

# Open Research Online

---

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

## Stuart Hall and the theory and practice of articulation

### Journal Item

How to cite:

Clarke, John (2015). Stuart Hall and the theory and practice of articulation. *Discourse: Studies in the cultural politics of education*, 36(2) pp. 275–286.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2015 Taylor Francis



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1080/01596306.2015.1013247>

---

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's [data policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

---

[oro.open.ac.uk](http://oro.open.ac.uk)

# Stuart Hall and the theory and practice of articulation

**John Clarke\***

*Faculty of Social Sciences, The Open University, UK*

In this article, I argue that the idea of articulation links three different dimensions of Stuart Hall's work: it is central to the work of cultural politics, to the work of hegemony, and to his practice of embodied pedagogy. I claim that his approach to pedagogy entails the art of listening combined with the practice of theorising in the service of expanding who belongs to the public. This involves the work of translation, finding ways of addressing different audiences. I treat each of these aspects in turn, drawing out the salience of articulation for each and suggest that these three dimensions are themselves articulated by Hall's commitment to the theory *and* practice of articulation.

**Keywords:** articulation; cultural politics; hegemony; common sense; pedagogy

When reading or listening to the many comments and commentaries on Stuart Hall's life and work that followed his death in February 2014, I was moved by how many paid tribute to his personal charm, his generosity in thinking and talking with others, as well as his engaging and persuasive way of speaking.<sup>1</sup> In this brief article, I will make speculative connections between these apparently personal characteristics and his orientations to theory, politics and pedagogy.<sup>2</sup> In this, I do not mean to suggest that the descriptions of his grace, generosity, or compelling style of thinking and speaking are trivial, incidental, or even wrong-headed. On the contrary, they consistently convey qualities that seem all too rare in the worlds of the academy and politics. The article asks what underlies this outpouring of tributes and their recurrent themes and offers an alternative reading of these 'personal qualities' and engaging style, explaining them as central to his embodied praxis of articulation. This paper will demonstrate how the concept of articulation works in three different and yet inter-related ways to organise his political, pedagogic and intellectual projects—as the work of cultural politics, the work of securing hegemony, and the attentive listening necessary to the work of embodied pedagogy.

## **Turning to articulation**

This paper will argue that Hall's engaging ways were more than merely personal, yet nor were they the result of the sort of careful calculation expressed in the contemporary academic obsessions with public engagement or the maximization of 'impact'. Rather, they were the manifestations of a uniquely historically aware and forward-looking reflection about intellectual, political, and pedagogic work within

---

\* Email: [John.clarke@open.ac.uk](mailto:John.clarke@open.ac.uk)

and beyond the academy. Hall's many political projects and commitments embodied personal, political and pedagogical dimensions. They were part and parcel of his conduct throughout his varied and intertwined career as activist, theorist, public intellectual and academic, and, for me, linked his public practice to the more intimate relationships of mentor, collaborator, colleague, and friend No-one who spent any time with him was in any doubt about the sincerity of the warmth, interest and attention that were in play in such encounters.

It is not exactly news to claim that the concept of articulation was central to Stuart Hall's work (see, for example, Slack, 1996). What is perhaps most striking is the multiple productive ways in which this idea worked for him: it linked his approach to thinking about social formations, his orientation to culture as the site of ideological and political struggles, and the problematic politics of constructing counter-hegemonic possibilities in popular politics. The idea also linked his work on diasporic identities, popular cultural forms and aesthetic/cultural practices. In the following sections, I review some of these usages of articulation, before returning to the question of 'practising articulation'.

The starting point is the role that articulation plays in Hall's response to the problem of analysing social formations, even though this issue often disappears in accounts of articulation in the analysis of discourse, ideology and culture. It is, however, an important starting point because it locates articulation at the centre of his attempt to think about cultural studies in relation to Marxism and forms a critical hinge in his uses of Marx, Gramsci, and Althusser during the 1970s and 1980s. He followed Althusser in refusing the view of the base/superstructure distinction (and the internal relations of determination between the two parts) that had dominated much Marxist theorising, not least for the room this created for thinking about the relative autonomy of social instances—and for 'culture', in particular. The idea of articulation provided a means for addressing the complex character of social formations (as articulated unities) rather than simple, or expressive, totalities. This Althusserian view of social formations which combined multiple modes of production with economic, political, ideological levels or instances in an articulated combination that was 'structured in dominance' rather than simply determined, coincided with Hall's reading of critical parts of Marx, notably the 1857 *Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy* or *Grundrisse* (Hall, 2003; Marx, 1993). He was taken with Marx's description of the circuit of capital as a complex totality, composed of different moments (productions, exchange, circulation, consumption, etc.) that together formed a 'unity in difference'.

This understanding of social formations as articulated structures was paralleled in his understanding of articulation as central to work on ideology, domination and hegemony. Here Hall moved between an Althusserian concern with ideology (not least the question of interpellation) and a Gramscian focus on hegemony and the organization of consent (not least in the complex relations with the field of common sense). This engagement took place dialogically—not least through the conversations (in person and in writing) with Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's work on hegemony (e.g., Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). In the development of articulation as an alternative to more reductive conceptions of ideology, we can see the characteristic subtlety of Hall's mobile theorising: working with and against other ways of thinking in a complex negotiation: Althusser allows us to see X, but does not help us with Y. Or Foucault provides a way of approaching knowledge and power, yet does not give us Gramsci's understanding of common sense ... and so on. I suspect that Gramsci provided the closest thing to a fixed point for this mobility, not least for his attention

to the necessity of conjunctural analysis (see, for example, Hall, 1986; 1987). But this mobile and exploratory understanding of theory—and of articulation in particular—is visible in statements like the following:

By the term ‘articulation’, I mean a connection or link which is not necessarily given in all cases, as a law or a fact of life, but which requires particular conditions of existence to appear at all, which has to be positively sustained by specific processes, which is not ‘eternal’ but has to be constantly renewed, which can under some circumstances disappear or be overthrown, leading to the old linkages being dissolved and new connections—re-articulations—being forged. It is also important that an articulation between different practices does not mean that they become identical or that one is dissolved into the other. Each retains its distinct determinations and conditions of existence. However, once an articulation is made, the two practices can function together, not as an ‘immediate identity’ (in the language of Marx’s ‘1857 Introduction’) but as distinctions within a ‘unity’. (Hall, 1985, pp. 113-114, footnote 2).

Here we can see some of the characteristic formulations of articulation—in particular, the view that connections or links are not ‘necessarily given’ as a fact of life or by law like correspondences. Hall returned time and again to the importance of the ‘no necessary correspondence’ between elements—while simultaneously refusing the other pole of ‘necessarily no correspondence’—(1985, p. 94). Instead, he insisted on the importance of analysing the specifics of particular articulations. This meant paying attention to both the conditions of their existence and the political-cultural work (practice) that went into making and sustaining specific articulations. No articulation—whether the combination of social instances in a social formation or a discursive alignment of meanings and politics—came with a ‘lifetime guarantee’. Rather their internal organisation (involving potential disjunctures, contradictions, antagonisms and tensions) and their external conditions of existence created the possibility of ‘disarticulation and rearticulation’. This understanding of articulation—combining both its contingency and the necessity of the work of production and maintenance—was a critical element in Hall’s approach to cultural studies and established the ground on which other implications of articulation as a way of naming the problems of politics and pedagogy could be developed.

### *Articulation as the work of cultural politics*

This leads me to the second way in which the concept of articulation was important to Hall’s project for cultural studies—in resisting expressive or reductive conceptions of ideology (or culture or discourse) in which specific ideas or ways of thinking were identified with a particular class location. This was always one of the most contentious terrains for cultural studies, given the temptations to identify ideologies with particular classes or to think of cultures as coherent organic unities that condensed a whole way of life (of a class, or community) in an anthropological model. As Jennifer Slack (1996) argues, articulation is one of the means by which Stuart Hall ‘resists the temptation of reduction to class, mode of production, structure, as well as to culturalism’s tendency to reduce culture to “experience”’ (pp. 122–123).

In developing his work around the concept of articulation, Hall always emphasized a double meaning, in which the ideas of ‘to give voice to’ and ‘to connect’ are always implied and always co-present. In an interview with Larry Grossberg, Hall talked at some length about the concept and its significance for him, including these (much cited) observations:

I always use the word ‘articulation’, though I don’t know whether the meaning I attribute to it is perfectly understood. In England, the term has a nice double meaning because ‘articulate’ means to utter, to speak forth, to be articulate. It carries that sense of language-ing, of expressing, etc. But we also speak of an ‘articulated’ lorry (truck): a lorry where the front (cab) and back (trailer) can, but need not necessarily, be connected to one another. The two parts are connected to each other, but through a specific linkage, that can be broken. An articulation is thus the form of the connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time. You have to ask, under what circumstances can a connection be forged or made? So the so-called ‘unity’ of a discourse is really the articulation of different, distinct elements which can be rearticulated in different ways because they have no necessary ‘belongingness’. The ‘unity’ which matters is a linkage between that articulated discourse and the social forces with which it can, under certain historical conditions, but need not necessarily, be connected. Thus, a theory of articulation is both a way of understanding how ideological elements come, under certain conditions, to cohere together within a discourse, and a way of asking how they do or do not become articulated, at specific conjunctures, to certain political subjects. Let me put that the other way: the theory of articulation asks how an ideology discovers its subject rather than how the subject thinks the necessary and inevitable thoughts which belong to it; it enables us to think how an ideology empowers people, enabling them to begin to make some sense or intelligibility of their historical situation, without reducing those forms of intelligibility to their socio-economic or class location or social position. (Grossberg, 1996, pp. 142–143)

The ‘articulated lorry’ metaphor is often taken up in terms of how different elements are articulated in a discursive or ideological formation, in which the elements have no necessary belonging—it is the way in which they are assembled together, the forging of specific links and connections that gives them their social, cultural or political force.<sup>3</sup> But less clearly visible in this argument is a question of political articulation—the ways in which an articulated discourse and a combination of social forces can (conjuncturally) be connected. It is the articulation of both a discourse and that discourse with ‘certain political subjects’ that constitutes the double movement of articulation. It is that second element that makes articulation more than a ‘merely cultural’ concept.

It is important to note that Hall’s reference to ‘social forces’ condenses a whole series of analytical questions. Although the concept and its relatives (balance of forces, political forces, etc.) are taken from an orthodox Marxist framing, the uses Hall makes of them always involve an insistence that social forces are never simply classes (as derivatives of the social relations of production). On the contrary, social forces for Hall were always multiple, constituted by the varieties of domination and subordination that were in play in any specific conjunctural setting. It is this argument that organises the conjunctural analysis offered in *Policing the Crisis* (Hall et al., 1978 **Not in references**) in which the accumulating crises of the British social formation are understood as being articulated through ‘race’ (see also the elegant essay by Gail Lewis, 2000, in which she dissects the displacement of ‘race’ in British social policy). I have argued elsewhere (Clarke, forthcoming) that this conception of social forces was one of the (many) enabling roles that Gramsci’s work played in the development of cultural studies. Gramsci’s tendency, in *The Prison Notebooks* (1973), to write cryptically and elusively about ‘social groups’ combined with his concern with hegemony as the site of alliances and blocs to blur the classical simplicities of class relations of domination and subordination.

### *Articulation as the work of hegemony*

His interest in the work of hegemony stressed articulation as a practice in the double sense that I have described above. At the core of this was an understanding of hegemony as the (contingent and conditional) construction of popular consent to the project and programme of a ‘ruling bloc’. Again following Gramsci, Hall insisted on the importance of understanding this as a bloc—an alliance of class fractions and other social groups, that aimed to provide social leadership—a project that could shape the direction of the social formation. Here is the first moment of connection/articulation—the construction of the (would be) ruling bloc among potentially competing and conflicting interests (including among the capitalist class itself).<sup>4</sup> The second moment consists of the work of articulating the subordinate (or subaltern) groups through material and symbolic concessions in which they are ‘taken account of’ in such ways that they can come to identify themselves in the leading project.

This includes the elaboration of ways of addressing, appropriating themes attached to, and speaking for subordinate social groups. This included—a central theme for cultural studies—borrowing and bending the forms and styles of popular thought. Here is posed the relationship between hegemony and common sense. For Hall, this was where cultural studies connected most powerfully with Gramsci’s understanding of the relationship between hegemony and commonsense. In Gramsci’s view, we are always—

... the product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces without leaving an inventory ... Moreover, commonsense is a collective noun, like religion: there is not just one common sense, for that too is a product of history and a part of the historical process. (1973, pp. 324–325).

This insistence on the fragmentary and heterogeneous formation of commonsense identifies the work of political articulation that is required to articulate selected elements or fragments of commonsense with dominant conceptions to create the appearance of a shared, unitary and coherent understanding of the world. It is important to emphasise the ‘selected elements’, since there are many ‘common senses’ and some of them, as Gramsci argued, contain ‘good sense’ that might be mobilised to build alternative hegemonies. For example, the Right—in Britain, the USA, and elsewhere—has often borrowed common sense discourses of nation, work and family to articulate a national-popular project. But they have also borrowed (and bent) apparently more egalitarian fragments of commonsense, as in the recent uses made of ‘fairness’ as a popular British identification by the Conservative-led Coalition government. In this, ‘fairness’ is re-articulated to legitimate welfare cuts (in benefits and services) in the defence of being ‘fair’ to ‘hard working families’ (Clarke, 2014). Writing in the 1980s, Hall argued for recognising Gramsci’s importance for engaging with politics as an articulatory practice:

Since, in fact, the political character of our ideas cannot be guaranteed by our class position or by the ‘mode of production’, it is possible for the Right to construct a politics which does speak to people’s experience, which does insert itself into what Gramsci called the necessarily fragmentary, contradictory nature of common sense, which does resonate with some of their ordinary aspirations, and which, in certain circumstances, can recoup them as subordinate subjects, into a historical project which ‘hegemonises’ what we used—erroneously—to think of as their ‘necessary class interests’. Gramsci is one of the first modern Marxists to recognise

that interests are not given but have to be politically and ideologically constructed. (1987, p. 20)

This practice of articulation was, for Hall, a complex one, implying political work: selective work *vis à vis* the many common senses, involving both the selective mobilisation of some aspects and the obverse: the selective *demobilisation* of other elements by rendering them silent, ridiculous, unrealistic, out of time or place and so on. As Slack and Wise (2007) insist, this view of articulation as a practice is closely tied to Hall's understanding of cultural studies as a contextual and conjunctural way of working:

These articulations are not fixed for all time; they do not remain permanently in place. They can and do change over time. But, here too, the speed and direction of change is contingent. Some articulations remain relatively tenacious; they are rather firmly forged and difficult to disarticulate. Hall called these 'lines of tendential force', which draws attention to their tendency to remain articulated. Others, however, might be more easily broken and thus subject to disarticulation. It all depends on the particulars of the nature of the articulations at any particular historical moment. (p. 128)

This view of articulation then underpins a reading of hegemony as not just as something to be established and maintained, a conception which implies a view of cultural studies as critique (widely held and practised) but also a concern with how to conduct alternative politics. This is the condition for his famous observation that popular culture is—

... one of the places where socialism might be constituted. That is why 'popular culture' matters. Otherwise, to tell you the truth, I don't give a damn about it. (Hall, 1989, p. 239)

In this sense culture constituted a field of possibility in which relations of domination and subordination were inscribed, represented, refused and contested through articulatory practices. A critical part of his frustration at much of British (and beyond) left politics was about the failure to take this field of possibility seriously (see *The Hard Road to Renewal*, 1989, for example). Some of this concerned the lack of attention to the work of hegemony being performed in Thatcherism (and subsequent British versions of what he later called 'commonsense neoliberalism', Hall and O'Shea, 2013), but much of his frustration focused on the left's failure to think about the other threads of common sense and how they might be worked with and on to create progressive blocs that spoke with and for the subordinated, marginalised and excluded. Such a view of articulation implies paying attention to common sense, its multiplicity, its fractures, the desires it voices, the silences it contains, and more. Listening and paying attention is hard work, while short cuts are easy and attractive—if not necessarily politically effective. This issue preoccupied him through to his last writings, for example, the essays on neoliberalism in *Soundings* (Ref?) and *Cultural Studies* (Ref?).

### ***Articulation as embodied pedagogy***

This understanding of articulation as a practice also underpinned Hall's approach to pedagogy. By pedagogy, I mean to refer to the many varieties of teaching in which he engaged: lectures, classes, workshops, and the vast amount of individual and collective teaching material he produced while at the Open University between 1978

and 1997. The OU is a distance teaching university and he contributed to the making of a variety of courses in the form of TV programmes and DVDs, audio commentaries, editing and authoring written materials and more. The university also operates a model of the 'collective teacher': the course or module team that is responsible for preparing such teaching materials and Hall's presence in such processes was a powerful one: leading, enabling, supporting and developing, but always with a view to finding the right modes of address and engagement between the course and its students. He also took an active role in the week long summer schools that the University ran, and was a remarkable presence in the everyday tutoring, in the one-off evening lectures given by all members of staff, but—most of all—in the amount of time he would give to talking with students in groups and individually about their studies, their lives and the world in which they lived. Having seen him in these settings, I can only say that the gracious generosity for which he was well-known was constantly visible (and was a constant source of delight for students)—and these qualities were matched by a seemingly boundless capacity to enter, continue and renew such conversations.

But this is not just a question of being nice: it reflects an orientation to pedagogy as articulation that runs throughout his work. The somewhat banal pedagogical principle of 'starting where the student is' takes on a rather different political and cultural significance in this light. Of course, 'where the student is'—from a cultural studies perspective—is rarely simple, singular or straightforward. On the contrary, 'the student' embodied all those things that Hall knew to be true about identities, common senses and the practice of articulation. Identities are multiple and rarely fixed; common senses are heterogeneous and fragmentary and the work of articulation is to build connections that lead towards a set of new configurations and possibilities. Angela McRobbie (2000) has argued for the importance of viewing him as a teacher in contextually specific ways:

Two things about Stuart Hall's career as a teacher as well as an intellectual are significant. First, his practice as a teacher has at every point departed from the university tradition embodied in the Oxbridge model. Second, in the British post-1945 context where the agenda for public intellectual debate remains firmly set by the standards and concerns of Oxbridge, and symbolized by the role of the BBC, Hall's field of influence is less in the establishment channels of the quality press and the portals of government, and more in the lecture theatres and seminar rooms of the redbrick and new universities, and, of course, in the late night broadcasts of the Open University. Stuart Hall has operated throughout his career as a teacher, and indeed as a certain kind of teacher. As he himself said in interview, 'Open university courses are open to those who don't have any academic background. If you are going to make cultural studies ideas live with them, you have to translate the ideas, be willing to write at that more popular and accessible level. I wanted cultural studies to be open to that sort of challenge. I didn't see why it wouldn't 'live' as a more popular pedagogy'. (Hall, quoted in McRobbie, 2000, p. 212)

This establishes a view of pedagogy as an engagement, a conversation, and a process of collective discovery, rather than an act of masterly revelation. That implies hard work too and it inverts what has (too) often been a left or progressive view of the relationship between politics and pedagogy: that teaching is the site for doing or—more frequently—announcing politics. In this mode, the act of revealing truth tears aside the veil of ideology and allows people to see clearly (as if they had become Johnny Nash). This was not a model of politics or pedagogy (or ideology) that Hall thought was sustainable or productive. Nor did he think that critical work was about the deconstruction of common sense (in which common sense was intrinsically

erroneous or false—bad thinking), which could be simply countered or displaced by correct knowledge. Certainly he thought teaching was the site of politics (just like popular culture), but that telling people what was right or true in a loud voice was unlikely to be an effective form of political mobilization.

I do think it is a requirement of intellectuals to speak a kind of truth. Maybe not truth with a capital T, but anyway, some kind of truth, the best truth that they know or can discover—to speak that truth to power. To take responsibility—which can be unpleasant and is no recipe for success—for having spoken it. To take responsibility for speaking it to wider groups of people than are simply involved in the professional life of ideas. To speak it beyond the confines of the academy. To speak it, however, in its full complexity. Never to speak it in too simple a way, because ‘the folks won’t understand’. Because then they will understand, but they will get it wrong, which is much worse! So, to speak it in its full complexity, but to try to speak it in terms in which other people who, after all, can think and do have ideas in their heads, though they are not paid or paid-up intellectuals, need it. (Hall, 2007, p. 2)

This conception of ‘how to speak’ is a powerful one, expressing a responsibility to engage with the audiences or publics who ‘need to know’ in the appropriate terms. Such a view meant that teaching was necessarily an exercise in articulation in a heteroglossic context, such that ‘starting where the student is’ meant considering the array of voices and modes of thinking that might be encountered and might provide the point of departure for the work of ‘thinking again’. Cultural and political contexts were necessarily heteroglossic (in Bakhtin’s sense) and required attention to the shifting terrains of the popular and the varieties of common sense that were in play at any particular moment. Pedagogy meant the task of working with, and on, those varieties—seeking to articulate them into new possibilities, new alignments and new directions of travel. Hall’s willingness to undertake this work of articulation was echoed, perhaps, in his ways of thinking and theorising such that teaching was not a separate domain. James Procter in his book on Stuart suggests that his practice of ‘doing theory’ can itself be understood as a practice of articulation:

Articulation, as a theoretical practice in Hall’s writing, involves linking two or more different theoretical frameworks in order to move beyond the limits of either framework on its own. For example, at the centre of this chapter has been a discussion of Hall’s displacement of the early theoretical assumptions of ‘culturalism’ through an encounter with the more recent ‘structuralisms’. Within Hall’s writings this displacement does not involve rejecting the former in order to proceed to the latter, but a coupling or articulation of the two in order to propose an alternative theoretical direction. This process of linkage is not fixed or final .... Articulations can only be made under a specific set of circumstances or, to adapt one final theoretical concept used by Hall, at a particular historical conjuncture. Hall’s theorising is conjunctural in the sense that it is always informed by and articulated as a response to, events at a particular moment. (Procter, 2004, p. 54)

This is an interesting and suggestive view of Hall’s theorizing: evoking Hall as ‘bricoleur’ discovering necessary elements in many different places and seeing what might happen if they were put together to illuminate pressing analytical and political issues. It certainly captures something of the mobile and unfinished way in which he would work patiently with, on and against, particular theorists or parts of their work. There are many examples of this—for instance, the essays on Gramsci (1986, 1987) or Althusser (1985). During the essay on Althusser, he carefully distinguishes that which he hopes to rescue and take up from Althusser’s work, whilst rejecting what he sees as overly structuralist tendencies. This approach underpins his response to E.P. Thompson’s (1978) famous critique of Althusser in *The Poverty of Theory*. He argues that Thompson provides an ‘undialectical reading’ of Althusser which lists the errors

and problems, yet ‘fails to recognize, *at the same time*, what real advances were being generated by Althusser’s work’ which establish ‘a threshold behind which we cannot allow ourselves to fall’ (1985, pp. 96–97). Here, too, is a characteristic double movement: the careful engagement with the analytical resources being developed by others combined with the identification of ‘thresholds’ or ‘springboards’ that would enable forward movement—to enable the task of thinking again and thinking better. He once argued that he tended to favour the ‘middle period’ of writers:

Perhaps I ought to say in parenthesis that I do find an alarming tendency in myself to prefer people’s less complete works to their later, mature and complete ones. I prefer *The Eighteenth Brumaire* to book II of *Capital*. I prefer Althusser’s *For Marx* to *Reading Capital*. I like people’s middle period a lot, where they have gotten over their adolescent idealism but their thought has not yet hardened into a system. And I like Laclau when he’s struggling to find a way out of reductionism and beginning to reconceptualize marxist categories in the discursive mode. (Hall, quoted in Grossberg, 1996, p. 146)

Here one might detect his own disposition to thinking and theorizing as active processes (and his reluctance to ‘Do Theory’ on a grand and abstracted scale). This orientation to thinking makes so much of his writing feel like ‘teaching’ in the best sense. In many places, he displays—in the sense of making visible—the process of working through ideas, concepts, orientations. What we read—or what we hear (since many of his essays began life as talks)—is the process of thinking, rather than just the conclusions. They are, then, also invitations to think with (and against) both Hall and the people with whom he is engaged. It establishes an exemplary practice of how to talk or write about thinking (as opposed to ‘undialectical’ critique). I was taken by the efforts of Gregor McLennan to capture this sensibility and style of Stuart Hall in a piece written shortly after his death. He begins from a troubling question—how to explain to others:

*What was it about Stuart Hall, as a social scientist, that was so special?*

To answer this, I find myself reaching for a rather old-fashioned, almost absurdly abstract term: dialectics. Yet for me this gets us close to the essence of Hall’s appeal as a thinker, teacher, mentor and friend. In so many people, in so many texts, and in so many addresses, seemingly contrary inclinations, arguments, traditions, political positions, and personal attributes jostle around awkwardly, never quite gelling into a final synthesis. But this was exactly the ‘dialectical’ quality and achievement of Stuart Hall’s work—especially when articulated in person.

Indeed, if dialectics comes across as abstract, this is because it is usually considered only at the level of pure understanding: the synthesis of generalised positions, theories, findings, and so on. Yet Hall had the rare gift and intelligence of expressing the dialectical movement of ideas and politics in his very character and presence. This was the way he worked with people, talked to (diverse) audiences, disputed and laughed his way through issues, and wrote up his (provisional, inclusive) solutions.

Only in recent times have sociologists (re)discovered the significance of ‘embodiment’ and ‘affect’, and only even more recently have fans of these new ‘vitalist’ notions realised that they are not in fact necessarily opposed to old ‘dry’ notions like reason, knowledge and argumentation. Better to put it, again, more dialectically: ideas and politics don’t lose their generality when they are ‘fused’ in and by particular situations and people, but they do seem to matter more because of this, gaining enhanced significance and buzz. And no one exuded this kind of embodied synthesizing intellectuality quite like Hall. (McLennan, 2014)

This is a wonderful evocation and analysis that grasps the sense of a person as an embodied practice. This was, indeed ‘the way he worked with people’ and McLennan

captures the sensibility of pedagogy as articulation that I have been trying to address—but even then, I think there is one more element that needs to be added.

### *Articulation as the work of attention*

The practice of articulation is not only the work of engaging, addressing, connecting. In a complex and heteroglossic context, crowded by many common senses, it also requires the work of listening: paying attention to what circulates, to what matters, to what connections are already being forged, what threads are being forgotten, and what apparently natural and normal alignments of things are coming apart. This is, in part, the work of cultural studies as Hall envisaged it: the search for the past, present and future possible articulations that secured and might unlock relations of domination and subordination. How is domination secured? How is hegemony articulated? What are the conjunctural conditions under which hegemony is fragile, vulnerable to the loss of consent?

Hall's legacy involves both such questions and the commitment to doing the careful work of listening that can make such links and potential new alignments available to us. Hall practised what Les Back (2007) has called 'the art of listening': the dialogical capacity to hear what people are saying. Such an orientation refuses the more conventional monological mode of politics (and teaching, one might suggest) and opens the space of possibility for discovery. This is, as Back himself has argued, something other than the 'we're listening' mode adopted by political parties (New Labour's 'Big Conversation' for instance), government agencies or the marketing arms of corporations that seek our responses to their provisions. But only by listening was Hall able to find the links and the connections that might be built upon to enable a conversation that moved. That attention was both large scale (the moving terrain of British popular culture in all its transnational formations) and intimate (the immediate encounter always felt as though it mattered). As a result, he was able to map the possibilities—a mapping that always enabled him to speak compellingly, making those connections, forging those links and refiguring the field of possibilities—again on a range of scales.

What so many of us remember is the voice—impassioned, warm, probing, inquisitive, laughing, and always generous in its offerings. Many of the tributes to him have evoked that experience. For example, Les Back (2014) observed that:

Listening to Stuart Hall made us see the world differently and he had a gift that enabled us to understand our life anew. He seemed to be talking directly to you, even if it was through the TV screen or through the pages of one of his many influential essays.

A similar view is offered in Nirmal Puwar's commentary about 'meeting Stuart Hall's voice' (2014)—an image that grasps at the life in (and of) that voice. She recalls having first encountered him speaking in the early hours of the morning (on BBC transmitted Open University programmes) and goes on:

There were many other occasions when I met Stuart Hall. Of course we meet him when we read, teach and debate his vast scholarship. To meet him as a reader is to find a form of speech which is always directly addressing you.

One of the many reasons he will be missed is the highlight of hearing him present a talk. He slowly comes alive. The audience comes alive. The ideas build up to a crescendo. He offers ideas which set off a whirlpool of connections. He moves the room. His analysis sets forth a sociological imagination that shifts its cadence through the tension of connecting the micro to the macro, the

everyday to the abstract, from theory to everyday practices, and never without attention to the political moment. (Puwar, 2014)

This, I want to suggest, is the embodied practice of articulation: the work of forging new connections in the pursuit of building progressive orientations and progressive alliances. In conclusion, I want to emphasise this as a *practice* for two reasons. The first is about not fetishizing the ‘Stuartness’ of Stuart Hall: what he did—and the way that did it—are models of good practice (the practice of articulation) rather than just the unfathomable wonders of a unique figure. I say this despite my profound admiration for who he was and how he conducted himself. We might nevertheless learn lessons—about listening and its value, about developing engaging (rather than instructive) modes of address and about finding ways of working in and with heteroglossic contexts in which multiple varieties of commonsense circulate. It is also the mode in which the personal and the political were articulated in Stuart Hall—a mode which we might strive to enact ourselves.

My second reason concerns the sense of loss that so many of us feel following Stuart’s death. On several occasions I have heard this manifest itself in the question ‘what would Stuart have said about ...?’ I think that misses the point: far better to ask ‘how would Stuart have thought about this?’ This question would bring us to the work of articulation—to think in ways that are committed but open, that recognise the unfinished nature of the moment, that try to borrow and bend productive intellectual resources, and that take seriously the collective and collaborative nature of social (and political) life. For me, that is the greatest legacy: that articulation is not just a theory or an analytic orientation, but that—as embodied by Stuart Hall—it was also a pedagogic and political practice.

---

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I am very grateful to the editors for the invitation to contribute to this special issue and to the anonymous reviewer and Leslie Roman for their thoughtful and constructive suggestions on the first draft.

<sup>2</sup> It is hard to write in the aftermath of Stuart’s death, not least because of the suspicion that he would never have taken himself this seriously. One specific instance of this difficulty concerns the problem of nomenclature—should he be interpellated as Stuart Hall, Stuart, Hall, or SH in the context of academic convention? This question remains unresolved—at least for me.

<sup>3</sup> I must confess to finding the ‘articulated lorry’ illustration somewhat frustrating. Articulated lorries articulate as a design feature—the cab and trailer are built with parts that are intended to conjoin. As a result, this may underestimate the work that articulation requires—whether in the ill-fitting alignments of economies and cultures in capitalist social formations, or the bending of forms of commonsense into would-be hegemonic projects. If only the parts were pre-designed for self-assembly ...

<sup>4</sup> The rise of neo-liberalism as a critical concept seems to have largely buried the question of the capitalist class as a fractioned, fractious, competitive and conflictual entity that cannot be relied upon to know its own ‘interests’. In contrast, Nicos Poulantzas (1973) argued that the state had to serve as the means by which ‘general interest’ of the capitalist class could be organised, while also providing the means of disorganising the subordinate classes.

## References

- Back, L. (2007). *The art of listening*. Oxford: Berg.
- Back, L. (2014). ‘Stuart Hall—a bright star’, *Open Democracy*, 16 February 2014: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/les-back/stuart-hall-bright-star>
- Clarke, J. (2014). Imagined economies: Austerity and the moral economy of ‘fairness’. *Topia*, 30-31(Fall 2013, Spring 2014), pages ?.

- Clarke, J. (forthcoming). Conjunctures, crises and cultures: Valuing Stuart Hall. *Focal: A Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology*. DOI number?
- Gramsci, A. (1973). *Selections from the prison notebooks* (G. Nowell Smith, & Q. Hoare, Eds.). London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Grossberg, L. (1966). On postmodernism and articulation: An interview with Stuart Hall. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*. In D. Morley, & K. Chen (Eds.) *Stuart Hall: Critical dialogues in cultural studies*, (pp. 131–150). London: Routledge.
- Hall, S. (1981 **Where is this cited?**). Notes on deconstructing ‘the popular’. In R. Samuel (Ed.), *People’s history and socialist theory*, (pp. 227–240). London: Routledge.
- Hall, S. (1985). Signification, representation, ideology: Althusser and the post-structuralist debate. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 2(2), 91–114.
- Hall, S. (1986). Gramsci’s relevance for the study of race and ethnicity. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 10(5), 5–27.
- Hall, S. (1987). Gramsci and us. *Marxism today*, 16–21 June.
- Hall, S. (1989). *The hard road to renewal*. London: Verso.
- Hall, S. (2003). Marx’s notes on method: A ‘reading’ of the ‘1857 Introduction’. *Cultural Studies*, 17(2), 113–149.
- Hall, S. (2007). Epilogue: Through the prism of an intellectual life. In B. Meeks (Ed.), *Culture, politics, race and diaspora: The thought of Stuart Hall*, (pp. 269–291). London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Hall, S., & O’Shea, A. (2013). Common-sense neoliberalism. *Soundings*, 55, 9–25.
- Laclau, E., & Mouffe, C. (1985). *Hegemony and socialist strategy: Towards a radical democratic politics*. London: Verso.
- Lewis, G. (2000). Stuart Hall and social policy: An encounter of strangers? In P. Gilroy, L. Grossberg, & A. McRobbie (Eds.), *Without guarantees: In honour of Stuart Hall*, (pp. 193–202). London: Verso.
- Marx, K. (1993). *Grundrisse: Foundations for a critique of political economy*. (Trans. Martin Nicolaus.) London: Penguin Books.
- McLennan, G. (2014). ‘On Stuart Hall’, *Discover Society*: <http://www.discover society.org/2014/03/04/focus-on-stuart-hall/>
- McRobbie, A. (2000). Stuart Hall: The universities and the ‘hurly burly’. In P. Gilroy, L. Grossberg, & A. McRobbie (Eds.), *Without guarantees: In honour of Stuart Hall*, (pp. 212–224). London: Verso.
- Poulantzas, N. (1973). *Political power and social classes*. London: New Left Books.
- Procter, J. (2004). *Stuart Hall* (Routledge Critical Thinkers Series). London: Routledge.
- Puwar, N. (2014). ‘Meeting Stuart Hall’s voice’, *Open Democracy*, 16 February 2014: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/nirmal-puwar/meeting-stuart-hall’s-voice>.
- Slack, J. (1996). The theory and method of articulation in cultural studies. In D. Morley, & K-H. Chen (Eds.), *Stuart Hall: Critical dialogues in cultural studies* (pp. ??-??). London: Routledge.
- Slack, J., & Wise J. (2007). *Culture + technology: A primer*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Thompson, E.P. (1978). *The poverty of theory and other essays*. New York: Monthly Review Press.