

24. Paul Gilroy, 'Between Camps: Race and Culture in Postmodernity', 10.
25. For a fuller discussion of this see P. Hintzen, *West Indian in the West: Self Representations in an Immigrant Community* (New York: New York University Press, 2001). The material for the ensuing discussion of West Indians in the San Francisco Bay area is taken from this work.
26. See S. Fisher, *From Margin to Mainstream: The Social Progress of Black Americans*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1992); G. Horne, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995); Mervyn Dymally, 'The Rise of Black Political Leadership in California', in *What Black Politicians are Saying?*, ed. Nathan Wright (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1972), 32-43; R. Sorenshein, *Politics in Black and White: Race and Power in Los Angeles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); B. Wyman, 'Roots: The Origins of Black Politics in the East Bay', *Express* 9, no. 43 (August 1987).
27. J.B. Justus, 'Introduction', in *Imagining Home: Class, Culture, and Nationalism in the African Diaspora*, 131.
28. Paul Gilroy, 'Between Camps: Race and Culture in Postmodernity'.
29. See C.V. Fong, 'Tracing the Origins of a "Model Minority"'. A study of the Depictions of Chinese Americans in Popular Magazines' (PhD diss., Department of Sociology, University of Oregon, 1989); W. Young-Jin, '“Model Minority” Strategy and Asian American Tactics', *Korea Journal* (Summer 1994): 57-66; S. Steinberg, *The Ethnic Myth: Race, Class and Ethnicity in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1981).
30. N. Glazer and P. Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1963); T. Sowell, 'Three Black Histories', in *American Ethnic Groups*, eds. T. Sowell and L.D. Collins (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 1978), 41.
31. P. Kasinitz, 'From Ghetto Elite to Service Sector: A Comparison of Two Waves of West Indian Immigrants in New York City', *Ethnic Groups* no. 7 (1998): 173-204; R. Farley and W. Allen, *The Color Line and the Quality of Life in America* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1987).

13

*Epilogue: Through the Prism of an Intellectual Life*¹

 Stuart Hall

Thinking about Thinking

I cannot begin at this point to try to reply or respond in any detail to the many papers which have been presented, the important ideas which have been circulated and the points which have been raised. Since I cannot respond in detail, what on earth can I do? Perhaps I can start by trying to invoke a certain way of experiencing myself over the last two days of the conference. I keep looking around trying to discover this person 'Stuart Hall' that everybody is talking about. Occasionally I recognize him. I sort of know him. He has a certain familiarity every now and again. I am familiar with a lot of the ideas people are referring to. I recognize some of the quotes, though I have to confess, not all! There are one or two I am very grateful to have rediscovered, and I hope to get the references. But this experience of, as it were, experiencing oneself as both subject and object, of encountering oneself from the outside, as another — an *other* — sort of person next door, is uncanny. It is like being exposed to a serialized set of embarrassments. And I want just to draw from that experience a first thought about thought. I think theory — thinking, theorizing — is rather like that, in the sense that one confronts the absolute unknowingness, the opacity, the density, of reality, of the subject one is trying to understand. It presents itself, first, as both too multifarious and too complicated, with its patterns too hidden; its interconnections un-revealed. One needs the act of distancing oneself — as Lacan would say — 'from the place of the other'. Marx once suggested that one should use concepts like a scientist uses a microscope, to change the magnification, in order to 'see differently' — to penetrate the disorderly surface of things to another level of understanding. There is a sense in which one has to stand back, outside of oneself, in order to make *the detour through thought*; to approach what it is one is trying to think about indirectly, obliquely, in another way, another mode. I think the

world is fundamentally resistant to thought. I think it is resistant to 'theory'. I do not think it likes to be thought. I do not think it wants to be understood. So inevitably, thinking is hard work, a kind of labour. It is not something that simply flows naturally from inside oneself. Thus, one of the perplexities about doing intellectual work is that, of course, to be any sort of intellectual is to attempt to raise one's self-reflexiveness to the highest maximum point of intensity. Someone — I think Mike Rustin² earlier on — referred to my early work, the subject of my putative D.Phil, on the novels of Henry James, and what a bizarre thing it is that this is where my academic career started. One of the things about James was of course his attempt to gain the maximum intensity of self-consciousness, to be as self-aware as possible about the finest movements of his own conscious thinking — as he said, 'to be someone on whom nothing is lost.' Yet to do that is to become instantly aware of the enormous *unconsciousness* of thinking, of thought; one simply cannot and will never be able to fully recuperate one's own processes of thought or creativity self-reflexively.

These provisional thoughts about thinking come from being present at a conference at which I am, somehow, both being discussed and also discussing! If I distance myself, see myself 'from the place of the other', I can see what James, in one of his finest short stories, called 'the figure in the carpet' that I could not see before. I was often tempted during these last two days to join in and speak of me in the third person! Now what I wanted to say about this strategy is that, of course, by taking the 'detour through thought', one sees all sorts of things about one's self and one's own thinking, connections in one's work, the patterns behind the patterns, which one could not possibly see for oneself in any other way. In that sense, one is always unconsciously escaping the attempt to self-knowledge, the attempt to become identical with myself. That is not possible. I cannot become identical with myself. That is the paradox of identity which I have tried to write about elsewhere — one can only think identity through difference. To think is to construct that inevitable distance between the subject that is thinking and the subject that is being thought about. That is just a condition of intellectual work.

Caribbean Formation

The second thought about thinking and about the 'thought' that we have been discussing these two days was my response to the invitation from Brian, Tony and Rupert, to, as it were, become, at this very late stage in my life, a Caribbean intellectual. In what sense could I possibly claim to be a Caribbean intellectual? Certainly, not in the most obvious sense of the term. My work has not been largely about the Caribbean. I have not been actively present in the enormously important work of trying to *write* the history of the Caribbean and Caribbean societies in the period of independence, including writing its past from the perspective of an independent nation. Of course, my hopes have been caught up with the fate of the nations of the region since decolonization. However, I have not been party in that deep way to the project of 'nationhood'. I am Caribbean in the most banal sense, in the sense that I was born here. But that accident of birth is not enough to justify owning up to the title. I have to confess, although they do not know it, that I did seriously think of saying to them, 'I am sorry, but I am not a Caribbean intellectual in the sense in which I think the Centre ought to be honouring people.' The reason I decided not to do that was because, reflecting on my own life and practice, I have to say that, although in many moments of my life I have been thinking about what many people in the Caribbean would think of as other problems, other places, other dilemmas, it seems to me I have always been doing so through what I can only call *the prism of my Caribbean formation*. In that sense I am committed to the idea of a politics of location. This does not mean all thought is necessarily limited and self-interested because of where it comes from, or anything like that. I mean something rather looser — that all thought is shaped by where it comes from, that knowledge is always to some degree 'positional'. One can never escape the way in which one's formation lays a kind of imprint on or template over what one is interested in, what kind of take one would have on any topic, what linkages one wants to make and so on. This is true even about so-called Cultural Studies, the field with which, inevitably, my work and my career have been identified, and for which I feel a certain responsibility. I have tried as far as possible to evade this 'burden of representation', and I sometimes make rude noises about it so people think 'oh well it does not really belong to him after all'. I deny paternity —

Cultural Studies had many origins, many 'fathers', but nevertheless, one feels a certain responsibility for it.

Well, Cultural Studies has its own internal history as a discipline, but when I think about why I ever got into it, I know it was because, before what is called Cultural Studies ever began at Birmingham in the early 1960s, I had to confront the problem of trying to understand what Caribbean culture was and what my relationship was to it. I put it that way because my relationship to it, in terms of a naturalistic logic — 'He was born here, so he must be a Caribbean intellectual' — does not work. My relationship to the Caribbean was one of dislocation, of displacement, literally and figuratively. My life as a young person, as a child, as an adolescent, was spent there. I left when I was 18 years old. Though I have never ceased to think of myself as in some way 'Jamaican', I have never lived for long periods in the Caribbean since then. A relationship then — a negative relationship, you would think — of displacement and dislocation. Dislocation in a deeper sense, too. The reason why I was so committed to leaving the Caribbean when I finished school at the end of the 1950s and the reason why in some ways I never returned to live here, had to do with my colonial formation, my formation and experience as a *colonial subject*. Because there are so many young people in the audience, I want to remind you that I am talking about something very specific, now more or less lost as an immediate experience to those who are not of or nearly my age. Most of you are children of the 'postcolonial'. I am talking about experiencing oneself, thinking about one's society and one's future, from the position of a colonial subject. I left for England 12 years before independence. My whole formation had been as a child of coloured middle-class Jamaican society. That is to experience oneself as 'colonized' — that is, fundamentally displaced from the centre of the world, which was always represented to me as 'elsewhere' and at the same time dislocated from the people and conditions around me. My relationship to that background, which I do not want to go into in a personal sense, was to make me feel (in the eloquent term which the great critic of Orientalism, Edward Said, used as the title of his memoir of a strikingly similar childhood half way around the world in another colonized space) 'out of place', both in relation to my family and my personal formation and in relation to the society into which I had

been born. I hope it is not necessary to add that colonization, class, race and colour were intrinsic to that troubled story.

Up to the point where I left Jamaica in 1951, I did not understand what was the source of that dislocation. I thought it was a largely personal one. It was not until much later that I discovered that this was a feeling of dislocation experienced by a whole generation of intellectual Caribbean people at the end of Empire. When I went to London, there they all were, hiding out: all of them making some kind of escape attempt from colonial society. All of them in search for a way to become modern subjects, but with the bizarre thought that in order to do so, you had to leave the place of your birth — to go somewhere else — to become, borrowing the title of one of George Lamming's novels 'a native of my person'. Not anywhere else, of course, but right to the heart of the dislocation itself, to that which had, at a distance, dis-placed, un-homed you. And when I say 'dislocated', I am talking about serious stuff. I am talking about never feeling at one with the expectations my family had for me; of the sort of person I should become, of what I should do with my life. And of dislocation from the people themselves — from the mass of the Jamaican people: not at home 'in the castle of my skin'. Not being able to find myself 'at home' in the context in which I was born, brought up and lived. And I thought, this a recipe for disaster. The thing to do, I felt, is get out of there. There is a wonderful passage in Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile*³ — a book which I strongly recommend to you if you are interested in this period of Caribbean intellectual history, and especially if you can appreciate and enjoy the ironies of the word 'pleasures' in which Lamming, speaking of the West Indian writers who all found themselves living in London between 1948 and 1958 says, 'they simply wanted to *get out* of the place where they were born'. This is the decade which, as he says, 'witnessed the "emergence" of the novel as an imaginative interpretation of West Indian society by West Indians. And every one of them: Mittelholzer, Reid, Mais, Selvon, Hearne, Carew, Naipaul, Andrew Salkey, Neville Dawes, everyone has felt the need to *get out*.'⁴ As an aspiring young writer, get out I did. However, what I soon discovered was that I had not and could never really 'get out' or be fully part of this 'elsewhere' that had simultaneously made and un-made me. To make the return journey: not literally, because for many, 'you can't go home again', but symbolically, in my head. I had no

alternative but to come to terms with and try to understand the very culture from which I had felt distanced and, unsuccessfully, engineered an impossible escape. And when in the mid-1950s after the *Empire Windrush* and the beginning of mass migration to England from the Caribbean, I met black Caribbean men and women looking for work and a place to live in the grey, wet and inhospitable London streets — one more turn in the story of the Middle Passage and a critical moment in the formation of another displaced black diaspora — I resolved to go back, to read, read about, try to understand and to make a part of me the culture which had made me and from which I could never — and no longer wished — to escape. The central theme of *Pleasures of Exile*, Richard Drayton says in the preface to the new edition,⁵ is ‘the recovery of self’ — even if it can only be recovered on the other side of the Black Atlantic. That was the personal origins, for me, of my own ‘making’ as a black intellectual (like many Jamaicans of my generation and class background, I had never until then thought of myself as ‘black’); and also the first encounter with, what later came to be called Cultural Studies. All this no doubt explains how my perspective on ‘being a Caribbean intellectual’ and my conceptualization of ‘culture’ acquired from its earliest point so disrupted and *diasporic* an inflexion.

Subjectivity and Culture

What we think of as our individuality — something given before culture, which we possess as a subject just by being born, after which we learn to use the tools of culture — is quite the reverse. This is part of what I meant by saying that identity is not settled in the past but always also oriented towards the future. We enter culture, and by doing so, appropriate a language, a culture, which someone else — many other people — created for us, and only in that way gradually become subjects. Men and women make history, not on conditions of their own making, but with elements which are provided for them from the past, and which in some sense, are their conditions of existence, and they and shape and form them in ways that they have to live subjectively but for which they cannot be directly responsible. It is one of Michel Foucault’s greatest insights that in order to become ‘subjects’ we must be ‘subjected’ to discourses which speak us, and without which we cannot speak. Of course, culture is also enabling as well as constraining,

disciplining. Within culture, we can form intentions, make purposes, create the most extraordinary intuitions into life. We can produce great works of philosophy, of painting, of literature; but only because we have already subjected ourselves to the laws and conventions and meanings of a language, the circumstances of history and culture, without which we could not have made ourselves. This process is called ‘the decentring of the subject’. It represents the dislocation of the subject from the position of authorship and authority. It is the dislocation from that humanist dream which, I think, is really a humanist fantasy, that actually Man (sic) is the centre of the universe, it all proceeds from us and we are the origin. I could say more about how that figure of the displacement from the position of origin and identity has recurred in my own thinking but this is not the place or the time. However, it represents the end of a certain fantasy of romantic individualism to which I once subscribed (I went to England, after all, as a Romantic poet manqué), and the starting-point in my thinking of a profound belief that ‘the social’ is more than the sum of individuals, it is what the early sociologists — Marx, Weber, Durkheim — called ‘society *sui generis*’. My critics would say this is how I fell prey to structuralism but it really preceded all that. It came in part from thinking about my own formation, my own subjecthood. I do not apply this insight substantively. It is not what I think about but rather what I think *with*. When I think about a problem, I realize retrospectively that I have done so by making this ‘detour’. I am sure this ‘methodological presupposition’ of my thinking has something to do with my own personal ‘displacement’, but this is a connection I cannot spend time reflecting on — it is part of the unconsciousness of thought about which I was speaking earlier.

Trans-disciplinary Thought and Intellectual Activism

I am trying to now respond or refer to things which have been said in the last couple of days without actually being able to take on directly arguments which have been made. I am trying to share with you my thoughts, prompted by the last few days, about this strange object/subject — ‘the thought of Stuart Hall’. I have been describing a kind of ‘thinking under erasure’. What I mean by that is simply that in intellectual thought there are rarely absolutely new paradigms, which

nobody has ever attended to before. We think within traditions and paradigms of thought — they think us — even when our intention is to break with and transcend them. But there are moments when the paradigms shift, when what David Scott calls ‘the problem space’ changes. We do live in a period when many of the existing paradigms established and developed within traditional intellectual disciplines either no longer in themselves adequately correspond to the problems that we have to resolve, or require supplementing from other disciplines with which they have not historically been directly connected. These are the openings for what is called a trans-disciplinary field of inquiry. And I speak about it because I have — once again somewhat unconsciously — found myself in a trans-disciplinary field. I have never been able to be satisfied with working from within a single discipline. It has nothing to do with not respecting what has gone on in the work of developing intellectual disciplines, but I am at the same time aware of the fact that the organization of modern knowledge into the disciplinary framework occurred at a specific historical moment. That historical moment may have passed, or may be passing, or ‘on the wane’; or that particular way of organizing knowledge may no longer be adequate to the reality it is trying to analyse and describe. I feel a disjuncture between the disciplines, on the one hand, and the rapidly shifting and changing fragments of reality which confront us today. Again, I am not recommending to you an anti-disciplinary pathway, I am simply saying that I have not found it possible to think simply within the framework of the given disciplines. I started in literature and literary criticism but I never became a writer or a critic. I was a professor of sociology but I have no formal academic training in the field. Cultural Studies is a trans-disciplinary field of inquiry, not a discipline.

Now, that has had profound costs on my own thought. First of all, I really am not an academic in the traditional sense at all. I mean Barry Chevannes⁶ was very kind to refer to me as a ‘scholar’, but I am not really in the true sense of the word a ‘scholar’. That is not what I am. I have lived an academic life and earned my living — not terribly well — from doing academic work. I love to teach. I wanted to teach from the earliest point that I can remember. And teaching goes on in academic worlds. I respect and defend the academy to the hilt and the capacity it gives to transmit knowledge to future generations and to pursue knowledge for its own sake. One has to defend this arena of

critical thought — especially these days when it is under such attack from so many quarters — with one’s life. But it does not mean that I want to be or think of myself as having been an academic. I would claim, I would insist on, my right to the title of having done intellectual work. I am an intellectual. I am an intellectual in Gramsci’s sense because I believe in the power and necessity of ideas. Of course, as a sort of materialist, I do not believe ideas alone make the world go round. And I certainly do not mean that I think my task is to produce theory. I would do without theory if I could! The problem is I cannot. You cannot. Because the world presents itself in the chaos of appearances, and the only way in which one can understand, break down, analyse, grasp, in order to do something about the present conjuncture that confronts one, is to break into that series of congealed and opaque appearances with the only tools you have: concepts, ideas and thoughts. To break into it and to come back to the surface of a situation or conjuncture one is trying to explain, having made ‘the detour through theory’. Marx, in his 1857 Introduction, which is a wonderful methodological text about which I have written, as Larry Grossberg⁷ remarked the other day, describes exactly this process. I am talking here about a working method of Marx. I am not talking about whether one subscribes to all the theories of Marxism or not. That is a different question. And what Marx says is you begin with an obvious fact: a social system is composed of people, and this gives us our first, what he calls ‘chaotic’ conception — the category of ‘population’. How far can you take this category of population? Well, you can take it quite far. But really, you have to break with that descriptive approach at the moment when you understand that every population is always divided, it is not a homogeneous or multifarious single object. Always within that population are relations between capitalists and labour, men and women, masters and slaves. Relations of difference are what matters. The social categories into which people are inserted are more important than the sum of the humanity — the fact ‘that we are all human under the skin’ — which they constitute. And to make the move of analysing the population, as it were, into its particular categories, and the relations of similarity and difference between them, seems an abstract movement: the necessary moment of abstraction. However, as Marx says, you cannot stop there — which a great deal of theory does. You know, it is pleased to produce the

