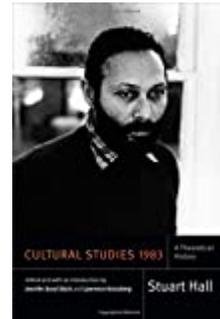




**Stuart Hall.** *Cultural Studies 1983: A Theoretical History.* Ed. Jennifer Daryl Slack and Lawrence Grossberg. Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2016. 232 pp. \$23.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8223-6263-0.



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## Marx between Structure and Culture

Today's undergrads who take courses in cultural studies might be surprised to learn what their discipline was primarily about thirty-five years back. Moreover, leaving alone today's ever more diversified field of cultural studies's inquiry, even such areas as postmodernism, ethnic studies, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, new historicism, psychoanalysis, communication, and gender, which attracted so many scholars at the discipline's very beginning in the United States, are barely touched if ever in Stuart Hall's *Cultural Studies 1983: A Theoretical History* (2016), edited and with an introduction by Jennifer Daryl Slack and Lawrence Grossberg. *Marxism and Cultural Studies 1983* would be a much more candid, although, admittedly, less commercially viable, title for the book. Hence both the editors's introduction and the author's preface are full of disclaimers regarding the seemingly comprehensive and universal character of the title—the disclaimers that are necessary to appreciate Hall's volume for what it is and is declared to be: a theoretical history. Hall (1932-2014), who was at the foundations of British cultural studies from its inception in the

1960s, has undoubtedly earned his place in history as the most influential theorist in the field. Considering the fact that most of his pioneering work, done both at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham and at the Open University, was primarily collaborative research published in edited volumes, this edition is unique in bringing to the public one of Hall's full-authored contributions.

The provenance of the totalizing Marxist inflection of Hall's *Cultural Studies* becomes clear when we learn about the occasion for the collected texts to appear: the eight essays comprising the volume were initially lectures delivered by the author in the summer of 1983 at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign as part of the teaching institute "Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture: Limits, Frontiers, Boundaries." As Hall had some reservations with regard to the publication of his lectures as a book (having written, nevertheless, a preface to the projected volume in 1988), this posthumous edition can be viewed as a tribute to the great scholar by the collection's editors Grossberg and Slack—Hall's

disciples and colleagues, who applied minimal editing in order to preserve "the characteristic rhythms of Hall's oral delivery" (p. xiii). In their introduction, the editors make it clear that they want us to perceive of the volume as a record of the event rather than as a closed theoretical position: being primarily "Marxism's contribution to the interpretation of culture" (p. ix) due to its necessary compliance with the topic of the teaching institute, the volume's obvious lacunae with respect to a comprehensive account of cultural studies as a discipline were later partially fixed by Hall himself in his widely anthologized essay, "Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies" (1992), presented initially as a lecture at the 1988 conference "Cultural Studies Now and in the Future" (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign), where he extended his survey to the questions of race, subjectivity, poststructuralism, and feminism.

Marxism as a centerpiece of *Cultural Studies 1983* is not only a tribute to the institute's topic. As Hall elucidates in his preface and in the first lecture, "The Formation of Cultural Studies," his outlook reflects his own personal experience of cultural studies, which has its undisguised political and institutional underpinning specific to the intellectual situation in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s. Emerging "as a response to a very concrete political problem—how the British working class evolved—under conditions of economic affluence" (p. 5)—the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, of which Hall was a director from 1969 to 1979, succeeding its founding director Richard Hoggart, cultural studies became a platform for the New Left to wrestle with a vulgar Marxism of class struggle and economic determinism. As Hall himself admits, "it was partially fortuitous that the field was organized around the concept of culture, which is exceedingly slippery, vague, and amorphous, with multifarious and diverse meanings" (p. 4). In spite of its strong sociological implications, cultural studies from the very beginning was taken up by professors and graduates of departments of English as well as Hoggart and Hall himself, both of whom shaped their theoretical perspectives in a respectful opposition to a very influential figure in British literary criticism—F. R. Leavis. Having paid homage to literary criticism, especially to Leavis's close reading methodology, as an important resource for the constitution of cultural studies, Hall notes that it was crucial for Hoggart in his *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) to overcome Matthew Arnold's traditional take on culture, championed by Leavis, as the highest achievement of human thought, and to turn to the reading of "the front living room" of the prewar British

industrial working class as if it were "a piece of prose" (pp. 9-10). Among other influential sources of cultural studies, Hall mentions anthropology (practiced mainly by Raymond Williams), admitting its relative weakness in Britain, and sociology, with its important discussion of mass society and mass culture, initiated by the Frankfurt School in the 1930s. According to Hall, mass culture and late capitalism are exactly the subjects where Hoggart's mere refocusing of Leavis's methodology proved utterly insufficient and where cultural studies wended its way to what Hall considers its most effective direction—the so-called Western Marxist tradition, represented by Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, György Lukács, and Antonio Gramsci. That is why Hoggart's departure from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies to join UNESCO is underlined as a milestone for "the Marxist alternative [to] become" a significant reference point and resource for developing Cultural Studies" (p. 24).

Williams's contribution to cultural studies, which is the focus of the second lecture, "Culturalism," vividly exemplifies that passage from Marxism as literary criticism to Marxism as critique of ideology. Williams's early *Culture and Society: 1780-1950* (1958), being just a rereading of the literary, Arnold-Leavis tradition from a broader cultural perspective, was later offset by E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), where the court documents, pamphlets, and newspapers represent precisely those popular voices that Williams could not find in the literary canon. Williams's *The Long Revolution* (1961) brings a different and, for Hall, a much more interesting perspective on what he calls "the totality" (p. 38), or a conception of narrowly understood social practices in their relations with the rest of the social formation. Williams's "culturalism" stems from his newly acquired philosophical and anthropological concept of Promethean Man, "who does not exist apart from the activity" (p. 39), which confirms Williams's inclination to Hegel and early Marx's abandonment of economic determination in favor of human energy that constitutes the material social practices. Williams's turn to "the structure of feeling" points to the balance of Marxist realization that people are subjects of the imposed economic relationships and a greater attention to the field of culture and consciousness, as well as signifies, in Hall's view, Williams's passage from being a covert Marxist to a covert structuralist. Hall's next lecture, "Structuralism," is both a tribute to and a refutation of Émile Durkheim and Claude Lévi-Strauss's structuralism understood not so much as a particular method as rather "a mode

of thoughtâ (p. 54). Like Williams, LÃ©vi-Strauss shows an evolution from a Marxist-culturalist perspective to a structuralist one; yet, unlike Williams, his structuralism is not âcovert,â and by the time LÃ©vi-Strauss writes his four volumes of *Mythologiques* (1969-81), he parts company from cultural studies as he moves âaway from the interface between the symbolic and the social and into the internal organisation of the symbolic forms themselvesâ (pp. 67-68). In accord with his decisive repudiation of LÃ©vi-Straussâs treatment of myth as âa self-sufficient system of logicâ (p. 67) outside of historical specificity, Hall dedicates two subsequent lectures, âRethinking the Base and Superstructureâ and âMarxist Structuralism,â to a constructive argument with Louis Althusserâs constant attempts to impose a structuralist stigma on such key Marxâs concepts as the metaphor of the base and superstructure, the theory of determination, the problem of the subject, and the nature of the social formation. Hall explains Althusserâs fallacy in distinguishing between the âfalse,â Hegelian, pre-structuralist Marx and the âtrue,â post-Hegelian Marx by a misreading of âdifferent levels of abstractionâ (p. 103), on which Marx operates approaching his various concepts. Despite his disagreement with Althusser, what Hall calls âAlthusserâs break with classical Marxismâ (p. 127) helped him to hone his position on ideology (Lecture 6, âIdeology and Ideological Struggleâ). Contrary to Althusser, Hall insists that ideology does not only reproduce the social relations of production but also sets limits to the self-reproduction of society by means of an unending process of âthe shifts of accentuation,â which constantly occur in ideology understood as language. This conceptualization of ideology as language with its shifts of accentuation, akin to Derridian *diffÃ©rance*, makes perfect sense when projected on Hallâs conceptualization of hegemony, understood in terms

of Gramsci, with whom Hall seems to have an unre-served propinquity (Lecture 7, âDomination and Hegemonyâ). Refuting the vulgar economic determinism, Hall posits the concept of hegemony as fluctuating and ongoing mastery of a historical situation where power with its ideological discourses is negotiated in a wide cultural field rather than imposed upon passive social subjects in a pre-existing class distribution of power. The same ânoneconomic and non-class-reductionist wayâ (p. 180) of thinking the Marxist cultural theory is characteristic of Hallâs approach to the concepts of resistance, opposition, and struggle (Lecture 8, âCulture, Resistance, and Struggleâ). Drawing on several vivid examples, including his own collection *Resistance through Rituals* (1976), Hall demonstrates how marginalized yet emerging hegemonic groups and individuals build their ideological discourses into the residual languages of dominant culture. The circuits of these fluctuating re-accentuations in ideological languages, âin which residual cultural forms are constantly appropriated, expropriated, and reworkedâ (p. 206), seem to be, according to Hall, the real subject of cultural studies.

Hallâs lectures from 1983 appear to be a peculiar event of appropriationâa fundamental attempt to retain Marx as a nondisposable basis for cultural studies by means of a meticulous, well-informed, and earnest guarding of his heritage from vulgar and reductive misreadings. The volume itself is a praiseworthy enterprise of retaining this hallmark of theoretical history and making accessible at least some of Hallâs works, otherwise scattered across less-known collections and anthologies. As the front page of the book reads, âStuart Hall: Selected Writings. A series edited by Catherine Hall and Bill Schwarz,â I personally look forward to reading the subsequentâapparently projectedâposthumous volumes of this interesting and independent thinker.

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