Centre as a place for those questions. And to be honest, I didn't go to the Centre with that as a clear-sighted project. It emerged as I insisted on not talking about culture without talking about politics and society. Something Raymond taught me: always the culture and society paradigm – not culture isolated, because by itself culture becomes another thing, a rarified realm of the aesthetic et cetera; and not society in some sort of determinist way in which society tells culture what to do, but in the complicated interrelationships between the social and the cultural, between the social and the symbolic – because culture is in some way always constitutive.

CM And then 1968 happened. How did that look to you?

SH I thought it was a very exciting moment. I went to the States in 1967 – I was in California in the summer of love. I thought, something is happening here. This is the new generation, this is the generation that Wright Mills said would become the new corporate class and they weren't doing that. They were switching off like crazy, turning the volume down, as it were. So I knew something was happening. And I knew about the student movement, partly because of Vietnam: we were all involved in the struggle against the Vietnam War. There was a politics going on all the time. But then the explosion, 1968. I thought it was extremely exciting. It was kind of a revolution of the higher consciousness – it was clearly a cultural revolution, had something to do with culture, with consciousness, something to do with the new technologies of culture – it just was a different kind of explosion altogether. We were very excited by that. It had a big impact on the Centre because the Centre got involved in the student movement,

which was sort of identified politically in the eyes of the university, and so on. At the same time, I have to say that I didn't feel 1968 was mine. I was 30 by then. And the formative moment for me was 1956, not 1968. So I was a 1956 person in 1968, if you understand me. But I didn't take the position that Edward Thompson took about 1968, which was, the students should all be sent to do their National Service and that would make them straighten up and fly right. I didn't take that view; but I couldn't, as it were, call it my own. I did think there was an element of overdetermination in 1968. I thought it was overdetermined from the top down, from the head. I thought *imagination au pouvoir* was a fantastic slogan, but would anybody outside the universities understand it? The students didn't have the patience to translate that into broader political terms. I thought it was lopsided. It was a lopsided moment. But incredibly exciting and, retrospectively, I think very influential. Not because it made the future, but because elements from 1968 have been present in contemporary politics one way or another ever since. Ever since.

CM From the outside, 1968 transformed the Centre so that it became a national focus for politically committed students who wanted to pursue intellectual work. Was that how it felt from the inside?

SH Oh yes, of course, certainly. First of all, we were very different from any other centre for one reason: the Centre was very transdisciplinary. We were reading Marx, we were reading Gramsci, we were reading Max Weber, we were reading the German Idealists, and we were reading Lukács because we wanted to understand how to theorise the relationship between culture and society. So it was not a centre like anywhere else. Also it was in those good old days when bright students got grants to do postgraduate work. Remember those halcyon days when 'grant' wasn't an archaic word? Well, a lot of the bright people who had come up through the disciplines didn't want to do their next phase like that. They wanted to make a break. So we started to recruit these bright students from history, from languages, from sociology and politics to some extent, from literature, of course, and a few from art. So we were working from this trans-disciplinary *mélange*.

OK, how are we going to pursue these questions? What is the discipline? We didn't have one. In a way we had to construct it. Not because we had huge ambitions to be cultural theorists, but because we had to teach the next seminar. What are you going to do? They had to write their theses. How do I understand the place of television in relation to X? So we set up the seminars, we set up the working groups, et cetera. So it was an incredibly exciting time intellectually. I would

say another thing about it, which is, not only was there nowhere else like it in terms of postgraduate work or postgraduate centres, it was done inside an institution which was hugely hostile to the very idea. We were located in the English Department, which gave us a little bit of cover. We were the brainchild of Richard Hoggart, who was the senior professor of English. That gave us a lot of cover. We brought some money in because Penguin Books gave Richard a grant to go on with his work on *The Uses of Literacy*. So we had financial cover. And at that period, postgraduate work was so poorly organised in Britain that you could more or less do what you wanted. Of course, graduate students had to write their theses and see their supervisor once a term. Apart from that, there was nothing.

So we created a frame. We had a new area of inquiry and we had to enable the students to research this area more systematically and rigorously. But to support the writing of the theses, the students have got to talk to one another, so you have to have a work-in-progress seminar where they share their experiences and what the research problems were. You can see why it emerged in that form and why it would appeal to a lot of similar people who naturally got to know about it. They got to know about it partly because we were committed to making these ideas more widely available. We were probably rather naïve in the view that the intellectuals could be organic in the Gramscian sense. I described this once by saying that we were organic intellectuals in our aspirations but there was no party to be connected to. There was hardly a class we could address. But we lived in the hope that if those forces did emerge in a broader sense, there would be intellectuals who were sensitised to the problems of producing some understanding of this new world.

CM One of the paradoxical after-effects of 1968 was that Leninism came back on the agenda. Dead in 1956, it is suddenly revived. How did you see that?

SH Well, this is the seventies. The mysterious seventies. Funny things are happening then. Everybody's reading *Capital*. Everybody's reading Althusser. So there's a huge Marxist revival. But it's like the blush of death. It's the last time it comes, because everybody thinks it's a rising curve, but it's the last flush of a certain kind of politics. And I think Leninism was the same. The last gasp. And remember, the seventies is very Maoist as well. People were suspicious of Lenin. So it reached for any revolutionary icons and figures symbolically, but the whole spirit of 1968 was intrinsically anti-Leninist. It's intrinsically kind of libertarian anarchist. That's the centre of the moment in 1968.

I thought these were accretions around it. And I have to say I was never attracted by any of that. I thought it was too late for Leninism. I didn't like it in 1946 or 1956; I wouldn't like it in 1976. I thought Maoism was a distorted way of taking the rest of the world seriously. We have to understand the rest of the world, but Maoism was not really going to do it. Maoism in France? What is that? It's sort of detached from its context, detached from its historical roots, detached from the question of the peasantry, detached from a party. What is that? It's a kind of free-floating dream.

As far as Marxism was concerned, it was very important. Very, very important. But I can tell you that we went back to Marxism not as a kind of orthodoxy, but as a kind of ground, a kind of thing to debate, a kind of paradigm to work with. And therefore, for me, it's the moment of Althusser. Althusser answers one of the questions that had bothered me about Marxism from the very beginning: determination in the last instance by the economic. Althusser offers us the alternative model of over-determination by the three practices: economic, political, and ideological. And I thought, in the ideological, located there somewhere, is culture. You're going to need a wider definition but it's a start. And then I read Gramsci. Gramsci, of course, has roots in the Leninist tradition, has roots in a particular kind of communist party and I don't want to detach Gramsci from that. But I could read Gramsci for what he called the relation between the structure and the superstructure. And I just thought, this is a Marxist who knows the world has changed as a result of mass democracy, that we require an analysis of culture, require an analysis of the state, and a broader sense of what politics is about. So it is true that I came closer to being a Marxist then than I'd ever been before. Because the problems I'd been wrestling with in a tussle with classical Marxism began to appear under the heading of Marxism as a broad, expansive category. Of course, it didn't last very long. Something else happened.

CM Well then we wake up, it's 1979.

SH It was before that: 1973 is the oil crisis, and when we look back we can see that that is the moment when the historic compromise that is the welfare state – a sort of social democratic moment from the war on to Vietnam – really begins to disintegrate. Really begins to disintegrate. By 1978 and 1979, society's coming apart at the seams. The labour experiment, the social democratic experiment of the seventies, has been completely undermined by these new forces which it has no clue about –

CM Couldn't you make a cruel argument that there are many in the universities in the seventies busily analysing culture and society,

completely unaware that their own culture and society is incubating neo-liberalism with the think-tanks acting as midwife.

SH They manifestly hadn't seen what was happening in their own culture, and I can't say that we did, either. Remember, I spent a lot of the seventies working on *Policing the Crisis*, working on race. But working on the social formation as a whole through the prism of race. It was never just a black study. And what *Policing the Crisis* charted is the disintegration of that society, the rising crisis. First of all the social crisis of affluence, then youth, then crime, then crime in the cities, then race, then everybody. As Lord Hailsham said, 'Everything is just the tip of the iceberg of everything else.' We cannot govern, Britain's become ungovernable. Once you saw that, you knew that society was in a paroxysm of change. Not in one direction. I didn't know that we were headed for neo-liberalism, I didn't quite see that. But I did see that things were coming apart at the seams. Something else was going to happen, and we could see that what I called authoritarian populism was the only way of holding it together. It would be a populism that would play on anxieties, it would play on a sense of British decline, it would play on the marginalisation of the working class, it would play on the new fears that race was able to symbolise, of being invaded by the Other, et cetera.

I don't say it because I was one of the authors but I do think *Policing the Crisis* was a very prophetic text. And it ended by my saying, 'Mrs Thatcher will win' the 1979 election, I knew she was going to win and I wrote *The Great Moving Right Show* in 1978. So before she comes to power, I do know that some very profound shift is happening. First of all, I don't know how profound it is, whereas now I would say, if you'll bear with the language, it is epochal. A new conjuncture, entirely. I didn't quite understand neo-liberalism. That's to say I don't understand that what is emerging is really not just some stitched-up combination of old-style conservatism and market capitalism but really a profound shift. And I didn't understand the international dimensions. It is the beginning of globalisation, the new globalisation, the beginning of multinational corporations. But I don't see that then, and Thatcherism doesn't either. They don't quite talk in those terms. It brings about the reshaping of the indigenous culture to let loose the forces of capitalism again. But it doesn't really preach that those forces can only overcome the limits that the welfare state has imposed on capitalism by going global, by doing something else, something very profound.

CM But in some quite strong sense, since then we've known twenty-five years of defeat. That is to say there may be local victories, but

basically we've been on absolutely steady retreat from an ever more dominant neo-liberalism. I wonder how much of that is to do with the dog that doesn't bark. In the sixties and in the seventies, you had millions and tens of millions of people in the Western world – particularly America, but actually Europe as well – who tried to find new methods of living and working together. Those attempts didn't just fail, they failed so terribly and horribly that there are almost no novelistic accounts of them, there are almost no memoirs. And yet this was actually a generational attempt to live differently. How do you look back at that?

SH Let me start with what you said before. Failure. Well failure, but also something else: incorporation. Something about the whole libertarian thing became one of the pillars of neo-liberalism. We began to speak in those terms – do you understand? I wrote a piece about 1968 called 'An American Moment', and I said, you could just see a moment when the heroes of the underground would appear on the front of shopping bags. We think in layered terms: so a certain kind of capitalism requires bourgeois culture, which requires a certain kind of consciousness, et cetera, but it's not true. They're not articulated in that determinate way. A new kind of capitalism can make use of new forms of culture and borrow from everywhere, from all over. So today corporate responsibility speaks the language of participation, of empowerment. It took the words right out of our mouths and made those words belong somewhere else. That is how the culture of neo-liberalism has partly been constructed of. So I agree with you that, for those who thought this would bring about an alternative life, it has been a defeat. But it isn't quite that they have gone away. They're sort of under the surface, still having effects to some extent there, I think. But they don't compose an alternative form of society, an alternative way of living. Yes, of course it was a defeat, there's no question about that. But I wouldn't go back and say, 'therefore –'

CM But I'm not thinking of the political defeats in a narrow sense of politics; I'm talking about all those attempts at cooperatives and communes. If you actually did a full survey of the West, say from 1965 to 1980, this was a massive social movement. And what is extraordinary is how it didn't just fail, it failed so terribly and bitterly that people don't want to think about it.

SH Oh, I know that. I know many people who identified with all that. But I think we – I don't have an answer to the question you're asking, but I think we need to think about it more carefully. I don't want to just

say it was a defeat. I want to say why it was a defeat. I think lots of people now are influenced in their lives by the fact that they took part in the commune movement, although living together every day turned out to be less a paradise than it first seemed to be. It may be one of the few places where any kind of collective instinct is still alive among middle-class intellectuals. The Centre was completely taken over by the idea of collectives. We worked as a collective, we wrote as a collective, we wrote each other's books and articles and that has never gone away. There were people who were formed like that who aren't in collectives now, but they're drawn to that way of working as a kind of instinctive thing. I just think it's quite a complicated picture. But if what you're saying to me is that in 1968, in the period just before and after, we thought, 'This is the paradigm for a new way of living,' in that sense it didn't happen.

CM But also it's not just that it didn't happen, but there's been very little reflection.

SH Well, I think that's true, I hadn't thought of that before. You mean in writing, though, don't you? Because, in music, I listen to some popular music and I think, this could not have been written without Bob Dylan. But I know what you mean. There's no consistent reflection on it, it had a kind of ephemerality.

CM My own feeling is that it was too painful.

SH I think that's true. I think that's what defeats like that are: painful, extremely painful. We don't want to think about them. We don't want to acknowledge how much our hopes were invested in them and how much they came to grief. I don't think we can honestly say that they came to grief only because they were incorporated or only because they were sort of defeated by other forces. They were kind of defeated from within. And that I don't quite understand. Maybe there were elements of the romantic inside us. When I think about the commune, I do think that we sort of deluded ourselves that in a contemporary world organised and structured like it is, some people could live a totally different set of relations to one another. And it probably couldn't happen.

CM Well let's agree to inflect defeat and make 1968 one of the key elements. But what about success? In the early eighties in the American universities, cultural studies sweeps all before it. How do you look at that now?

SH As a mixed blessing. [laughter]. When I was involved in the Centre for Cultural Studies we did think that there would be a few people who were interested in what we were doing and perhaps would be trying to teach it in English departments. But as a global movement, as a transnational movement, which it is – a transnational movement in cultural studies – it certainly went way beyond anything that I had envisaged. The institutionalisation was inevitable, I think. Cultural Studies would have disappeared if it hadn't become institutionalised, but the process of institutionalisation itself kind of robbed it of some of its cutting edge. I suppose the most important element has to do with politics. We were free because we were just a little space and a little space which the university thought would soon disappear. We were free to talk about politics more openly than you can once you become part of a big department. As part of a university department, three-quarters of the people aren't on the same wavelength as you. You can't really have a class on Maoism. That's a general point, but then there's the fact that the big expansion came first in the US. I think in the US the academic world is more self-enclosed, self-sufficient, less related to anything outside it than anywhere else. In Britain the intellectual world, and academic world, especially, are relatively small, relatively marginal. So people conduct their intellectual debates, for instance, outside academia as well as anywhere else. In the British Film Institute, in various summer schools, not really just as a member of a department. In the US it seemed to me to become more confined within a particular academic world. It's a certain kind of academicisation of cultural studies.

What we tried to do in cultural studies would not have been possible without our training in critical work, especially literary criticism, but critical work generally. But because of our commitment to the culture and society paradigm – and I keep going back to that as a shorthand – because of that, the literary, the aesthetic, had to be held in its place. Acknowledged as important, but held in its place. At some point in the expansion of cultural studies, culture escaped. It became a kind of balloon, a pumped up critical theory balloon. This is not an argument against theory. I couldn't imagine my making an argument against theory. And the sophistication that theory brought leaves early cultural studies looking like kindergarten. Nevertheless, cultural studies ceased to be troubled by the grubby worldliness, to use Said's term, the worldliness in which culture has always to exist. It seems as if cultural studies could operate on its own terms ... everybody could quote everybody else, et cetera, and the literary text comes roaring back. Everybody is suddenly being a scholar. I feel I'm betraying myself every time I say it because of course I don't have anything at all against

scholarship and of course there must be serious scholarship, serious intellectual work which must attend to the traditions, have to know about the past, genuinely understand it. I take all of that as written, as for granted. But I don't think theory is a self-sufficient domain. The tension to hold, to think culture and society together, disintegrates, and culture drifts upwards into a sort of thing in itself.

CM But also a lot of that culture becomes contemporary culture of a very thin kind: endless studies of Madonna.

SH Oh yes. You mean cultural studies itself. I don't have words to describe that; I really cannot read another cultural studies analysis of Madonna or *The Sopranos*. Of course, I feel sort of guilty about that because we did do some of that in the Centre. We studied *Nationwide*, we studied particular programmes, a lot of interesting work was done around soap operas. So of course we studied those things, but always because of how it interconnected with wider formations. But now it doesn't interconnect with any wider formations. Well, you could say the wider formations for us were sort of given because class was still, in the old sense, a going concern; we related cultural studies to complicated questions about class – we were always forging that culture and society connection. You might well say that society has changed so we don't know quite how to make that connection any longer. That may be part of the reason, but it's not the only reason. The goal of producing theory became self-generating.

CM I think another problem with cultural studies is that it developed in such a way that evaluation disappeared entirely from its discourse, so it became simply descriptive. For me, if you're trying to analyse a cultural formation, you can't do it without an evaluative element.

SH I think you and I have had this argument going one way or another for about fifty years. You know, *The Popular Arts*, for instance, in the wake of the birth of the New Left and all that, is evaluative. But remember, it's evaluative about quite different forms. So it says, there is a question of value here, but it is not the same thing as the – evaluations that have been canonised in the past. So there's a distinction to be made between what I would call judgement, and inscribing what you are studying in an already given hierarchy: the serious novel must always be better than a piece of science fiction, as the novel form. Well, I think that's nonsense, a load of old rubbish. Some science fiction has penetrated high art, some of it has something else, it has a kind of vigour, it has a kind of insight, it breaks the bounds, and so on. So

certainly, I don't retract or withdraw at all from the assault on the popular/high divide. It's not high because it's High Culture. Now that's not to say that everything is the same. I don't know what to call that. It's different from evaluation because, unless you enter the critique of the structure of value that informs your judgements, you find yourself back in the same old game. For me, Shakespeare is the most wonderful writer, not because he is the Great National Dramatist or because he's always taught in university – what the whole of literary studies is founded on. I don't think, it's good because it's Shakespeare; I think, it's good because there are things in there more complex than practically anybody else has been able to do. How can we get to the notion that that is worth identifying and worth staying with? And you can't blur that just by saying, oh well Shakespeare is just another kind of writing, like a *Guardian* editorial. On the other hand you're not saying, well, I like it because it carries the weight of judgement of the centuries, the tradition. It's the decanonisation of the categories and the retention of the critical function that I'm interested in. I don't know quite how to theorise them or how to put them together. There's no doubt that in cultural studies a kind of flat populism came to prevail. I don't think that's any use either. I don't think we can go back to the high-popular distinction. But what it is that becomes valuable in the popular forms is really what we were trying to do in *The Popular Arts* without being very conceptual, very rigorous about it. In what sense is Billie Holiday a fantastic singer? Well, she doesn't sound like Maria Callas. It doesn't help to compare her with that. She is way ahead of Rosemary Clooney. Why? Because she's able to get into the voice in music a range of experiences that Rosemary Clooney doesn't know exists. She enunciates from an experience, from a range of experience, but she finds form for it. That's what culture is about, finding form. Culture always arises out of experience, but it's different from experience because it finds significant form for it. So of course I'm willing to make that judgement, I'm still willing to make that judgement. It's an argument, of course. It's not fixed. I don't want everybody to say, oh because you think Billie Holiday is one of the great singers of the world, we *must* think she is. I want to go on arguing that, because only by arguing that critically can one identify what it is that is worth putting high on the list. I don't think the critical function can ever go away and I don't think the critical function is possible without that kind of judgement. I think that judgement is concrete and local and specific and has to be defined, and depends on the analysis. You have to say, what is it about this that makes it different from something else. And you can't rely on the fact that it appears in the category high culture, it's reviewed in the *THES* [*Times Higher*

Educational Supplement] or the *LRB* [*London Review of Books*], so it must be a serious work; because here are both pages half full of the most unserious serious nonsense.

CM So you moved to the Open University as Professor of Sociology just as cultural studies went transnational. How did you see your work at that point?

SH You mustn't identify an institution with yourself. You mustn't imagine that an institution has to fall apart because you're no longer there. You must manage the transition. I had a very difficult time managing the transition from Hoggart to myself. The university tried to close it down then. And I wanted the work to be secure, the site to be secure for this kind of work, but not dependent on me. A second motive is much more personal. When you get to the point where halfway through the first term of every new year, your students erupt in the same predictable way and rewrite the syllabus. This is terrific, it's very creative. To go through it, you can only do this a certain number of times. And since you don't want to stop this happening, and you are likely to become a brake on it, just get out from under it. But where was I to go? There was at that stage certainly no cultural studies department. Well, what is the closest? I suppose sociology in a kind of way. In order to reflect on that culture–society couplet, I had to teach myself a lot of sociology. Not conventional sociology. I had to read Max Weber, I had to read Durkheim, they had important things to say about culture. So I learned a certain amount of sociology. I learned, really, what the Europeans called social thought, rather than sociology. But I knew that terrain. Well, I could teach that. But I didn't want to do that in an established university. I didn't want to teach it in Essex or in Warwick. I wanted to take these ideas, which had been worked out with a highly selected group of students, people who'd performed brilliantly as undergraduates and therefore got a postgraduate scholarship, to a wider terrain. I wanted the pressure on me of making more popular the ideas that I'd been working on in cultural studies. So the Open University, which I did some work with in any case while I was still at the Centre, seemed ideal. And it just happened that it came up; it came up a bit earlier than I was planning to leave, and I thought, this is about the only place you'd be happy going to in academia. And so I took it then, and so I left the Centre.

CM Did you ever think of going to America?

SH I did at a certain point think of going to America, but not at the point when I went to the Open University. Later on. In the seventies,

when I was at the Centre, I went to the States all the time. Three times a year, and I didn't stay there for any length of time, but I visited every university. This was when cultural studies was catching on. I went to departments of linguistics, of mass communication studies, of sociology, of history, of anthropology, et cetera. And so I began to realise that this thing was coming there. And people began to say, would you be interested in coming, or in spending half your time over here – like you do, Colin. And so Catherine and I did think about it. And I thought, first of all, I have relocated culturally once in my life, and it's taken me thirty years to be sort of OK about it. Can I go through that again? Secondly, Catherine didn't want to go. Catherine's a British historian, wanting to work on British stuff and on new postcolonial work in relation to Britain. Neither of us wanted to work on America. My kids, who'd learned a lot from American popular culture, didn't want to go. They liked it, liked being in New York, but they didn't want to live there. So the only possibility was that I should go for the term and leave them here, and I couldn't bear the idea of being on my own. I did spend a couple of terms in good universities. I was so lonely. I wasn't intellectually isolated, I just didn't understand the culture, couldn't take my bearings. So it sort of went away as a possibility.

CM In the eighties race becomes a major topic in the academy. Of course, politically, it goes much, much further back. But it comes rather late to the academy. How did you understand that both intellectually and personally?

SH Of course, I was, from quite early on, interested in race in an anthropological/sociological way, and now it's in a very different place. It's so transformed in terms of the intellectual, academic world. I have a different notion of it in relation to my own work. I always was concerned about it because I was concerned about it personally. I had to locate myself as a brown middle-class West Indian in relation to a society which was black. I had never been able to do that in my childhood. I constructed it as an intellectual and emotional problem in the fifties and sixties. I read a lot about it, and so on. Then in the seventies, of course, I saw the emergence of black culture as intensely political. Rastafarianism, the recovery of African identity. That's when I really begin to be interested in the identity question as a political issue. The question is, What is the stake of that in politics? And I suppose the stake for me is, in the previous period, these questions of identity and identification had been settled by class. Your class location defined who you were – sort of produced it. Once class disappears – not disappears in reality, but disappears as conceptually this lynchpin of everything

else – you realise you have to ask the question, Well, the working class could easily be racist, how do you construct an identification for them which is not out of what they're given in their circumstances, but which they make out of their circumstances as an active, subjective investment? So it takes you into the domain of the cultural and the subjective much more deeply; in a way, before that, you could take the subjective for granted. I don't mean personally: of course we knew people had personal troubles, but the social identity was, we thought, given by their socio-economic position.

Well, by the seventies you couldn't think like that any more and at Birmingham I was more involved in questions of race and racism. That's when I began to think about race in a more concerted way, and in *Policing the Crisis* I wrote about race a lot more than I had done before. I suppose where that goes for me is that in the eighties it becomes the debate about identity. About culture and about cultural identities and so on. And that's a broadening out of the concern. But I don't know that I can map that trajectory onto the wider academic agenda. I suppose I can because there is a very big interest in those issues. Identity comes to the fore not only in my work but elsewhere. But I feel I sort of have an inner path through that which is not quite explicable in terms of the wider intellectual formation. I wrote a pamphlet when I went to Birmingham called *Young Britons*. It was about what is going to happen to the second generation of black kids. How are they going to negotiate their relationship to this country in which it is assumed that you are white, assumed in a sort of inchoate sense that white culture is superior and more civilised than black culture? What are these kids going to do when they don't know the Caribbean directly any longer? They know it through their parents, they know it through their transistor sets, but they don't *know* it. Where are they going to find themselves, et cetera? I've been concerned about that issue ever since. When I saw people coming out of *The Windrush*, out of Paddington into the cold, grey light, I said, what are they doing there? How long are they going to be here? How are they going to fit in? How could they live? Who will they become?

In the seventies, it was a very urgent question. The second generation was feeling profoundly alienated. It's not being accepted. It cannot imagine itself as white any longer. The available identification is African, but African as Shakespeare says 'north by northwest'. It's African, but it's not Africa, it's Africa as it had been translated in the diaspora. So I began to think about these questions. What is identity? It's not inside you. It's affected by how you have to retrace your connection. And connections are not just going back to a single set of roots, but by the pathways – the routes – through which those roots had

been transformed. To be a Rastafarian is to be, what? – a kind of Jamaican-African in Birmingham.

CM You say that identity is not inside you but that ignores that the popular discourse of identity is exactly that. You may say ‘but that’s not what we meant at all’, but it is how it is meant in current discourse.

SH Oh yes, I know. Of course. That is quite right. It isn’t what one meant But I don’t know that it can’t trace its lineage back to those concerns. Because once you’ve thought about black identity you have to think about British identity. You have to think about what that was. And about its mystifying account of its own development and roots. One of the books I really want to write is a short primer for the people who are now obliged by New Labour to take citizenship classes, which would simply deconstruct all the things that are said to be intrinsic British values, tolerance, fair play et cetera. Which are imagined as somehow having arisen out of the North Sea, pristine. Albion comes up and there they are, toleration, freedom, democracy, et cetera. And just unpack how they have become historically part of the culture. If you go back to the Civil War, religious tolerance was a way of not eating people of a different religious sect. Just imagine how many English people resisted the vote right up until the end, late as possible . . . And how democracy in any full sense never came because in spite of the fact of one person, one vote, capital always had ten votes. So I was interested in Britishness. I think a certain kind of cultural identity has now been – I suppose like libertarianism in the sixties – reharnessed and become a kind of banal way of talking and thinking. Something at the heart of that is still extremely important. It presents a problem for me because in writing about identity, which I wrote about in terms of its non-essentialism, I did see and say that this non-essentialism means that it can be harnessed in several directions at once. It can become defensive, tribal, reactionary, just as it can become the basis of a wider recognition of one’s interconnections with other cultures. I probably didn’t talk about that enough. And that is, of course, what confronts us now. The harnessing of a certain kind of cultural identity back to religion, which we thought had disappeared. Religion as a sort of bizarrely inverted critique of new liberal capitalism. I don’t know if you want to go there; that is very murky territory.

CM Well, where I was going to go first was your work in the eighties and the fact that much of it appeared in *Marxism Today*, which was distinguished under Martin Jacques’s editorship for the quality of its intellectual/political debate. But I suspect there will be historians who

will say that the New Labour project is intellectually the child of *Marxism Today*.

SH Well, in part, it might be said, and that's probably right. My contribution to *MT* there was really about Thatcherism, it's really about the British forms of neo-liberalism, how it set about remaking society. And what I had to say in relation to the left was exactly not that you must imitate it, but that you must occupy the same terrain. It's the Gramscian point. Capitalism is changing, they're right about that. Now if they hegemonise that into a particular programme, the left cannot counter that hegemony by saying nothing has changed. It has to root itself in the same way and be transformed by its encounter with the real, with real society as it is now. Unless it has a counter-hegemonic programme with the equivalent depth, breadth – with its roots in philosophy, its roots in literature, its roots in music as much as in economics and politics – unless it can bring a formation of that scale to bear against Thatcherism, what is going to happen is that, in order to survive, Labour is going to have to occupy Thatcher's terrain, which is what has happened. It didn't find an alternative. It never thought itself deeply enough in relation to the changes that have gone on in the world. And so when it comes to New Labour, Anthony Giddens says, well, this is inevitable, this is globalisation, there's no alternative to market society, that's the way it is. And New Labour in Tony Blair and his court find as crafty an adaptation to Thatcherism as you can imagine. You know, Thatcherism of course was dramatic and very profound – more profound than people imagine it was. What we now think of as managerialism was really begun then: it was when people understood that Thatcher's ideas would never take root until institutional cultures were changed. And they began to be changed in our lifetime. So it's very, very profound. But under Mrs Thatcher it was done in such a brutal way that it generated its own enemies. People would say, 'It's fine, we have to go with all of this, but the social fabric is sort of coming apart at the seams'. So social democracy in the hybrid New Labour form proved to be the best shell, as Lenin once said, of global capitalism. Much more thoroughgoing and more capable of catching up the victims: a bit of welfare state and then you cut off the welfare state until you get to the very bottom, and then you catch them up minimally while opening the opportunity for them to work productively; even if they're lame or they're sick, get them into productive jobs. Not welfare but workfare. That's Gordon Brown's great contribution.

New Labour is the proof – if you let me go back to what I said before – of the fact that if you can't develop a counter-hegemonic politics, there is no alternative. This became a slogan. But in the larger sense,

there really is no alternative. New Labour they believe that economically and globally, too. They have no way of turning back the multinational corporation and the new global division of labour which it installed. There's no way of turning back from making markets the source of value. Well, if you believe that, you've got to go into it wholeheartedly, enter that terrain and, I suppose, see what can be done from within it. People have responded to it differently. Some people have adapted to it 101 per cent. Other people have tried to rescue elements of the older politics. Every now and again Giddens talks about there being too much inequality. The state must be more enabling for the social change. You hear these residues of an earlier moment, an earlier politics which have been sort of taken over. Well now, Colin, I'm going to say to you, remind you, that four or five times in this conversation we have come to this moment. The emergence of alternatives, the apparent defeat or loss of an impetus, and their partial reappearance somewhere else. And I want to say I just think we need to understand this is really what history is like. It is really like that.

CM Well, of course (and this is still a source of historical astonishment to me) one of the reasons there's no alternative is the collapse of the Soviet Union. You might have no time whatsoever for Soviet communism but it provided a space where things were organised differently. Now, there's nowhere where it's any different.

SH That's absolutely true. Even for people who didn't believe it was a place where anything was going to be new, it was a kind of place in the mind, it was a kind of symbolic space. It said, things can be different. They ought not to be as different in the way in which the Soviet Union was different, but they can be different. And that is why the most unexpected thing is the collapse of the social democratic, the socialist left, as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union in which they'd never believed. It was incredible. *Marxism Today*, which has never been a Stalinist or pro-Soviet journal, winds up when the wall comes down!

CM Well, I remember the night it wound up, and I think you and I were the only two there who weren't celebrating.

SH You see I thought it should go on to become the voice that might help to construct the alternative. But I had not reckoned with the depth to which invisibly the very notion of an alternative society – an alternative politics, an alternative way of organising cultural or economic life – depended on the fact that there was another space. And I think that was very profound. So when that happens, why

should people hold their nerve? You have to ask it the other way around: why did they start to work for the other side? For which there are all sorts of explanations including, well, they like to be in power and that's where power is and they're drawn to it. But in a kind of sense, well, you can't spend your life nay-saying, resisting. You've got to get in and see what you can do with it. I say that from the position of somebody who spent their life nay-saying. It's not very popular; indeed ... it's a difficult space to hold. A difficult space to live.

CM Did you have any moment of belief in New Labour?

SH No. No. Martin Jacques and I wrote on the Sunday before the 1997 election an article in the *Observer* entitled 'Thatcherism with a Human Face', because I knew that was what New Labour was by then. Although, curiously, you're quite right, at a certain earlier moment Tony Blair was interested in *Marxism Today*. I met Tony Blair at Martin Jacques's when he was an up-and-coming politician. Perhaps, we thought, he would be somebody interested in beginning to speak within the labour movement from these new ideas. So I don't deny at all the kind of early connection with what became New Labour. But by the time it had begun to form up as New Labour, we knew it was not that but it was what we had prophesied: the adaptation. The adaptation to Thatcherite, neo-liberal terrain. I'm afraid I did not celebrate 1997. These shifts, they're very profound, I can't tell you how profound I think they are. I think we don't have any idea about the degree to which, profoundly, culture has been deeply re-fashioned by what is happening, I don't want to call it capitalism because that's too economically reductionist. Something associated with the new forms of capital accumulation and the cultures that are required to sustain it on a global scale has transformed our society to its roots.

CM And how have these transformations been affected by the events of 11 September 2001.

SH I think they are very profoundly affected by that. But I don't think they're created by it. They've been roaring ahead since the mid-seventies, changing form. Reaganism and Thatcherism develop neo-liberalism within the sort of national framework, and then they take to the wild winds, and after that ... So I don't think 9/11 created them. I don't think it created the new world. But what it did was to develop two things. First, it made visible the degree to which this new system had to be the supervisor of the entire globe. Now this is nothing new.

The CIA has been at work supervising the world since the Cold War. But I think this is a different kind of superintendence. It's the first planetary system – that's what's distinctive about it. And I think 9-11 is the first break in this planetary system. Now this is the second thing, which is the deep paradox. Where did it come from? Maoism? Marxism? The revolutionary proletariat? The revolutionised peasantry? No, it comes from fucking religion – which we forgot about. We thought – and sociology told us – that secularisation is an unstoppable process. All our notions of modernity and of progress are harnessed to secularisation, the secular. I must say, I never quite liked secularisation in that sense. I've always understood that religion came from very profound roots. I'm not religious myself, but I'm not a militant humanist, a militant atheist . . . But in terms of our intellectual work, we just didn't give it a second thought. There it was humming away. With the defeat of secular alternatives, it became the focal point of resistance in some of the less developed parts of the world. What I am saying is, what I've called this planetary system harnesses into one system the overdeveloped and the underdeveloped. It's founded on uneven development. And that's a concept in the old Marxist literature which needs to be rethought. Uneven development, all within one global system. Of course, it's always been sort of within one system, and Marx is right that, from the early stages, capitalism always depended on engrossing more and more of the world. But now we've come to it: the whole world is engrossed unevenly in one system. So that means the first world, the third world, the fourth world, are all in the first world. And the fortunes of first-world corporations are being decided in Uzbekistan or places whose name people can't spell, the geographical location of which they don't know. Actually, the car they are driving is going to become obsolete because of what is happening there. So I'm not surprised by the fact that politics, having been exhausted in its social-democratic-liberal-reformist form, leaves only a much more extreme, indeed archaic, form, which has come back into the present. Return of the repressed. I think about the way that Arab nationalism, then Arab socialism, then Arab liberalism, are one after another exhausted, come apart at the seams, become their opposite until the only Arab focus of mobilisation left is the Muslim religion. So everything must surface inside of that. Now let me say what I think about that. What is surfacing in there, I would insist, is both something deeply recidivist and a skewed notion of how to be modern. The aspiration to become a modern society is right there alongside the form in which it must express itself; which is, within the tradition, the language, of what holds a society together – religion – in ways in which religion has stopped holding society together here. So it's not likely to surface here with the same force, though it surfaces in America.

CM But it really doesn't surface in Europe.

SH No it doesn't. Absolutely. Europe is where it doesn't have that resonance. It's more around and people talk in religious terms, but it really doesn't. But in those other societies, including the US, it is more of the common language, and those common languages carry everything. They carried nationalism, they carried liberalism, they carried progress, they carried modernisation, and they are carrying the opposition to whatever this global system is. So of course what this poses for us is the impossibility of making an alliance with forces which appear in that way. But I can't tell you that the only alternative to identifying with it is to identify with the other side. I don't think that helps, either. I think about the tragedy of Palestine all the time. I think about how the Western world has simply driven it to the wall. I think it was the paradox of the fact that Western Europe and North America have hounded and decimated Jews, the paradoxical consequence of which is that Arabs in the Middle East must pay – Palestinians must pay. It's a bizarre idea. I think about Israel, and I have to say I think Israel now must exist for practical reasons, it does not have any legitimacy as an ethnically cleansed religious state.

What I'm saying is, Where is the expression of opposition to the way in which American power is harnessed through Israel as a kind of hegemonic force across the whole of the Middle East? It's something to do with religion. It doesn't necessarily have to be: there have been secular movements. But in the end these will fall back on what little glue there is around to hold together this society which is being ripped apart. People talk about a two-state solution. Do they have any idea what the other state looks like? I mean, Palestine looks like a cheese, a cheese with holes in it. So I just think, of course religion is going to play a part there. I think about Fanon, and despite everything that Fanon saw, he never understood how religion was a force that the Algerian revolution had better come to terms with or it would undermine, weaken and subvert it. On and on and on and on. So I feel we have some responsibility for that because religion is a cultural form. And we could have something to say about that and about its ambivalent harnessing to different systems of power and what it does, not consciously but unconsciously – providing people with subjective identifications as a way of holding notions of collectivity expressed in a religious context. It's not to validate the religious foundation but to understand it as a cultural system operative bizarrely in our twenty-first-century world. And we didn't do that. So I think 9-11 flipped the switch on, up to high, but it was simmering long before that.

CM Final question. You're seen, rightly or wrongly, as one of the great theorists of multiculturalism, and one of the striking things about contemporary London is this extraordinary mix of races and cultures. But it's actually undergone a very remarkable change even in the last ten years. I still automatically think West Indian, African-Caribbean, South Asian, Indians, Pakistanis. But actually London now –

SH Full of Poles . . .

CM Yes . . . How do you see this most recent development?

SH I do think that what we call globalisation has a lot to do with it, and that what we call culture has a lot to do with it. I think if you persist in disseminating images of, not the good life but the prosperous life, across the globe, people will soon climb underneath the wheels of an aeroplane and try to get there as fast as they possibly can. They'll hang out halfway because they didn't make it this time, but they'll make it next time, disappear into the interstices of the city, et cetera. So there was a moment of real optimism about multiculturalism, and I think we were formed in a way in relation to that. I won't let go of that. I won't let go of that because I think there is no retreat from the multicultural mixing of peoples and cultures. So the question – what I call the multicultural question – the question is how people from unevenly developed societies from different cultures, religions, languages, and histories, can occupy the same space and negotiate to not eat one another and not just divide into separate warring tribes. I think that is the question, that's the dark side of globalisation. The transnational corporation and the global movement of people, some of them expelled from their homes, et cetera. Huge tides of peoples which mix. I don't think that multicultural question's gone away. I think we feel different about it because we imagine we can see that inside cultural difference hides the terrorist, the Islamic fundamentalist, et cetera, and that is just one of those problems that really has to be attended to in its own term. But for my purposes it doesn't undermine the deep questions which multiculturalism is about.

So I see why there's been a turn against the more optimistic reading of multiculturalism. But I don't think the multicultural question has gone away; and therefore, I think, the sort of rubbish which is talked about social cohesion is another form of assimilationism. Some people will be assimilated, no question about it, in the third and fourth generation, and the rest will fall into the drug posses and the underside of urban life, and so on, and continue to be extruded, expelled from the schools, et cetera. So we're not at the end of the problem which was

posed in multiculturalism, but I can see why it can no longer be taken for granted in that way. I'd say that I'm not much interested in multiculturalism because I think there are many different strategies. But I'm intrigued by what I call multicultural drift. I think London today is a result, not of equal opportunities, the good intentions of anybody. It's just that social forces have produced an unstoppable *mélange* of histories and cultures. And the fact that some of them are Somalis and North African, Middle Eastern and Iraqis, isn't surprising to me at all – really not surprising given the unevenness of stabilisation. Of course the appearance of Poles and Bulgarians poses a problem for the politics. The politics of the oppressed can be expanded from the Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, to include North Africans, but it can't in the same way be expanded to Eastern Europe.

I think that presents a problem of definition for us. For example, I've been working in cultural diversity and the arts. So do we now feel ourselves required to represent Polish culture? Bulgarian? Why not? Why not? What is it that distinguishes them from others? It can't be just colour because part of the multicultural argument has been that colour is only one of the signifiers of difference. It's cultural difference that has been the subverting force. Cultural racism is as important as biological racism, and indeed in our world much more potent. The troubling thing is that when cultural racism is in the dominant, it always carries a trace of biological racism with it. So people from Pakistan can't any longer, as we thought in the seventies they could, be black. But they're not white, either. They're sort of brown. Their brownness is the signifier of their difference. There's no signifier like that in relation to Eastern Europe. You look very hard indeed to be able to identify them visually. Whereas race in my view has always been useful because it's there, you can see it from the end of the road, you trust the evidence of your eyes, it tells you they look different so they must be different. I once wrote an essay called 'Is Race Nothing but a Floating Signifier?' One of its purposes is to argue that it's much more important to think of racism as having two different registers, always interrelated, and never just one without the other. Blackness in the black-white tension is there, but it's always been read civilisationally: you're black therefore you're more emotional than you are intellectual, you're more sexually endowed, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. So there's always been an interrelationship between these two registers, the biological and the cultural, and it's one of the things that people who talk about racism until the cows come home have never actually confronted. So there it is. I don't think it's going to go away. But it does present us with a shift of terrain. I'm going to say as the last thing that I think in a way which is radically conjuncturalist. I know that there's a problem of why you periodise it

here or there. Why do I say that there was a historic compromise that covered the moment of the welfare state and that began to come apart in the seventies? Is that supposed to give some analytic priority to capital accumulation in a wide sense as marking out a certain period. I think there's a lot of work to be done there. I am a radical conjuncturalist in this sense that I think, when the conjuncture shifts, everything shifts. Politics doesn't disappear. Culture doesn't disappear. But the way in which culture is articulated with the economic, and the way in which that is expressed in the political – all of that changes. And one of the reasons why something that emerges as opposition in one moment can be assimilated to the system in another is exactly that conjunctural shift. It's a question of positionality. This doesn't in my view devalue the first moment. We mustn't read the first moment in terms of the second. We mustn't say 1968 failed because it's been assimilated to neo-liberalism. It was, in its moment, extremely important in holding out the notion of some alternative way of life together. But it's not going to stay the same. Other things change, you're going to find it positioned somewhere else. Multiculturalism is undergoing one of those shifts at the moment.

CM I still feel some residual optimism. I mean, it depends on the day, but I actually find the kind of energy and mixture of London invigorating.

SH Of course. Of course that's right. That's why the notion that multiculturalism is dead is just nonsense. It's also why I talk about multicultural drift. That's not the only form of multiculturalism there is, but when the rest goes away – when programmes of equal opportunity end and politicians are talking assimilationism – unstoppable multiculturalism multiplies the cultures and the languages; there are now ninety languages in London's schools. What is that? It just multiplies. That is a kind of hope. We have to take hope where we can get it. I must say – to go back to something that we haven't talked about but which you mentioned when you came – global capitalism is an incredibly dynamic system. And it's capable of destroying one whole set of industries in order to create another set. Incredible. This is capitalism in its most global, dynamic form, but it is not all that secure. It's standing on the top of huge debt and financial problems. And I can't believe those problems won't come eventually to find their political, critical, countercultural, intellectual expression. We're just in the bad half of the Kondratiev cycle!

CM OK, I think that's a very good place to stop.