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# Pioneers

*of Qualitative Research*

## Stuart Hall

Life story interview with Paul Thompson

2012

Principle investigator's thematic highlights

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## **Stuart Hall**

**Interviewed by Paul Thompson**

**March 2012, April 2012, May 2012**

### **1: Family: Colour, Class and Colonialism**

I was born into a coloured middle-class Jamaican family.... They're relatively few, but they are the elite. We were 20 years away from Independence, but they were already clearly the coming class – they're going to be the governing class, the business class, etc. – and so my father belonged to this solid middle-class elite. My father had been from a lower middle-class family – his father kept a drug store – but he had been quite well educated, and he got a job, very early on, with the United Fruit Company. He stayed there the whole of his early working life, and he was the first local Jamaican to hold every post he had, and finally ended up as the Chief Accountant. Before that, people had been sent down from Boston to top the Company, etc.. So he was a rising, he was part of the rising social group, as it were.

My mother, however, came from a very different background. Her mother was a postmistress, and her father may have been what I would call “Jamaican white”... Close relationship to an English birth, but whether he was actually English or first generation, or whatever - they were much fairer than my father – the whole of that family. They were Grossets. They lived in Port Antonio... [They] were a very prominent family in Port Antonio. Port Antonio was then a bustling, thriving town, on the north of the Island, and bustling and thriving because it was the last port of call of the banana boats.... Her uncles were the leading doctor, and the leading lawyer of the place. And my mother's mother, who was really quite poor, allowed my mother's uncles, in effect, to adopt her. It wasn't formal, but they brought her up rather than my mother bringing her up. ...

Now, they owned a small estate as well as this professional standing that they had, and that's where my mother was brought up. She was brought as if she were an estate girl. There were cousins, a bit fairer than she was, and there was no formal adoption, but she

was brought up alongside them – not quite, because they were all sent, at a certain point, to England, to be educated, as was often the common practice then. She didn't go, and I think she resented the fact that her cousins went and she didn't go. But she was part of that world. She adored and idolised both her aunt and her uncle who brought her up. And they acculturated her to small plantation life. You know, she drove the buggies, and she gave commands, etc.. ...

But she brought into my family all those habits, all those expectations, everything. She's very handsome, very strong, very self-willed person. She should have worked, they took her to work in her uncle's office – law firm – she loved it. But the family was her work. That production of the family was her labour! And she'd have my father as a good prospect, because he was coming up, and he represented new emerging Jamaica. But, of course, he never quite earned enough money for her... So this mix is the family I was brought into. ...

When, finally, I was born, ... we were part of the Kingston middle-class. When my sister looked into the crib and saw me, she said, "Where did you get this coolie baby from?" Because within that family, there was every shade! My mother was the fairest, my brother was almost as fair as her. My sister was a bit darker. I was distinctly darker, much closer to my father and my father's family. But I had the sense, from God knows when, that I was a kind of anomaly there. I didn't quite fit in. ...

I was, of course, the bad one, the naughty one. I was always naughty, always rude, always in trouble ... I never felt at home in that place. Never felt at home. Their aspirations for me were not my aspirations. They saw me in a way that I didn't see myself. And that was very much because of their attitude to the rest of Jamaica. They were in the struggle to identify us – that middle-class, at that stage – with the Colonial power, with England – you know, my mother really thought she was English, some sort of some genetic error had occurred to make her not English! ... My father wasn't quite like that. He was a very quiet person – studious, read the papers, never went into debt for anything, careful accountant, smoked stubby cigars in the evening. Go for his walk, have a rum and ginger on the veranda. And he never really stopped my mother from doing anything. She just governed the place.

*Well, you say, as a child, you had a sense there was something odd going on, but when did you begin to see that in terms of colour and class?*

Well, that is hard to tell, Paul. I remember the riots in 1938, which comes at the end of the terrible depression Jamaica suffered in the thirties, lots of unemployment. It's the beginnings of Trade Unionism in Jamaica, and of political parties, yes? So it's really the opening of modern politics in Jamaica. Huge riots, unemployment riots. And I remember, my family was in, as you can imagine, panic. All of them thought the mobs, the black masses are going to rise up and come up into Upper Kingston and savage us in our beds – all sorts of rumours! And I must have been six, and I thought, “What is this about? ... Who are they?”

Well, I knew who they were because the veranda talk that I had been exposed to throughout my life, was entirely about that. That's what it was about, it was about class and colour, class differences, colour differences.... My family experience was - well, somehow you've got to choose. Why you don't feel at one with them? Well, who are you to feel at one with? Well, ordinary Jamaican people - 95% of the population! Yes, but you don't know them, you never lived a life like that. You know them, you've seen them about, you love Jamaica, you identify with the place, you adore the countryside, etc., but you don't really - you're not one of them. You aren't one of them. Between me and them was the shield of my family, the screen of my family. So I suppose it's quite a while before I identified this as having to do with class and colour. But I knew we were different...

My grandmother could pinpoint people's racial background, you know, to a T. I mean, she would run the combinations of skin colour, education, straightness of the hair, European features, on and on and on, she'd say, “A touch of the tar brush there!” So that's what they talked about. We used to have rum punch parties on Sunday and some expatriate people would come, some of my father's business people, old family friends from Port Antonio, etc., the grounds would be full of these people drinking my mother's rum punch and chatting. They were chatting about affairs, and about class distinctions. And the class distinctions were always mediated through colour. So the moment I really

started to reflect on this thing, I thought, “Well, that is what this society is about. It’s about these two things”. ...

Now, unlike racially divided societies formerly, like the Southern States, or like apartheid, there was no formal lines, so everything was part of an informal system. You could cross, nobody would stop you. A black person, uneducated, if they had the money, could go into Merchant Bank Hotel and he wouldn’t last for two minutes because the atmosphere would be so hostile! But nobody would come and say, “You can’t have a drink here” or “You can’t order lunch here”. Nothing. So it had to be managed informally, it was a society that had to be constantly read – it had to be made legible. Now, the way in which you understood that was another thing.

I’ll tell you another element which adds to its complexity, of course it’s a colony, and a colony means that it’s judged according to a norm which is not internal to it. The white English are the norm – that is what civilisation is – and the further away you are from it, the less in life you are. So it’s graded, but towards the centre, which is not inside your society, it’s somewhere else.... Yearning to be in England, never been in England. It yearns to be white, can’t possibly be white. ...

Another factor had to do with the way in which race and class are linked together. And I would put it this way. Class, obviously, had to do with land, property, wealth, spending power, education – all the things that those things buy.... But all of it was, of course, also graded by colours – by skin colour. So the mass, who were poor, were largely black, and the intermediate class, who are quite well-off, like my family, were brown. And the rich and the landed, were either English or what we call “white Jamaicans”, i.e. it all got mixed up so early on, nobody could tell any longer, but they could pass as white. So the class system and the skin colour system were interlaced....

The big thing was, of course, because there weren’t many women in the early stages, so there had been substantial sexual miscegenation, and planters and overseers and engineers in the sugar factories, etc., simply took African wives – women, not wives – women, and had children with them. So although everything was graded by an interlocking of class and colour, you couldn’t be quite certain what that meant. A lot of black families would

turn out to have one white forebear six generations back!... So where do you stand in the social ranking? This complex hierarchisation of racial difference.

What I discovered was that everybody knows this. Everybody understands it. Because it's a taboo system related to racial impurity, and it's related to slavery, which at that stage nobody wanted to know about at all – you couldn't talk about it openly. But you had to have a thousand euphemisms and circumlocutions to refer to this glaring heart of the society. So the talk was hints, innuendos, you know what people are talking [about], you had to internalise a kind of matrix, complicated social matrix, which allowed you to read the society. But you couldn't say, "Oh, I hate black people" –as a middle-class person. You couldn't do it. Of course not.

I'm telling this in this detail because most of the questions that have preoccupied a lot of my work come from that experience, long before I knew anything about sociology or social sciences or anything like that, and informed it really.... I didn't understand that race, as a concept, was not very actively understood. But colour was the visible sign of race, so if you wanted to operate an informal social system of distinctions, you had to find a language that was non-existent there, [that was] visible. "Well, I don't know where they come from, and I don't know who their parents are, who knows? But I can see a touch of the tar brush there!" So colour is a signifying system for that which you can't see – race, biological – these things operate genetically, hidden, you can't smoke them out, but colour you can't avoid. You can't avoid. You have only to look and you see the whole of Jamaica resumed in the colour, class, bearing, physique, of the people in front of you....

I came to disapprove deeply of [my parents], and of the life they wanted me to lead. I came to not be able to recognise myself in their image of me, but I never had open rows about that with them. I had open rows about everything else. For instance, my mother, when I went to school ... my mother would not allow me to bring a black boy home. Not one of us. "You'll learn bad habits from them". "We don't know who his parents are". No. So my life was divided between people that they liked – including girls that they thought was appropriate for me, about whom I had no feeling whatsoever - and my underground life with my friends at school, a much wider posse of intimates. So she patrolled those boundaries, and I felt that as a weight on me.

I haven't mentioned one thing which I should say something about very briefly. My sister went to work.... and fell in love with a black student. The University of the West Indies had just started, and a black Barbadian student, medical student was there – very educated, etc., etc., but black. My mother said, “No! It will not happen. Not from this house. Absolutely not”. She forbade it. They broke it off. My sister had the most tremendous mental breakdown within two months. She was given shock therapy, bouts of it, by ordinary GPs, because there were no psychiatrists, blitzed her mind, cleared her mind of these funny ideas she'd somehow gotten hold of! And I suddenly saw that the whole microcosm of Jamaican society and its problems and intricacies, were being mirrored inside the family culture, you know? She was she was the victim of Colonialism! You know, I don't know any other way of putting it. She was sacrificed to the social system. ...

I just looked at her, and I thought, “Now, this is a certain kind of emotional death, and if you ever get a chance to leave here, don't come back to it. (pp. 1-13)

## **2: Other Jamaican Migrants to Britain**

I saw this stream of ordinary Jamaican people coming out of the station, and I thought, “Who are these? Where are they going? These are not middle-class travellers, these are ordinary working people from Jamaica. What are they doing here?” Well, of course, it was only two years after the arrival of *The Windrush*, which is 1948 - two or three years – and the migration was just beginning to build up. Well, that was a very strange experience to me, because I regarded coming to England as a kind of escape attempt, I couldn't come to terms - I wasn't the person my parents wanted me to be. But somehow that formation prevented me also from identifying as an ordinary Jamaican boy. So I felt blocked in both directions... But there they were. There was my problem! On the station forecourt, all there, all in England.

What were they doing here? Where were they from? A lot of them were from the countryside and never been in Kingston, though it's been a bit exaggerated how unskilled they were, it's turned out. But, nevertheless, they'd scraped together and found the

wherewithal to travel, and here they were, in their brimmed felt hats and their brightly coloured jackets, and their baskets an incredible sight! I thought, “Well, what will happen to them? They’re not going back right away, they’ve come to work. Can they find work that isn’t available in Jamaica?” “They’ll have to live here. They’ll have to live somewhere. Where? What relationship will they have with the people that they’re living amongst?” “What kind of jobs will they find?” But more especially, “What sort of Jamaicans will they be in ten years? They’ll be habituated to something else”. They are really, themselves, of composite cultural background, and here is another layer, to be lived in Hounslow or Notting Hill or wherever it is, Brixton.

What I realised is that they would never be the same as they’d come, as this experience would transform them. I couldn’t see in exactly what ways, but they could never quite go back. In that sense, they, and I, couldn’t really go home again. And so I felt ... “All of us are going to change by staying”. So for the first time, their fates and mine were sort of the same!

That’s where I learnt to see life as a diasporic subject – as somebody who’s living the in-between life there and here, between cultures, between temporalities, between forms of authority and power, and finally decide, “Could you make a home here when you really thought of that as home? But if you went home, you could never make a home there”. You’d always be thinking about there. Well, that is what diasporic subjects are like. They’re going to be them, and so am I. So it’s a critical experience for me, because suddenly I saw myself from some other person’s place. ... I saw my subjectivity, but from the place of the other, rather than from within, what I felt like and all the ideas I had. So it was a very important experience. (pp. 26-28)

### **3: Finding a Caribbean Identity**

George Lamming said, wrote, in *The Pleasures of Exile*, “Most of us became West Indians in London”. I arrived as a Jamaican, I’d never been to any other West Indian island, and lots of the others hadn’t. People from the southern Caribbean travelled a lot more between the small islands, but Jamaica is way up at the top of the chain. I’d never been to anywhere down there at all, so I suddenly discovered there was the rest of the

Caribbean, and there was a thing called “Caribbean identity”. There was a thing called the “Caribbean novel”. So I identified with the region, for the first time, in England. (p. 34)

One of the things I read about, because I was puzzling about Jamaica, was the debate about slavery, and about what had been retained of African civilisations, and how it had been broken up, and, you know, how they’d mingled with other cultures to preserve themselves and so on. Herskowitz: long debates, mainly from American cultural anthropology, but long debates about how Africa survived Colonialism, and how those were integrated with other cultures, for instance, the language. Jamaican patois, as you know, is still full of African words, certainly African concepts. The structure of the grammar is English, a kind of English, as it were, it’s a kind of fusion of these two languages. And the more I looked around, the more I saw Caribbean culture as a fusion of different cultures, essentially not authentic in its own terms. Everybody who came from that region had died out - the Spaniards killed them off in a hundred years, hard work, Arawak Indians, etc., there was nobody left in Jamaica. Everybody there is a coloniser, or an African, or an Indian indentured person, or a Chinese trader, or a French person running away from Haiti, it’s all somebody somewhere else.

But this was one of the puzzles I was trying to track through the anthropological literature, “What is this thing, an authentic culture that everybody is rooted in? One authentic culture that everybody’s rooted in. How come we folks are not at home quite in any culture, but at home in several at one and the same time?” There’s a point where Salman Rushdie says, “I’m just one of those mongrels. I am a mongrel. The idea of purity is something which - ” well, I think in some ways he’s mistaken, I think Salman could have found an authentic culture if he’d worked at it, but I certainly couldn’t! I certainly couldn’t. (p. 36)

#### **4: Researching Henry James**

Now, in some ways, most of the people I know – not at the time, but since then – are completely puzzled that I would be interested in Henry James, and I can’t think of anybody more different. I don’t know whether Henry James knew where Jamaica was, or

anything like that. There isn't a line about race in his work, really, except for about Jews and Judaism, but about black people, nothing. Aristocratic, in taste very refined, very pro-European, etc., so what was it about James? Well, I thought that it was what they call the "international consciousness" in James. His work is structured around the contrast between Europe and America, and that was what I was, in a completely different dimension, puzzling about. So I regard James as a diasporic novelist... Then the middle novels - and then the big novels at the end, all of which are about Americans in Europe ... I was more interested in that work than I was in James's more English-focused novels.

I never finished the thesis. No. I started to work on it, but instead of working on it in a steadily progressive fashion, I started to go to Rhodes House Library, and read about anthropology. (pp. 34-35)

## **5: The Debate on Changing Class Consciousness**

The debate was about what was happening to working-class culture after the War: would it be affected by the American models, and American mass culture? Television and all that was coming. Was capitalism the same as it had been before? Was this new orientation to affluence and consumerism and so on, did this represent another stage or phase of capital? We had to debate that. Well, could class be interpreted in the same way as it had been in the high industrial period? What was the equivalent of the cloth cap working class in 1950?

So when I say "culture", I don't just mean that it was about cultural questions, it was about culture in exactly this broader sense that I'm talking about. But it was also about culture in another sense. It paid attention to the cultural dimensions of politics, of the political, and therefore it was from the inception in my head opposed to the narrow base/superstructure model that prevailed within classical Marxism, which gave culture, and literature, and the symbolic dimension, a dependent status. It depended on, [was] reflexive of everything else. We just were not able to think about that in that way.

So there's a theoretical thread going which leads all the way through cultural studies, and there's a political thread going of a position in between the major currents and tendencies.

Yes? And the focus was on, “How would you describe Britain in 1956, ’57, ’58? What would you expect it to be? What will this new kind of capitalism be like?” Well, this, as you know very well, was not the debate [just] we were having, we didn’t generate this debate, everybody was talking about that! I remember the 1959 Election, Gaitskell’s speech to the Labour Party Conference was, “What will happen to the Labour vote in the light of the coming of the small motor car, the washing machine, the fridge, and the television? Will affluence undo all of that?” Well, Hoggart had said, “Well, no, but it will change it. It will change it”.... So there were deep cultural questions, and the debate about what was the nature of modern capitalism was a cultural debate, in part. ...

But you can see what that is coming out of – that debate about affluence. And when we got the *New Left Review*, I wrote a piece called, “A Sense of Classlessness”. Well, the sense of classlessness was left out, it was thought to declare that we were now a classless society, so it was entirely misread, I didn’t mean that at all. But I meant there was a growing sense that people were being loosened from their class position and origin, and that in any case the content, social and cultural content of economic classes was being very different in the new period, and we had to come to terms with it, and to find a language to define that difference. Well, of course, Edward on one hand, and Raphael on the other, came down on me like a ton of bricks! But you know, I think I am vindicated by history! (pp. 38-40)

## **6: The Partisan and Notting Hill**

So the Club became a kind of focal centre. The first group was in London. We went from hotel to hotel. Eventually we took root in 100 Oxford Street, which was a jazz club, famous jazz club, but on Monday nights no jazz was played, so Universities and Left Review Club moved in there amidst the technical lighting of a jazz club, and there we invited all the people that we felt - Richard Crossman, Crosland, we debated with Crosland, Gaitskell, but also Tom Mboya, people from the Left overseas; had debates about NATO; had debates about the bomb. A huge centre for political discussion. And only after that were there clubs of a similar kind started elsewhere among readers.

The Partisan was really a sort of offshoot of the Club. Instead of hiring these places, why don't we have a place of our own? Well, we could only afford, with the people that Raphael [Samuel] rustled up contributions from, a very small place, though in Soho - can you imagine, the corner of Soho Square, I mean a really a prize site, but that's all we could [afford]. But where we going to hold these Club meetings? Sometimes we had 300 people there. Well, there was a plan that there was a basement, and the basement is where Raphael's penchant for small tables with chess ... took root down there, and never seen again! ... But it was not very big. Upstairs was the main room where the tables were, but where to put a speaker? ... We had to go on hiring places elsewhere. But that was the beginnings of The Partisan.

*Whose idea was that?*

Oh, it was Raphael's. I tell you, we climbed into All Souls', Oxford, where Chuck [Taylor] was a Fellow, to take a final decision on whether to go with Raphael's proposal to start a coffee bar - European style coffee bar, French style coffee bar - in London. We spent hours and hours debating it, and we all said, "Nobody here has ever run a sweet shop, let alone a coffee bar in the centre of London. No." We took a decision, no, and then the Partisan opened regardless, two or three months later! Raphael himself was the impresario: used to go to the market, and buy beetroot to make borscht, and insisted on filter coffee. Well, right opposite where the Partisan was, was "The Gaggia". The Gaggia was the home of the first Italian espresso machine in London, so the Partisan had a model somewhere in the past, and the Gaggia was about to be cappuccino, the new cappuccino generation. So people had sort of to choose between these two cultural models. I was, unfortunately, addicted to cappuccino, so I would drift across quietly, leaving the filter coffee behind, to the cappuccino. But it was that kind of period - the opening of the Italian café, boys in Italian suits, with Vespas - it's that era.

I should say one thing more, which is very important. Universities and Left Review Club was used, in addition to the Partisan, we had offices upstairs, and we had a library, in which you could have small meetings and seminars, and a lot of groups - one related to schools, one related to education, one related to film and so on, used to have meetings, 50

people in this room. That became the place from which Ernest Rodkear among others, organised the first leafleting of London for the first Aldermaston March.

But also, Universities and Left Review Club became, in '58, one of the first groups to go into Notting Hill after the race riots, and try to establish or set up with local residents, black and white tenants' groups. So we were there negotiating with the Labour Party, with the churches, to some kind of common front. We were there when Mosley made his first appearance on the Saturday morning, you know, first appearance since the War, saying, "Send them back home! They're just as bad as the Jews, the blacks, etc.". Fascists started to organise. I mean, this was a very very tough period. It's the moment when the underlying racism that had always been there from the end of the War really – "No coloureds, no dogs, no Irish", etc. in lodging houses - really surfaced. The Notting Hill riots. And it was, of course, made more volatile because it connected with the new youth culture that was growing, yes, Teddy Boy culture, a mixture of style and aggression, etc.. So it was a lethal kind of combination. ... The Club got involved in Notting Hill. So the Club became a more activist centre through these different activities as well as a place where the big Monday meeting debate was still held. (pp. 42-44)

## **7: Edward P. Thompson**

He was a very powerful person, very powerful person. Imaginative, romantic. He was a romantic, and he taught the Romantics, and he interpreted the Romantics in a very important way, but he was, himself, a great romantic, I would think. Fine social historian, *The Making of the English Working Class* was a wonderful, wonderful book, what an intervention, created a whole new intellectual field of work. So I was very proud to have read it in manuscript before it was published. Because we used to go – by then I was with Catherine – we used to go to Vodi in Wales, to their cottage there – Edward and Dorothy – so they were very kind to us and so it's not at all personal, but I found them formidable. Formidable. We used to discuss the New Left, and New Left politics, and what was going on in the world, etc., quite a lot, and he was interested in my work because he thought of me as a literary person, so he would talk to me about William Morris and the Romantics, and Blake and so on, where a lot of other political people weren't so interested in that.

But I have to say he also had a particular view of me, which was not what I was. I can't tell you exactly what that was. Of course, he was politically committed, as you might imagine, to the cause of national liberation and so on, but he didn't have a sense of what Colonialism was. He didn't really have a sense of what Imperialism was. He was very English in his imagination, in the fibre of his being. And I remember when we published *Policing the Crisis*, I sent a copy to him, and he wrote me a long long letter, and the sum of the letter was, "I don't know why you keep going on about race. What is so important about race? Of course we're all against racism" ... So [he did not connect with] that side of me, my preoccupation with my racial identity and my racial identification, my sense that the Imperial and Colonial world was a different route to modern capitalism from the ones the European historians were interested in. They were interested in the evolution of the market, from early market society through to modern capitalism, and I had to come to terms with conquest and violence, slavery, aggression, imposed colonial rule, colonial cultural dependency. They really didn't know anything about that. So I've always felt, again, slightly misunderstood by them, but very very generously treated.

Of course, I was not knowledgeable enough to be a scholar, to debate with him on *The Making of the English Working Class*, but by then I knew what an incredibly important book it was – not only because of what it said, but also, for my purposes, because it took the cultural dimension absolutely seriously: serious about religion, didn't box it off into some other thing. So that's a New Left kind of person. So I was very formed by him, but it was always a tense relationship, in spite of our closeness, and became tenser later on.

Because he hated cultural studies, and the famous Ruskin meeting at which he ripped us up, and then he destroyed one of his greatest devotees, Richard Johnson. A savage, savage attack, it was a kind of parting of the ways, and I we never really got it together again after that. (pp. 47-48)

## **8: Raymond Williams.**

Raymond Williams is a completely different kettle of fish. I met Raymond because he was an extra-mural tutor in charge of the South Coast – Hastings, he lived in Hastings – and he organised classes all around there, but for the Oxford Delegacy of Extra-Mural

Studies. So he was always in Oxford, and I met him in Oxford. He used to go to a thing called the Critical Society... I started to talk to Raymond, and he sent us to read, it must have been in '56, in draft form, two chapters of what became *Culture and Society*. So from then on, I was close to Raymond, always trying to meet him whenever he came to Oxford, and reading this stuff.

He was ... a wonderful thinker with a huge range of imaginative things going on in his head – like Edward [Thompson] – but at the absolute opposite end of the pole. You know, the more Edward got into - the more excited he became, the more wild the hair would [become, till] you could see him in a sort of prophetic role. The more excited Raymond became, the quieter he became. Yes, went into a kind of Welsh burr: you had to listen very carefully to hear what was being very scrupulously formulated. So temperamentally they were at opposite ends of the pole, interested in very different things.

But I found Raymond incredibly approachable, and because of his interest in literary, historical, political things, much closer to my own formation than Edward ever had been. So when we started editorially *Universities and Left Review*, we invited Raymond to become an editor.... And that was a very long and wonderful friendship.

But they were my fathers. I was younger than them, more inexperienced than them, influenced by their ideas. I thought it was a remarkable opportunity to have them as friends and mentors. I didn't feel I was their equal, I couldn't debate with them, and often didn't quite share the positions they had, but I didn't feel I was able to really take them on. I didn't really want to. I didn't know enough history to take Edward on.

I knew a lot more about the things that Raymond wrote about, but there wasn't such a divergence from what he was saying. But *The Country and the City* was a wonderful book – literary history. I thought *Culture and Society* was a fantastic re-reading of what really began as the course on morals in Cambridge. He refashioned what he taught on that course into *Culture and Society*, re-reading the literary critics of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. And then *The Long Revolution*, which was the Bible of culture studies. (pp. 49-50)

## 9: Perry Anderson and *New Left Review*

Perry [Anderson] had come to Oxford I think just before or just after the first generation New Left people left. I overlapped with him very briefly ... but he belonged with the New Left generation which followed, which started its own magazine, student journal, and that included Mike Rustin, Alan Shuttleworth, Robin Blackburn, that generation, very mixed in terms of political orientation, but that was the generation. And Perry started to do work, and to publish, but was obviously an incredibly intellectual high academic kind of person. I mean, Perry is the only person who still uses six words in any essay that I've never seen before in the English language! If you have that kind of Eton education, really you just know things that ordinary human beings don't know! He was very very very clever, clearly.... We took advice around the place, and they said Perry. So it was perfectly decided by [the Editorial Board in 1962] that Perry was going to be the Editor ...

He started. He got the offices in Soho Square, but almost immediately it was clear that that echelon had a very distinctive political formation and project of its own – very different from the amalgam that had made the old New Left, and it was not going to live in the same house for very long. Anyway, he started to move people in. They really were practically not interested – as they still aren't – interested in British politics. No interest at all really. As Perry Anderson said in *Peculiarities of the English*, we've never had a proper bourgeois revolution. Actually, I think it's had the only real bourgeois revolution we've seen, but nevertheless, not one like France, not a textbook Marxism, weak, all over the place as compared with the Germans or the French, or the Russians, or Italians. He knew about this other world, could read all those languages, spoke Russian, had been to the Russian Language School during his military service, as had a lot of them, a whole group of them.... A lot of them had all been through this highly selective training in “intelligence” - to speak and to understand, to know about Russia, in the period after the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress.

So high flyer, but with a political project of a much more scholarly, academic, international kind. And gradually people on the Editorial Board became more restive with this project, and it all came to a head when Edward wrote a very long, and so far as I know, unpublished critique of the tendency of the Journal, and Perry – I think I'm right in

saying – refused to publish it. And at that point, most of us said, “That’s the end”, and left the Board. So they were then free, much freer, to even sideline those people in their own generation who were closer to Edward than to us and to Raymond. It was a more selective [group], amongst classical Marxists, high level Marxist analysis, elite, with international connections.

Well, out of that came a very high-powered journal over many years. Out of that came Verso Books which translated for the rest of us all sorts of Marxist traditions and political traditions we never had encountered first hand. I’d never read Lukacs till the translation of *History and Class Consciousness* appeared. I’d read a little Gramsci – that’s another connection I had with Italy, but not before *The Prison Diaries* ... The European tradition of Marxism, which they made available to a generation which had never really understood or seen it before. So it was a great project. It has its limits I would say, but that’s not what we’re talking about. But it wasn’t the product of the old *New Left Review*. (pp. 51-52)

## **10: On Marriage to Catherine**

She was 18 – I’m 13 years older than she is – so I was already a kind of established figure, you know. We met after an Aldermaston March, and two Aldermaston Marches after that I spoke in Trafalgar Square, she was on her way to Sussex to do her undergraduate degree. So there was a big disparity between us. ... By Christmas ’64, we were married, she left Sussex, transferred to Birmingham, so came to Birmingham to live with me, and started history, a different kind of history altogether, with Rodney Hilton ... So by then we were living together, and she was really an undergraduate, and I was already the research person with Richard Hoggart at the Centre. So that’s a long time ago, and we’ve been together all that while.

You may want to ask more about this, but I’ll just say two things. One is, it took a long time equalise that balance, between me as a more established figure on the Left, in his early thirties, and an 18-year old trying to learn how to become a historian. It took a long time. There was a big imbalance, and I’m afraid, in my characteristically masculinist way, I thought this was right! We have love letters in which I in entirely D.H.

Lawrencian language, sees planets circling around the moon! Ridiculous nonsense! But when you look back at them they weren't at all anti-Feminist or anything, one just assumed that the man led, and was experienced and knew things, and talked well, and did theory. So righting that balance took a long time. It was not easy. And it's quite a while before our interests began to converge, and then, really, we were able to learn from one another, though she said she always learned from me. But I didn't think, in that area, I had much to learn, I learnt that, and then I learnt from her! So there's been a shift in the balance of the relationship all the time.

The second thing is, of course, Feminism. Because what happened was that she finished her degree, got a very good degree, decided to stay on to do her Ph.D. in Mediaeval History, with Rodney Hilton, started it, got pregnant. Well, now she's locked up at home with a young baby, starting a Mediaeval History Ph.D., and I'm teaching my life out at the Centre. So she was ready-made for first-wave Feminism. And lots of other people like her – those mothers with academic, or husbands, or people who worked elsewhere, who are locked up for the first time, at home, with children - got together. So Birmingham started a crèche, and a school, and jointly parents looking after other children, and the whole neighbourhood became a kind of Feminist network.... They set up this group - a lot of our friends were involved, and the men were all helping, while the women had discussions, the men were helping with the kids, and helping at the school. And we had six children for tea, we would have them ... A big network in which neighbourhood Feminism, Feminist politics, and academic interest overlapped....

So it took root in that. So the second thing is that this is a very difficult period for us, because that rubbish about moons and planets just had to go! It had to go! And what I discovered from it is that you change your ideas, but your practice is much more stubborn. So, of course, I was in favour of this equality. Of course! So obvious, you know! Men bossed them about and tell them what to do, as I have done with Catherine - so this has to stop. But what was an alternative way of relating to one another? I didn't believe many could become Feminists, I still don't believe that. I think they can become sympathetic to it, and understand it from the inside, and try to change their own practice In any case, you'll almost certainly remember, the beginnings, the early stages of second-wave Feminism, they didn't want to hear from me! "Shut up! We're going somewhere else. To

have our conversation, listen to our own voices for a change!” So that has been another big transformative moment for us. It took quite a long time, and by the end our relationship was very different from the dependent/independent thing that it started out....

I just assumed our inequality, and after that I couldn't assume it. I had to assume our equality, and therefore had to tolerate - you know, if she'd have friends I didn't particularly like, okay. We had to decide what sort of marriage it was: an open marriage – whatever that is – or, we're going to try to remain monogamous. What did that tell you about men and women, and about marriage, as a kind of contract, a binding contract on women. Then there's the sexual politics.

So it's a period of huge turbulence. And because Catherine was involved in all of that – very actively involved – it was a matter of in the home as well. How do you bring up the children? Do you give the boys guns? I had always had guns, I grew up with holsters and air rifles at home! Yes, but what does that mean? Why don't they have dolls? Dolls? What about the girls, read them cowboy stories, etc.! So, in every detail, we had to re-think the whole of that. Were we going to stay together? And if we were staying together, it was going to transform our relationship. And eventually there was no question, we decided to do so, but after that we couldn't live the old relationship. Not possibly, inconceivably.

*I was wondering, you were a mixed couple, is that something you were very aware of, or not?*

SH: We were aware of it. I was aware of it. The truth is, Paul, I will never not be aware of it. I'm perfectly comfortable in England, I feel I know the English like the back of my hand – I'm married to one, I'm friends with so many English people – and anyhow, what else am I? But I can't ever forget that I am, in some significant ways, different from other people, and the mixture is partly race and colour, but it's then also the reminder about quite another history....

I've never talked to [Catherine] about the early times we met and started to go out, what on earth did she thought? A mixed couple was much rarer then, as you can imagine,

mixed middle-class couple.... Amongst New Left people, I was the only black person. We were the only mixed couple. So I'm both aware of it, but it didn't stop us. And she, I think, would say, "Well, I just grew into it. I met him before I really understood what I was doing, and after that my life has just been as a mixed couple".

But objectively, of course, that wasn't always easy. When we went to Birmingham, we had to find a place to live, very difficult. Birmingham atmosphere was declining significantly after Powell and all of that, so it wasn't easy. People shout terrible things at us, as a mixed couple, often more nastier things at her than at me, for going out with a black man, etc.. But it was sort of outside our relationship. Our relationship has never been structured around that as an emotional focus.... We are conscious of racialised and colour differences, but it has never been the subject of trouble, or difficulty between us. There have been all sorts of other things, like in every marriage have been, but I don't recall that that ever was. I don't think I ever felt, "She would like out of this relationship because it's a mixed one". Never. I just thought, "She came into it as an innocent, and she just never thought of it". She never thought from within that position. Other people put us in that position, but she never thought, "We're in that position". (pp. 53-58)

## **11: London school teaching and racism**

I walked in to do a job on a Monday, and was a class teacher by the end of the month! So I stayed quite a while. And I taught - as you did, in those days – formally, everything: English, geography, some of it I was complete acronym. I could never do, I said, "I won't teach maths", because I was badly taught, and I'm not going to muck up somebody else's mathematics. But English, of course I can teach English. And literature, yes. And a bit of French, yes. Geography". ... But actually, of course, what I was doing was minding the class, teaching them football, or taking them to the playground, preventing a riot....

They were from, overwhelmingly, families who worked in the print, and the parents worked in the print, and because of protective Union practises, they were all going to get jobs in the print, so they didn't have anything to lose at mucking about in class. Why would they need any 'O' Levels? Nobody took any 'O' Levels, which was GCSE at that time. They didn't need to. "We're okay, sir, our parents work in the print, and my dad's

going to get me a job as a printer for a newspaper in Fleet Street”. But it was a big experience because, of course, I then met and had a lot to do with the children of a sector of the English working-class that I’d never encountered....

In school, form master, I was the master of what was called, in those days, “4FX”, which I believe used to be called after that, “4F-Remove”. I don’t know what “Remove” means, but all the kids in my class had been removed from something, or had something removed! You know, they’d all failed the 11+ - everybody in the school – so they were the failures of the failures of the 11+. So academic work was not really in their purview. I tried to teach them English grammar, because I thought this would be a way of improving their writing. Can you imagine, gerunds, adjectival clauses! Oh God!

*So were they rowdy?*

Oh yes, rowdy, undisciplined, rude, threatening, but quite lovable as well. I was very fond of them. I wrote a piece about teaching.... It’s about my teaching experience, and about, therefore, seeing through the eyes of that generation: first, the birth of youth culture, because they started to be interested in music.

Secondly, the rise of racism. Because one evening I got on the train, and lots of kids from my class were on the train. ... I said, “Where are you going?” “Notting Hill, sir”. I said, “Well, what’s going on over there?” “Trouble. Trouble. Trouble with the blackies”. “What sort of trouble?” “Well, they play loud music and they’re taking our women”. I said, “Our women? You would be so lucky!” I said, “You don’t have any women, what are you talking about?” So I said, “You mean me?” “Oh, not you, sir”. I said, “Well, do you mean the boys from Brixton who are in our class?” “Oh, not them, sir! Them!” So I said, “Well, what goes on over there?”

Well, I soon discovered. They were going, standing in front of the tube stations, monitoring the passage of black men and women coming from work, and going into the back reaches of North Kensington – Powys Terrace, and the terraces behind there – full of multi-occupation, crumbling North Kensington housing, and shouting abuse at them. And behind them, in the summer, with the open doors of the pubs, and the fathers, or the

equivalent of the fathers, were egging them on. So in spite of the fact that I didn't intend to stay there, didn't intend to become a teacher, or re-train as a teacher, I, nevertheless, saw a lot, felt a lot of what was going on. ...

*But in terms of teaching, they were all white, there were virtually no black [children]?*

No, no, no, there were black kids from Brixton. From going further round, from Kennington, Clapham. But not the majority by any means, not like a contemporary inner city school with the majority black population, nothing like that. (pp. 63-65)

## **12: *The Popular Arts: High Culture and Popular Culture***

I was teaching ... for the British Film Institute, because I was very interested in film. I met Paddy Whannel, a Scot, working-class man, who was in charge of education at the BFI. And Paddy started promoting the teaching of a bit of film in schools. Well, you couldn't teach it without extracts from the BFI Education Department, [so we] started to produce teaching extracts, the Western, the musical, melodrama, thrillers, etc.. And I was doing lectures in that kind of thing to film appreciation societies in universities around the country.... So I used these extracts that we were generating, that Paddy was generating, and used them in class for discussion.

And we became involved in the movement within the English teaching profession, which wanted to address the question of the modern media. Because they were aware that the kids were not listening to them at all, they were listening to Elvis Presley! So, "How do we discuss this in class?" And because we were involved in doing a bit of teaching in schools, Paddy and I started to meet to write a book to help them out. And that is *The Popular Arts*, and that's a result of our friendship... We would listen to jazz, listen to Billie Holliday, talk about television, watch television, talk about films, talk about advertising, and that's what became the book. But the book was really a teaching manual. If you want to teach this stuff in schools, this was how you might do it.... Well, it was a turning point - because, you know, now - am I still a literary scholar? ...

*Would it be fair to say that you wanted to carry that sense of discrimination that you learnt with literature into listening to music, looking at films and so on?*

Yes. Yes.

*Was that what the book was about?*

It was about that, in part. It was the residue, but it was also the product of being a kind of critic and associated with critical debate in Oxford, very much influenced by F.R. Leavis. We were in Oxford, Leavis and *Scrutiny* were in Cambridge, but we thought, although he had a very elitist, undemocratic social programme, that *Scrutiny* was a serious journal, and thought culture was a serious matter, and literature was a serious issue, and language was a serious issue. Whereas my own tutors in Oxford, I thought, were just dilettantes. They savoured literature over the port, but they hated Leavis, they hated that what my tutor called “the beetle-browed Puritanism”. So we identified with that spirit, although we were very critical of many aspects of Leavis, and one of the things that interested us was, of course, that *Scrutiny* and Leavis became interested in popular culture. Q.D. Leavis wrote the book on popular fiction – 18<sup>th</sup> century popular fiction. And Leavis, himself, took part in these debates on modern advertising, from the position of the decline of cultural values, of course, which wasn’t exactly our take on it, but that was bringing a more stringent critical sense to bear on the arena of popular culture.

But that wouldn’t be right to think of this as the point of my transition from literature into something else, because I’d always been more interested in the social dimensions of literature. So even when I was doing my undergraduate degree, I wanted to know not only Shakespeare, but Shakespeare’s relationship to popular theatrical traditions, to spectacles and the mediaeval plays. I was always interested in the background, always interested in the social context, and that had arisen much more from becoming an adept observer and critic of my old social milieu. So though it looks like, well, at this point you started to be interested in wider things, it wasn’t quite like that. It became more formalised, more central to my intellectual work, but always been present.

I think I may have described to you before, my aunt took me to the cinema, the matinee cinema in Kingston, at the Carib Theatre, every Saturday afternoon. I saw every Humphrey Bogart, Lana Turner, Bette Davis, musicals, millions of Westerns, I just imbued with popular culture. Then, of course, I was interested in the popular culture of Jamaica – African residues, African rhythms, etc. It never occurred to me until much later, that this would be regarded from the position of traditional high culture as a kind of slumming. I never thought of it as that. ...

*Now, in the book, [you argue that] the best popular artist as good as the best high cultural artist. There are just different criteria.*

Yes. Now, at that point, it becomes a more sustained serious and theoretical issue, yes? Because I begin to understand that there's a difference between the criteria being applied to high culture, and the criteria being applied to popular culture. High culture is serious - Shakespeare, Mozart, the great painters, etc.. Popular culture is all this rubbish about Bette Davis and Lana Turner and, you know, Joan Crawford, and *Guys and Dolls*, and it's "inferior". That's very much the stamp of Leavis, yes? This represents the decline of Western civilisational values. Well, I felt, "It's a funny thing, because I'm into it as well!" I love Shakespeare, I love *Moby Dick*, and I love "My Darling Clementine", and what am I to do with that? So I began to understand this as a socio-cultural phenomenon, and to disentangle the critique of high culture from the actual quality. Billie Holliday has an incredible voice, a great opera singer has an incredible voice – they're not the same voice. But Billie Holliday isn't not worth taking seriously because she's a drugged black woman singing the blues. This is a social judgement, not a judgement on the thing itself....

It's a judgement about social refinement as much as it's a judgement that this book is better than that. After all, there are books in hard cover, they're a load of rubbish! And there are books in paperback that are wonderful! Chandler is a fantastic story-teller. I'm listening, still listening, in my audio, to *The Big Sleep*. It's a wonderful novel, and his use of language is incredible. It's as good as any of the thirties writers like Steinbeck and so on. But Oxford didn't regard even Steinbeck as serious literature. You know, it's too popular, etc.. So I began a kind of cultural critique of the category of high culture, and of popular culture, and about that split. ...

*One of the things I noticed, too, there, was that you argue in favour of what you call the “direct response” as a way of evaluating popular art....*

Well, the “direct response”, there’s not much in evidence in high culture. You know, understanding it, appreciating its values, but nobody said, “Do you really absolutely adore Turner?” And, “Does he give you a heart lift?” Well, you couldn’t not say that about “My Darling Clementine”, or Billie Holliday, or John Ford, I’d say, “Wow! I was really into that, and actually, it’s quite good. And it’s much better than nine-tenths of the Westerns I have looked at”. So I did value that. It may be, that may be a Leavisite hangover, a Leavis privilege, what he called “lived experience”, and he brought lived experience into formal criticism as one of the criteria of value. I thought, “Well, if you use ‘lived experience’, you divide this artistic world differently”. Differently. And it’s perfectly open to you to say, “Carlyle is a bore. I don’t care how important he is. He’s a racist pig, actually. I can’t stand another word. I won’t read another word of Carlyle all the rest of my life, and I don’t care how intellectually important he is. He’s a bore”. And this is very unlettered, very unsophisticated, but gets hold of something concrete and gives you an experience, a lived experience, of what he’s talking about. “That’s a fine artist”. I don’t know whether that’s the greatest artist. I wasn’t interested in saying, “Chandler is as great as Tolstoy”. That’s a different matter.

For me, that’s more a matter of how deep the perception is. What the complexity is. Chandler and popular culture is much more stereotyped. Tolstoy opens up an extremely complex world of feeling and emotion and ideas, and forms of social life, so Tolstoy is a very very great artist, but these are different kind of perceptions. He doesn’t have the “Chandler moment”, and Chandler doesn’t have the Tolstoyan perception or depth of understanding. So I was never unable to make discriminations, but there were discriminations between particular works – not discriminations between the categories. You could ensure yourself value by printing in hard cover, and you could ensure yourself denigration by printing in paperback. That is a social judgement, not a literary or aesthetic one. And you can see where that leads in terms of, well, both the politics, but also cultural studies. (pp.67-72)

### 13: Studying Mass Consciousness

One of the interests in popular culture, was popular consciousness – mass consciousness. What is the consciousness, not of the great intellectual figures and philosophers, what's the consciousness, the modes of understanding, of perfectly ordinary people? How do they understand the world? Do they have to be able to understand contradiction? No. They don't have a phrase for it, they don't know what the dialectic is, but they know things that are contradictory. They do know that. So how did that get there? And what studies it? What evidence can you find?

You ask people about it, they don't know why you're going on about it. Well, can you read it indirectly in their letters and art? No doubt you could, but they didn't leave much letters. Well, could you read it in their conversations? Hoggart tried to do that. He listened to how their ordinary talk nevertheless involved the making of complex moral judgements, which were never inspired by philosophical morality, philosophical theory over high blown morality, but were moral judgements....

So we were interested in piecing out what mass consciousness was like, and we developed – there's a bit on this in *Popular Arts*, but also many other things I've written – an indirect way of reading the things produced for popular culture, and the responses to them as kind of indirect evidence of popular consciousness. So if people responded to something, why did they respond to it? Well, the traditional argument Leavis had was because they've been manipulated into it. The traditional Left argument was that they're being fooled. Well, yes, they are being manipulated, of course – advertising is a hugely manipulative language and industry – but the response is not completely accounted for by the response to manipulative impulse. Not completely. They bring a bit of their own experience. You listen to people talk about *EastEnders*, they're not just fooled by the narrative and the characters, and the drama and incidents of *EastEnders*, they like something about its ongoing character... They're interested, and they bring - "Oh well, my family wasn't like that". So the response comes out in an indirect way in relation to these apparently corrupt sources.... It is some, yes, complicated formation in between these two things, therefore you have to develop an interpretative methodology for seeing what you can tell about consciousness from these indirect sources. Well, that's become one of the things that

cultural studies does – it treats popular cultural film, television programmes, and tries to read it as itself, the product of much deeper social causes, and with much more complicated and profound social effects than just the thing in itself. (pp. 73-74)

## 14: Richard Hoggart

Hoggart, though he doesn't discuss this directly, knew perfectly well that the sketch that he offered of an older working-class culture in which he'd been born and brought up as a child, and what was happening now was a key contribution to this debate, though people were conducting the debate in political terms, and economic terms, but not in cultural terms. But actually, if there was no social milieu in which these ideas could take root and become institutionalised, they weren't going to survive. So that's what we fastened on in Oxford, why we took *The Uses of Literacy* as so important, because it was our discussion about how is capitalist society changing in the post-War period? "What is the meaning of affluence? What is the meaning of the coming of television? What is the meaning of the coming of mass advertising to Britain? What's the meaning of the rise of an independent youth culture? What's the meaning of music? What's the meaning of Elvis Presley? What does it tell you about the mind-set of another generation, altogether different from Hoggart in his teens, in Hunslet in the thirties?"

*What was Hoggart like to work with?*

Well, he's a very kind, extremely kind, very generous, very soft-spoken, working-class boy. Tough minded, but very unassertive, he wouldn't try to persuade you, he didn't move easily at having an argument with you, but he knew that there were serious issues at play. He was very generous to me, because I'd never taught in a university before, never been a researcher before in this area, but he sort of felt, I think, that neither had he. He'd got into *The Uses of Literacy* via a literary route, and I had got to the popular arts via the same literary route, and we could both understand the political implications of the things that we'd arrived at and were interested in. So if you're going to research those, you need a different milieu, a different research programme altogether from traditional Ph.Ds.. He had a lovely family. He had a wonderful wife, Yorkshire woman, who looked after

Catherine and me very much – just married, not very much younger, but considerably younger.

But he was not a political person. He was, of course, a natural Labour Party supporter, if you understand what I mean, but he didn't think in political categories. He was not what would now be called "theoretical" at all. He's inherited the Leavisite prejudice against theory, which was for concrete judgements, not wild philosophical speculation. So we were different people from the beginning, but I think he perfectly well accepted that he had to know more about the social dimensions, and I needed to know more about the imaginative side of the cultural question. So it was a partnership. (pp. 76-77)

## **15: Cultural Studies: Forging a Field**

That's what Raymond [Williams] made me see. That's why *Long Revolution* is the counterweight to Hoggart in the thinking about culture, crucial passage in the second chapter where he says, "Not just high culture, but ways of life" – the beginning of the anthropological definition of ways of life. "Culture is there", he said, "along with the families, and the trading and economic life". It's one of those elements that made me see the cultural questions and, therefore, cultural studies, and, therefore, the definition of culture that I was working on developing in a very profoundly different way. (p. 82)

It worked very well as a partnership [with Raymond] until later ... But it worked as a partnership largely because - for example, we brought these students in, they got their topics, which of us was going to supervise them? Not many people came, but they were really from mixed backgrounds – somebody from history, several people from literature, some people working on the local press – a mixed bunch already, interdisciplinary bunch already.

Okay. How do you forge a kind of field of work out of that? Well, you draw things together. Richard would give a seminar, a working seminar, on largely "how to read the culture through text". So what would he read? He would read, with them, *Sons and Lovers*, or he'd read Orwell, or he'd read Orwell's, *Shooting an Elephant*, and I would do bits of theory – we didn't call it that, but that's really what it meant. ...

What bits of theory? Well, sociology. “But you don’t really know much sociology”. “But it’s something to do with the social”. “Yes. Something to do with the relationship between culture and what is not culture”. “Well, Marxism has a particular view about the superstructural role of culture in relation to the economic. Is that what you think? Should they know about that theory? Should you critique that theory?” So it began with us reading *The German Ideology* and so on. Then my friend Lidia Curti came from Italy, activist in the Italian Communist Party which, as you know, is a very distinctive formation. And she said, “Well, have you read Gramsci?” ...

They were kind of reading groups. They didn’t know what culture studies was, I was making it up, and Richard was making it up! And the students were engaged in making it up! So I couldn’t teach - well, there’s no cultural studies to teach. We were making it up out of elements, bringing all the different elements together. So, “What will we read?” Well, you start by reading a chapter from *Uses of Literacy*, you start by reading Raymond Williams’ *Long Revolution*, a chapter on the definition of culture. That becomes the curriculum. But it couldn’t be taught in a characteristically typical academic way, it had to be one which recognised the novelty, the lack of definition, the absence of a constituted body of knowledge and research, the confusion about which traditions you were drawing on. “Well, we ought to read a bit of Leavis, then”. “Yes, a bit of Leavis”. So then we’d have a discussion with them.... They, and us, in the position of discussion leader and participants, made cultural studies up.

That’s the origins of [co-operative working]. How can you assume the authorial position of power and authority when you don’t have anything you can definitively say about it? ... It was made up in that *ad hoc* way, so the relationship between me and my students could not be of a traditional kind. We weren’t the same, but we were participants in the production of the field of knowledge, rather than my guiding them through from a more authoritative position, an already constituted field of knowledge.

So the collective, collaborative mode was there from the very beginning – not as a sort of decision to make it that way, but as a practical outcome of what we were trying to do. Then there’s ’68, of course, and the whole notion of democratic participation, collectives,

reading groups, Feminist reading groups, Marx reading groups, Freud reading groups. Well, the Freud and Marx reading groups were much more like our seminars than a traditional Cambridge seminar was! So the collective nature of early cultural studies mixes these different elements in to the actual practice. (pp. 77-79)

## **17: Gramsci, Marx and Revisionism**

If I'm anything I'm a Gramscian, because lots of my ideas, especially about politics, are Gramscian ideas. I have a Gramscian orientation towards Marxist Revisionism. I was a Revisionist from birth. I never became a proper economic determinist Marxist. I never became a Freudian quite, although I'm really interested in psychoanalysis, read a tremendous amount. Considered being one at one stage in my life ... I then became interested in European social theory, in flight from American-dominated sociological theory. So I read Weber, Durkheim, Marx, Simmel, Schutze, and they influenced me a great deal. So I had a Revisionist approach to sociology, critical Revisionist approach to Marxism, critical Revisionist approach to psychoanalysis, critical Revisionist approach to sociological theory. I wasn't any one of them, but I was learning from all of them, and borrowing from ideas generated within each of them, to develop this independent terrain called cultural studies....

My position was always that culture could never be everything, but that it was constitutive, it was not a dependence there, so I was never a base superstructure convert. Never. Or, if I was, I thought the superstructures were always more relevant, more developed, more complicated, and the relationship to economic and political things were much more developed than classical Marxism ever said, than Marx, himself, said, when he formulated it, and the classical Marxism did. So I'm a Revisionist. (pp. 80-81)

## **18: The Linguistic Turn and Codes of Meaning**

Well, then everything is struck asunder by the advent of European theory, by the arrival of Roland Barthes and Levi-Strauss and structuralism and so on, and that theory gives very

central place not to culture but to language, and that is called the “linguistic turn”. And cultural theory became implicated in the linguistic turn.

Well, the linguistic turn - they don't mean language in an empirical sense, they mean language as a system in which meaning is constituted and communicated. Of which language is a paradigm instance. And this comes from the influence of the structural linguist Saussure – French theory rediscovers Saussure – which is about how meaning is constituted... This is not language and power, which is what you asked about first, this is, first of all, language and difference, because the big thing at the heart of Saussure's theory is that meaning is constructed through difference, through the combination of similarity and difference. Do you want an example of that?

The simplest example is the Latin verb “*educare*”, meaning “to draw out”. Okay, that concept is at the centre of a whole list of words in English. Well, how do you distinguish between the person who does the drawing out and the persons from whom the drawing out is? You combine it with variable endings – education, educating, educator, educated, to educate - meaning something very different. So how do these meanings arrive as much through difference as through similarity? So this is preoccupied with questions of the creative role of difference.

This is major in my own thinking, because, of course, insofar as I was still, at that stage, very influenced by Marx, and in an argument with Marx, I believed in the totality, and I believed in total explanations, [so I was wanting to be] adapting and reviving Marxism, so that it would explain the world, and the world in one framework. The dialectic covered everything. Well, suddenly I thought, “Well, it does, but only because of those moments when they're different through contradiction and opposition, not through just weaving similarities together”. So difference kind of enters the field of cultural studies – for me. Meaning and difference. ...

I'll see somebody chopping down a tree in the next yard, how do I know what's going on? Well, they're chopping down a tree, yes. Are they clearing the garden? Are they building a new design? Is it George Washington chopping down the cherry tree? How do you know? Well, you interpret what meanings you can give to an action which you can fully

observe. It's changing the world, the material world will lack the tree in two minutes time, but what does it mean? What is its meaning? Well, you might ask somebody, and I'd say, "Oh, I don't know, I was hired to chop the tree down". What you do is, you mobilise existing frameworks of interpretation to apply to it. ... Ultimately it's a matter of interpretation, it cannot be scientific. He might think he's doing that, but he may not know why he's really doing it. He may be subconsciously a vandal of nature, so you can come to what seems like a good interpretation, and he can corroborate it, and contextually you can see, "That's probably what it was. Somebody hired him to cut down this tree".

But ultimately it's a matter of interpretation. And what you do is, you mobilise codes of interpretation, many of which constitute the content of your culture. ... When we share, widely, a set of interpretative frameworks, we are members of the same culture. And when you see somebody who says, "Oh, it's nothing to do with that, and do you know that in Latin America, the natives cut cherry trees because it's the devil?" "No, I didn't that. It's not my interpretative framework".... Well, these are two ways of life. The actual practices are different. What they signify is different. And the way of interpreting what they signify, or getting meaning from it, is interpreted too. ...

[The idea of codes and difference] really comes from structural linguistics. The idea is, for instance, Saussure has his description, this discussion, "If you see a light changing from red to green, or green to red, why do you stop? Does red mean stop?" Well, only in our culture. In our culture. It doesn't necessarily, you might not expect a native American Indian to stop driving because he's seen a red light! He never heard of it. He doesn't share the code. Well, the code is a particular organisation – red to green, to orange warning, back to red – and once you know that, you can obey it, it signifies something, and you adapt your practice to it, you stop the car. Everybody else stops the car so we don't run into one another. So if you don't share the code, or if you want to breach the code, like Italian drivers, it won't work, we'll have accidents. But it's because we have shared codes.

Well, that's not the only code in which red figures. Red figures also as a symbol of blood. Ah well, that's different. If you go to a Spanish culture, if you go to the bullfight, there's a close relationship between red, danger, and blood - but that's not what the stop sign is

talking to you about! So there are two different codes. So which ones are you using? You can't drive the street according to the bullfighting code, and you can't fight a bull according to the driving code, so we have to choose. I say "choose", but that gives a very conscious account of it. Of course, we don't choose at all, we just unconsciously mobilise. ... So we're absolutely full of interpretative codes, and for me, that is as much what culture is as Shakespeare. Indeed, the opposite way round. Shakespeare is a refinement, he offers us a particularly rich set of interpretative frameworks which enable us to gain huge complex insights into human behaviour, but it's not a different thing from understanding what you're doing when I see you turning on the kettle. Exactly the same thing. Much of that culture is unconscious – not unconscious in the Freudian sense, but it's unconscious in the sense it's outside of our awareness. If you had to think about it self-consciously, you couldn't get out of bed! ... So I don't think, "What does it mean to buy a ticket to get on the bus?" "I'm getting on a bus, so I'd better have a ticket". Sure. Ticket. Well, tickets, imply buying something, which implies the existence of money, and implies shops. It implies commodification, but you don't know anything about any of those, just part of the ordinary interpretative framework we bring to bear on the world. And since every practice is signifying, every act of interpreting a social practice is an act of mobilising an interpretative framework, sometimes very unconsciously. Literary criticism is a very rich and complicated interpretative framework, but everyday practices also involve interpretative frameworks of that kind. (pp. 86-88)

## **19: Media Influence: "Encoding" and "Decoding"**

These are two - "encoding" and "decoding" are two quite different moments. They're different moments. An event happens. There's a report on it in the media. You can't reproduce the event in the media, you can deal with pictures about it, so you can put it into visual language, therefore you need codes of producing the meaning, you have to say, "The Vietnam War means this". Well, I'm looking at it, unless I share exactly the same code of encoding, I'll get a different reading. I'll say, "Oh well, they think it's a good thing, but I don't, for these reasons". So codes are not necessarily aligned at all, so the moment of putting a thing into a narrative, and of getting the meaning of that narrative, and either accepting it or opposing it, are two different moments in the process of communication. (p. 88)

We were not interested in a theory of media studies, as such. Indeed, we were very critical, precisely, of non-interpretative nature, of mass communications – as it had become, a sociological sub-field within American sociology. And “Encoding and Decoding” is written in critique of that model. ... There was what was called, in mass communication theory and practice and empirical work, very crudely, the “hypodermic model” – the media told you about deviancy, you saw what the media did, you went out and knocked old ladies on the head in the road! Yes? A straight causal line chain between input and output.

What “Encoding and Decoding” said is, “The line is not like that, because deviancy, or crime in the street, is a social fact. My story as a reporter, about crime in the street, is a narrative. I can’t produce the facts. I can’t produce the thing in itself, I’ve written a story about it”. Well, the fact that there is a story has, itself, imposed a sort of new structure of it. ... So you’ve entered the sphere of language, so you can’t talk about the influence of the media without saying, “The influence is through language”. Well, does that happen because somebody, or some system, some institution, puts it into meaning – encodes it. Puts it into linguistic narrative discursive form. ... That’s all you see when you look at *EastEnders*, you don’t see the East End, you see a narrative about it. A discourse about it. It’s recognisable, drawn from real life, but, nevertheless, it isn’t the thing in itself, so it can’t have a hypodermic effect of the simple kind. It can only have a hypodermic effect if it’s put ideas into your mind, or it gives you a model of social behaviour you want to follow. ...

So we looked at the two moments of this – “encoding”, when journalists, the professions who report on the world, anybody who reports on the world, has to use language in order to do so. That’s one moment. Well, what happens at the other of this hypodermic causal chain, so to speak? How is it getting to the people who behave in a certain way? Well, but they are not necessarily encoding the events in the world in the same way as the journalists do. First of all, they couldn’t understand what the journalist is talking about, unless they shared, to some extent, the same codes. They also know what crime narratives are about. They also know what beginnings and ends and middles. They must

share the code. There's no communication if you don't know language, you won't know what they saying, in the simplest way.

But when you say, "share their linguistic code", we don't just mean the capacity to understand in the literal sense, we mean the connotative structure. This is where Barthes comes in. Why is an advertisement about a sweater showing you a boy and girl holding hands, walking in the autumn mist, through a wood? Yes? Only because you see that that's what it is, but also this connotes a certain kind of melancholy, a romantic ethos, tells a little story. And you see that the sweater is substituted in the story, because it is what attracts him to her.

So when you talk about the codes, the codes are not just literal language, they are structures of meaning.... So most people who share the same culture, what it means to share the same culture is, in part, to share those meaning codes. But the meaning, then, that you take from it, at the other end of the chain is not necessarily the way in which it was inserted, as you know. We don't all respond to *EastEnders*, in the same way. Some people say, "Oh, that's just like real life.". Some people say, "Well, it's not really like real life down here in the East End". And other people say, "I don't believe it's anything like it". So there are three "decoding" basic ideal typical decoding positions which are not the same as the people who are saying, "This is what it means". So encoding and decoding are two different moments in the circuit of communication, which have to be aligned for any meaning to pass, and which almost certainly are not perfectly aligned.

So what we said to the hypodermic model is, "There is no input of a simple kind. There is no effect on the people who receive it, of a simple kind. And there is no single result or conclusion. There are two moments in the circuit – the encoding moment, and the decoding moment." Basically the encoding moment takes place in the institutions of the media and meaning-making in the society, and the decoding takes place in the audience. Unless you connect these two things together, not just audience studies or content analysis, but content meaning and audience in a chain, you don't get an understanding of what the communication process is about. (pp. 97-99)

## 20: Labelling Theory, Moral Panics and Youth Culture

I regard [labelling theory] as a development, in that interactionism, deviancy theory, the awareness of deviance of the controlled culture, its response to deviance is, itself, a part of deviancy, and therefore labelling, the action of the controlled culture in labelling things one way or another, this is what I meant, this is a question of a structure attributing social meaning to the actions of different people; and that having real effects and real consequences in terms of how the laws apply, whether they were put in jail, whether they were sent to reform school where they were well-adjusted to society or not. So the whole baggage really from labelling theory. And the shift to labelling theory is really a move which happens in criminology at this stage...

*Stan Cohen's ideas about Folk Devils and Moral Panics were an influence?*

Well, they're absolutely critical for us. *Policing the Crisis* is a study of how a variety of moral panics, in different areas of social life, begin to come together in a particular period, begin to overlap, and relate to one another... So that was the use and development of a concept of moral panic. We thought there was a moral panic about street crime, and there was a moral panic about street crime not because, statistically, it could be shown that street crime had grown in that period – because it wasn't really the case. What's more, there was no such thing as street crime, as a crime, so where did they get the statistics from? Well, they had to put together, a bit of property crime, and a bit of theft, and a bit of stuff going on in the street, etc., to generate a figure. So you couldn't explain it.... It wasn't about that at all. It was about a much larger fear, which had to do with other people in the society, with the fact that it was changing too fast, with the fact that affluence was deconstructing it, undermining its moral authority and patterns. It had to do with black kids, why there are so many of those people, and, therefore, with race.

There were moral panics about all of that, and they folded into one another, and the title *Mugging* was a way of naming that general sense of social crisis, rather than just a particular street crime. And that's why moral panic is an extremely good phrase for it, because moral panic is like those historical phenomenon like fears about the Black Death. They're not specific, but they're general, they hover around, and people take them very

seriously, they're unnerved by them, partly because they can't decide whether they are factually correct or not. And the big move in transferring mugging here, is that the phrase, "mugging", to indicate this wider social problem that is developing in societies in the sixties and early seventies, well, the big example was what was happening in American cities – where the term was first used. And the headline in the press was, "Harlem comes to Handsworth". What's happening over there is going to happen here. ...

It wasn't just a factual observation about society which alerted people to it, they were already in a tizzy about a number of different things, and began to construct those different fears and anxieties – or moral panics – into one general moral panic in which you could find your way into that moral panic wherever you started. It didn't matter, everything led into it. Society was coming apart at the seams. Not just more crime on the street, or more housing problems, but crime on the street and housing problems, and the inner cities, and violence, and property crime, and theft, and so on and so on, getting larger and larger and larger, less accurate in relation to any particular set of sociological observations, and more a kind of general ethos of fear. (pp. 91-94)

## **21: Analysing Communication**

*So let's think of looking at a TV programme then. How are you going to do it? Is this a form rather like literary analysis, that you look at the programme, and then you think, "Well, maybe that's emotive, which has this meaning"?*

Well, in part it is, yes. In part it's literary, because what is the programme? It is language? It's metaphors. It's images. So it's not just that you bring a literary analysis to it, you have to analyse forms, separate forms, because that's the form in which the message – the thing - becomes a message. The message takes form. The audience responds to the form, takes a meaning, and may or may not behave in the world in a similar way. That's the chain. So that intervening period between encoding and decoding, you need literary or linguistic, or formal or visual analysis, forms of analysis. "What is being said? How is it being said? What sort of effect might that have? How are the real facts being reinterpreted by implying that kind of narrative to it?" But the

question of the audience, whether the audience may or may not understand that, so after you've conducted that analysis, you have to turn to the audience and ask yourself, "How are they responding to these forms?"

*And how do you get that, then?*

Well, in part you look at the broader social response to it, in part you look at what people say, and in part, we ought to have done more of long interviews with audiences. We didn't do that, and that's the weakness of the model. ... But the basic methodology in cultural studies did not include that, partly because everybody said, "But you're not proper sociologists, do you know about structured interviews? Could you produce a structured interview of an appropriate kind?" "Do you know about the weight of one cause or another, and how to investigate the level of significance of what is being said? Do you know anything about that?"

We were told we didn't, by the Sociology Department in Birmingham. When Cultural Studies first opened, it said, "Well, don't know what you are, but don't imagine that you're proper sociologists. Stay off our patch". So we were quite reluctant to become interviewers. Also we were a bit doubtful that the interviews would yield the truth, because we thought the interviews have to be interpreted as much as the content has to be interpreted. So it's not that I refused that moment, but that there were problems about that moment which did not strike us as being obvious to the people who criticised us on those grounds. (pp. 99-100)

## **22: Group Work at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies**

We decided we also needed a framework within which the students could discuss their own research topics, so it seemed best to do that in roughly grouped areas of study. So some people working on the media, well, they should be in the Media Group. Then they would read the mass communications literature, they'd know the debates about that, they'd know the empirical work done in that, etc.. Some people are interested in the

popular press, they could go to that media seminar. But somebody else who was interested in crime, deviance and youth culture, well, what were they doing in the Media Group? So we had another group which was responsible for grouping together people who were interested in deviancy.

Then the groups proliferated! ... There was always a Literary Group. Later on that became interested in language, as that linguistic shift took place, it became a Literature/Language Group.... We had a Marx Reading Group, we had a Freud Reading Group, we had a Feminist Group, we had a Race Group ... Once Richard Johnson came, the areas that he was interested in – education, social history, oral history, family history – became a grouping....

Well, you don't get a group like that together, meeting week after week, reading together, debating together, until it starts to produce itself, so some of these groups started to produce joint work. The History Group looked at the influence of Marxist historians in the Historians Group, so it went into that in depth, so it had something to say about that. "Well, what are you going to do with this? This is not your thesis, but emerges out of the group work that you have done for your thesis". "Well, perhaps you ought to publish some of them for each other". ... You're still in the business of creating a common conversation around cultural studies. You're aware that cultural studies is this hybrid field of studies, not a discipline. But they have to understand each other in order to constitute something more than particular specialisms in each area....

They not only started to publish things, but they started to do some work of their own together. So, for instance, the Media Group – it's not just the Media Group – a section of people in the Centre started to work on popular magazines, and they worked on analysing an issue of *Woman* magazine, in which there was a story, and the story was called, "Cure for Marriage". "Cure for Marriage" was about a woman, locked into the domestic role, always in the kitchen, etc., not really part of her husband's wider social life, who develops a fantasy relationship with Cary Grant, and has a dream about him. And this dream, as you can imagine, in a woman's magazine story, reconciles herself to her marriage, so everything's all right in the end. But we did an analysis of this.

Well, what was it? It wasn't anybody's thesis. The Centre had no publications of its own. It consisted of papers that every member of the Group contributed. You can't publish that in a journal, you can only publish it for other people in the Centre and slightly wider than that, by using the Roneo machine! So everybody used the Roneo machine, and produced what were called "working papers", and these working papers were the results of individual and collective research in the fields where the groups were working. (pp. 102-4)

No university or higher education institution would allow a sort of grouping like that to develop independently, upstairs, doing what they liked, reading what they liked, organising themselves as they liked, but productive: producing papers, producing research, doing theses. You can't quarrel with that. But what is going on up there? So that's the moment before the institutionalisation of graduate studies in English higher education, we're just at the edge of that, so it really was improvisatory. Yes, a great moment to be doing it. (p. 109)

### **23: Policing the Crisis**

[Deviancy was one] basis of the *Policing the Crisis* Group. We recruited from other areas. So there's Chas Critcher, who was mainly, as I say, doing work in class culture. There was John Clarke who was doing stuff on football, there was Tony Jefferson who was interested in youth culture. Of the four authors, there is Brian Roberts, who is not in the Centre at all, was in Sociology, doing a thesis on Chicago ethnography, but who came to all our Group meetings, took part in our discussions, and was interested in developing that ethnographic side of *Policing the Crisis*. So it was, itself, a heterodox group....

The reason why it takes that form is because the impetus comes from outside – not from within the Centre at all. It comes from the fact that a lot of Centre people were involved in anti-racist youth groups and community groups in Birmingham. Charles Critcher ran, lived in, and was very active on the ground with young people and with social problems and with racial discrimination in the Handsworth area. And he came to us one day and said, "Do you know what's happened? Three boys, all of them from different cultural backgrounds, were involved in a small-scale property crime. They saw a man, a drunk

man coming out of a pub, and attacked him. They wanted money. They got a very small amount of money, and they beat him up a bit". So they were coming to court. They were coming to court at the moment when what I described earlier as the moral panic, was ratcheting itself up, and this got called "The first mugging", or "one of the early muggings". Okay, well, then it entered a different empire altogether, and the boys went to court, were given twenty years each. Twenty years!

Well, what is that? That's not just a societal reaction to crime, that is a moral panic. That is people feeding into the legal process, their fears, anxieties, nameless folk devils, their feelings about race, their feelings about poverty, their feelings about people intruding into our neighbourhood, all of those things were what produced, in the law, a kind of response which said, "This mustn't go on. We must stop this in its tracks".

So that's where it came from. We said, "Well, we should look into it". So we started doing some *ad hoc* research – into the boys, into the event, and then into the law. What did the judge say? Why did he give them twenty years? "But he said this". "Well, how was it reported in the press?" In other words, how was this single event constructed, through social meaning, into a much larger phenomenon? How did it connect with the anxieties of the society, underlying anxieties of the society? ...

Remember, this is a particular period when Birmingham is transfixed by the emergence of immigration, the impact of immigration, so not all of them were directly working ... But everybody was aware of it, we were going on anti-racist marches, it was a live political theme in the Centre. Not many of us would have been close to a particular community like [Charles Critcher]. He brought us the news, but only because people were receptive to this, they were watching all the events going on in Birmingham, from the time of the Enoch Powell "Rivers of blood" speech onwards. At places, there were anti-racist demonstration every week. The place is alert with questions, for the first time, about race and class, and race and equality, and city deprivation, and in deprivation the relationship of crime to those questions. So there's a fertile ground, receptive ground, for somebody who says, "I've got an example of what you're talking about. Yes, it's just happened in Handsworth". (pp. 106-8)

## 24: Theoretical Eclecticism

I just said that we borrowed, very eclectically, from all over the place, not respecting the paradigms within which those particular concepts were lodged. Weber had a particular methodology, we may not have subscribed to the whole methodology, but certain ideas in Weber were tremendously important to us. Marx had a lot of ideas to show the connection between cultural questions, social questions, and economic questions - we resisted forms of economic determinist explanation – but we borrowed a hell of a lot of Marx. I didn't say, in relation to encoding/decoding, that the model is drawn from Marx. The model is drawn not from *Kapital*, but from the methodology of the *Grundrisse*. In which, just to be brief, Marx says, you have to start with what he called the “chaotic obstruction”, but you have to add more and more levels of determination in order to produce the concrete in thought – that is the method of encoding/decoding. It adds determination to a very loose model, makes it more precise, more historically specific. ...

The best way of describing it is as Foucault calls it, “concepts are tools to think with”. We treated them as tools to think with, sometimes in a rather loose and cavalier way – that's quite true. But if they were of service to us in analysing a particular set of events, phenomenon, social phenomenon, development, we used it. We would defend it, we would go back and try and read to understand out of what matrix of problems it came, but we didn't agree with, say, Althusser, which is you can only understand the concept because it's within a particular conceptual framework. We thought people actually break across their conceptual frameworks all the time. What's more, they change them, so what is this thing about consistency? (pp. 111-12)

## 25: Cultural Studies and Media Studies

[Cultural Studies] has gone through masses of changes in becoming more international, becoming more global: the spread of it to Italy first of all, and then to the US, and then, since then, everywhere in the world has a Cultural Studies Movement, or whatever it might be called. But each time it does that, it changes in character, a different set of influences come in. ...

But, some of those developments I'm as opposed to, as I'm opposed to anything else. To tell the honest truth, I think a lot of rubbish is published and written, I think there's a lot of rubbish in sociology, but there's also a lot of rubbish in cultural studies. Some of the international journals of cultural studies, I think if I see one more analysis of some particular television series, I'll die!

And this parading itself as cultural studies, it's not cultural studies at all, it's media studies - a sort of elaborate version of media studies, with a very particular element, segment of cultural studies. It doesn't ask the cultural studies question, and that is the question, "How is culture related to other practices which are not, themselves, cultural in the same sense?" That's the question of that early moment. So it's not to produce a cultural theory, self-sufficient in itself, it is to produce a notion of how culture is not a dependent, but itself a constitutive element in every other field and social practice. So it's interesting in those connections, and when you lose those connections, and the questions of power - which they always bring into play - when you lose that, I think you've departed from basic paradigm cultural studies. (p. 113)

## **26: Cultural Studies and Politics**

One of the reasons was having a political conception of cultural studies but keeping group politics out. That was broadly agreed by other members of the Centre. Our definition of culture represented a critique of a more traditional conception of culture, which ... was without a conception of power. Culture was the sphere where a power did not operate. It has been the greatest things that have been thought and said by mankind. It wasn't recruitable to the ruling class, or the ruling bloc, or the working-class, etc., it was an empirian sphere of values and judgements floating up above there in the Matthew Arnoldian sense.

Well, we dirtied that conception. We said, "It is not just that, but ideas are always connected with social groups, and thus connected with social interests. ... In that sense the political was always part of cultural studies. ... I, personally, pursued a political path which overlapped with, and was influential, on my own approach, but which never tried to recruit people to it in the Centre, and which was often pursued outside the Centre. So

the time when I was in the Centre, I was also active in anti-racist work, then active with *Marxism Today* – where the critique of Thatcherism was made – and so on. (p. 126)

## 27: Althusser

Unless you have Gramsci, you really don't understand my take on Althusser. Gramsci is the person who talked a lot about conjuncture, about hegemonic forms of power, about historical blocks rather than the ruling class, on and on, Gramsci was proliferating new concepts for discussing the political, what is distinctively belongs to the political.

Althusser brings a kind of structuralist mode of thinking about that, to bear on that, so that you'd find important sections on articulation in Althusser, which is about the joining up of different processes or different sites. But then you have to go back to Gramsci who says, "Hegemonic power is precisely something which is not defined just in one place". For instance, you can't get it by just commanding the State, because you have to command popular assent, you have to lead in intellectual work, you have to lead in the media, you have to lead in moral debate, so hegemonic power is precisely things coming together across a series of sites. So when Althusser ... discusses the vexed problem of determination in the last instance by the economic, this is where cultural studies begins in a resistance to that formulation taken in a simplistic way. Well, Althusser is the person who eventually frames the idea of over-determination, that things are determined at the same time – ideologically and politically and economically – so they're like symptoms really, they're the effect of several processes which crystallise, they conjoin, and that's exactly a conjuncture.

So Althusser, for me, clarifies a lot that is in Gramsci, but ... he is reading Marx in a more structuralist way, in a more French way than a Hegelian way. Very critical of Hegel, the Hegelian Marx. His line is that Marx goes away really, and Marx becomes more strictly an analyst of the capitalist mode of production, in its broader framework, so he would make a distinction between the Hegelian and the post-Hegelian, and that is what he would call "the structuralist Marx". We were, of course, interested in structures – I was interested in non-Marxist structuralism for a very long time – Levi-Strauss, Roland

Barthes - the question of structure in anthropology, semiotics, all of that strand of thought which is really, in critical theory, influenced by Saussure, stemming from Saussure.

Saussure on language provided what somebody like me felt was a more rigorous form of cultural analysis than the analysis I had been taught in literary departments, which was sort of splurgy - do you feel that metaphor? ... But language provides a model of culture. So people who are influenced by that strand of thinking, which goes right along Derrida and difference, and on and on and on in French critical thought, but Saussure is very much a founding figure. Though he was a linguist, he wasn't a semanticist, he wasn't interested necessarily in broader social or political questions.

I wrote this essay on two strands in culture studies, one which you call the "humanistic", to which Edward Thompson and Raymond Williams and so on belonged, and one called the "structuralist", which was our first impact with French critical theory. And it's interesting for the Centre that it went that way, influenced by Althusser, rather than going in the Hegelian route to the Frankfurt school, which also had an elaborated theory of culture. But we didn't go that way. We went the French way rather than the German way.

*Well, you talk about "wrestling with Althusser", what were you wrestling about?*

Well, Althusser - first of all I accept that you can't really think about Marxism without thinking about the notion of structures. But structuralism is a different thing! It's a sort of methodology, it's a principle of analysis, and Althusser took structuralism right to the very end - to the extreme is really what I mean - so that each of the practices that Althusser discusses are not only relatively autonomous of each other, they become autonomous. At one point, Althusser, in reading *Kapital*, talks about a "theoretical practice" as if it doesn't really matter whether the theory explains anything or not, or has any practical purchase on the world. Well, that was to apply structuralism much too far, as is the case in a lot of French critical theory - for me. There are wonderful insights, you can work with them, you've got to rob them, steal them away, and go on thinking in another way, because they will exaggerate it, to the point of the ridiculous. So when Althusser says, "theoretical practice can't be measured by its practical or concrete

relevance”, I thought, “This is rubbish”. “And is Hegel really so absent from the later Marx?” So there were key questions, for somebody who was very influential in my thinking, which I just thought, “It’s too much. You’re pushing the point. This is a good point, too far”. (pp. 131-33)

## **28: Black and Asian Artists**

I got interested in the visual arts. I had been interested, as I said, as a young person - because part of my intellectual awakening was to see Picasso for the first time, and to see Paul Klee for the first time, and to see Cezanne and wonder what the relationship is between the two, and to see Braque, so this bursts on me like an incredible new world. And it doesn’t look like the things they’re supposed to, people don’t look like that! Picasso is seeing them from the front and the side at the same time, what sense does that make, in terms of real time? So it’s part of my awakening in that sense. I’m interested in it, but I’m not a student of the visual arts – then, or, indeed, later. Then I become very interested in film, which is the medium of modernity. Again, it arises in that period, comes into its fruition: colour, the big, wonderful cinemas of the post-war period, France, Italian neo-realism, American cinema, and so on, so my visual interest is transferred to film.

Then [more recently] it becomes focused on the visual arts, in particular the visual arts of black artists and Asian artists working in Britain, or showing their work in Britain. They are second generation diasporic subjects. ... The second generation has gone to school here, they’re becoming educated, but they simultaneously feel distanced from the place which is their potential new home. They feel they have what’s called “double consciousness” – they belong to Jamaica, but they’ve never been there. They have been to London, but people in London don’t think they’re really Londoners, so they’re betwixt and between. This is the second generation, which is the audience for reggae, it is Rastas, it is rude boys, it is anti-racism, that whole thing.

One of the things that comes out of it is a few of them who get, for the first time, to Art School, and they start to paint, or take photographs of themselves – putting themselves in the frame – and of other things, “this is how we see it, not how you see it. This is how we

see it". And indeed, as a weapon of protest, the first big wave, Eddie Chambers and so on, are very close to the kind of collage protest art of the Black Power and of Civil Rights. So it hasn't explicit politics, but it carries forward a sort of political critique, even when it's not so directly engaged politically.

Now, this produces enormous work, interesting work. In the eighties there's a huge explosion of this kind of work - everybody's making something, doing something, putting together an installation, taking photographs, doing some painting, writing, etc. - huge creative explosion. And they have nowhere, nobody who represents them, nobody who attends to their work very carefully, they can't get spaces for exhibitions, galleries are not interested in their work, Art Schools don't teach their work, they don't encourage them to produce it. So there is a question about their accessibility. There is a question about, "What is their impact - not in relation just to the black community and black consciousness elsewhere, in the Caribbean and black America, and South Africa and elsewhere, but in Britain?" And some of my friends have spent their youth organising little exhibitions in back-street shops in Brixton, the Black Arts Centre which, you know, closes tomorrow, and then opens somewhere else. But fine work is done in that period.

So I became involved with two organisations that come out of that eighties work, or are inspired by it. One is in the visual arts more narrowly defined, and it's called the Institute for International Visual Arts - INVA, and the other is a similar movement, parallel movement, in photography - the Association of Black Photographers, Autograph. ...

Something else comes out of that, and that's the black film makers, Isaac Julian, John Akomfrah, Steve MacQueen and so on, that's also going, and they're all similar problems - who will give them money to make films? Where will their work be shown? They get subventions to start a series of film workshops, and these other people are all beginners, small organisations, picking the artists and championing the broader cause - the cultural cause of what Fanon calls "The fact of blackness" as a strong element in the arts, because a strong element in social life, and it's going to be a strong element in Britain - whether they like it or not.

So I became involved with this work, introduced to it very much by someone who was responsible for putting on many of those exhibitions – his name is David Bailey. He was a young photographer... And I met people through him.

*So when did the idea of Rivington Place come, then?*

Well, I became Chair of the Boards of these two organisations, and as such I thought, “What are they doing, struggling along as two separate organisations?” They were both, by then, recognised by the Arts Council, so they got funding, which they hadn’t in the past, but they were still struggling to make it, and there was no secure place that they could pass on to other generations. But there was a Capital Fund in the Arts Council to actually build some arts buildings, or to re-convert older buildings, and we applied. There were two capital programmes, one in which black organisations got very little money, there was a huge stink about it. And the second time round we applied, and they gave us money for the proposal to build a new-build visual Arts Centre for the Cultural Diversity in the Visual Arts....

We don’t hold anything, we’re not a gallery in that sense, but we show exhibitions... We’re not telling them what to paint, or what to do at all. We’re partly responsible for generating a debate about those things. What is black art? What does that mean? So there is a debate going on about it, and black art isn’t impacted by Feminism, so what are black women’s interests visually different from black men’s interests, etc.? So there’s a series of debates like that. ...

And when artists move from black and white naturalism – so-called – to colour, to paint, and then to abstraction or semi-abstraction, we go with them, because now they’re in Art Schools and they’re coming into contact with modern art in a wider sense – they’re learning about abstraction, they’re learning about installations – so that’s what they want to show, in some ways their consciousness, what they’re on about, goes into that kind of work, and we’ll follow them if that’s what they want to exhibit.

We won’t not exhibit the earlier work, and in a sense, photography has its feet in that earlier tradition, but so does film, so does painting, so does drawing. It’s not a

commitment to naturalism. You're not talking about my personal tastes, because that doesn't help you either, because, you know, I like all the stuff! I like photography, I like painting, I like abstraction, I like non-abstraction. I'm interested that, on the whole, the black arts have not gone wildly into abstraction, they're still more figural, they use the face and the body much more than the broad generality of global modern art does, and that interests me, because I think you can see its roots in putting yourself in the frame, still operating within a tradition where even the forms have become more abstract... (pp. 138-43)

## **29: Qualitative and Quantitative Evidence**

*Now, I just want to ask you something about method - obviously you're a qualitative researcher and you've got this literary critical basis originally, but did you ever feel you wanted to have anything to do with measuring and counting like a lot of social researchers do?*

Yes, I did. No, I'm not against that, I think it produces a certain kind of evidence. I don't think it's as hard an evidence as many people imagine it does, I think it depends a lot more on interpretation. People quote the figures, "that the figures prove", and they don't prove - they may give greater weight to it. Some of the things they don't take into consideration are that people don't know, when they answer questionnaires, they don't know. "Why do you think that?" "Why do you think homosexuality is wrong?" "Mmm, well, because the Bible says so", or, "It's against nature". You can't say it's [against] nature, it doesn't appear in nature, because it appears all over the bloody place, and dogs are at it, and the cats are at it, so it's there. They don't really know where the moral distinction falls.

What can they tell you? They can tell you what they believe. "Do you believe that it's wrong?" "Tick 'no'". But how they came to that, and what follows from that, and what frames of interpretation are being drawn on to support that belief, that they can't tell you. It doesn't mean it's not worth counting how many people believe it, but don't think that you're at the end of the game when you've done that, you're just at the beginning of the game. Now we know it's an important cultural formation - this belief - which affects

practice, of course. So it's pretty important to know whether it's very widespread, but how is it spread? Why does it take root in certain people, at certain times? Why does it become a public issue? Why is it just a question of morality and private belief? These are to take the numbers further.

So it's not just that there are phases when I thought that was good, I thought that that was a very important kind of method, in the same way I think ethnography is a very important. More so, because there's more investment in the concrete, there's more an instance, it instantiates processes, you don't have to guess that it's happening, you can say, "Look at this life, it is happening here. This is how it happens. This is how they talk about it", so ethnography is very very rich. But an ethnography which is not related to wider social principles that you wouldn't capture in a questionnaire, what's the use of that? It doesn't really tell you anything.

When I first read Durkheim, social facts are "things", treats social facts as things, Durkheim was not stupid, he knew that there are mental processes, but he says it all happens in a black box, and we can't enter the black box. So if you're asking about morality, you should ask about the changing statistics of crime and deviance, that will tell you what the public morals and social morality is, and why, how it came about. Well, that's fine. A lot of *Suicide* didn't attempt to do that. But ... Jack Douglas, wrote a book called, *The Social Meanings of Suicide*, and what he shows is the amount of actual substantive material which is *ad hoc* into place by Durkheim. Why do Jews commit suicide more often? Well, the whole history of Judaism, the position of the Jews, anti-Semitism, all that is implied by it, it's in the interpretative background to it, but what he produces is, "Well, don't worry about that, treat social factors as things". Well, social factors are not just things, there are things and meanings and practices, and beliefs – some of them wrong, many of them wrong. Still, what we believe to be true is true in its effects, including idiotic beliefs. (pp. 151-52)