

#### NOTE FROM THE WEBSITE COORDINATION:

By publishing this text simultaneously with a new virtual exhibit, we intend, as we have recently done, to create a relation between the two sections. Global Encounters, including works by Mónica de Miranda and Andrea MacDonald and curated by Eva Langret, addresses the question of affiliations and processes of identification in an increasingly interconnected world, in this case Lisbon/ London, Europe, Africa, America. But these travels and exchanges are not, as Stuart Hall's article also reminds us, entirely new.

In fact, in the present article, Hall addresses the diverse temporal conjunctures – since the 'first globalisation' – that made possible the emergence of a self-designated Black art in the United Kingdom, thereby associating the experience of an African/ Black diaspora with a precise context. Evoking what he calls the "three moments" of that movement in "post-war history", the author engages with formerly developed analyses, which were also particularly influential in this artistic field. He also stresses the way in which the historicising of these artistic tendencies has to question traditional national, Eurocentric, historiographies.

But historicising may also mean that the addressed issues have become outdated. But things are more complex: recognising how much the signifier "Black" has a decreasing relevance in a(n) (art)world, whose focus is increasingly set on migration and globalisation, Hall insists on the fact that the inter-dependent – albeit unequal – globe in which we live, is still characterised by racial discriminations and the ensuing forms of social exclusion. He therefore stresses, in the follow of Edward W. Said, the need to think in a complex way the relations between art and the 'world', avoiding the instrumentalisation of artistic practices in the name of (legitimate) social questions, as well as an auto-referential formalism that ignores the contexts that also explain the way in which artistic texts are more or less globally woven.

However such questions are, notwithstanding all rhetoric on the global, very local, as Hall has also been stressing in other essays. The present text requires, hence, an added translational effort, according to very diverse experiences and expectations, regardless of the language in which it will be read.

## Modernity and Its Others: Three 'Moments' in the Post-war History of the Black Diaspora Arts

Stuart Hall

How are we to write the histories of non-western societies in relation to modernity? Modernity is, as we know, an extremely slippery signifier, and appears here with as many quote marks as I can muster: and 'the modern' in its many derivatives – early modern, late modern, post-modern, modernity, modernism - has long been effectively appropriated to the story of the west, monopolizing for western civilization the privilege of living to the full the potentialities of the present 'from the inside'. It is therefore difficult to imagine this story in any way other than as a binary polarity: modernity and its 'Others'. Only two narrative alternatives then seem possible. Either the story is told from within the perspective of modernity itself: in which



**Frank Bowling, *Dan and Them*, 1969. © Frank Bowling**

case it is difficult to prevent it becoming a triumphalist narrative in which the 'others' are permanently marginalized. Or one reorients the story within its margins, seeking by this move to reverse and disrupt the normalised order of things by bringing into visibility all that cannot be seen from, or is structurally obscured by, the usual vantage point.

This 'turning-the-world-upside-down' move has generated many of the critical histories of our time - histories from below; histories of subordinated peoples, genders, classes, races; subaltern histories; the histories of the conquered and the colonized, the exploited and the oppressed; of 'peoples without a history'. This has constituted an astonishing revolution in thought and learning, in knowledge, scholarship and research, in political narrative and popular memory. Perhaps, in more conservative time, the tide is beginning to turn against this critical current, as education and learning become more instrumentalised but where would the contemporary humanities be now without it?

Yet this reversal strategy has its limitations too. Since the inaugural moment of the colonial encounter between the west and the rest at roughly the end of the fifteenth century – the moment of the first of many globalizations – it has been increasingly difficult to encompass the relationship of modernity to its others within this binary structure. This is the achievement

of the post-colonial and post-imperial historians and critics, who have insisted on trying to narrate these different times and places together: not as the same - for they are not the same - but as connected; connected, not despite but through their differences. Since then, it has been impossible, within the narrative of modernity, to keep separate and inviolable 'in here' from 'out there'. 'There' was 'here', materially and symbolically: in the raw materials and finished goods, the resources and commodities, the revenues and profits, the products of forced labour, and free; in the imported tastes and delicacies, in the refinement of sensibilities and the marking of distinctions, which made possible, and constituted, modernity; above all, in the modern imaginary, forming the subjects and constituting the 'outside' in relation to which, alone, modern subjectivities are constituted. 'There' was 'here' - in the cups of tea that soothed a savage breast and eased a troubled heart, the silks that adorned the bodies and houses, even in the sugar and sweetmeats that rotted a million civilized teeth. 'Here' was 'there' - in the trading ports, the plantations, mines and markets, the conquering armies and naval fortifications, the systems of colonial administration, of governance and education, the churches and schoolrooms: sustained by the ceaseless tides of migration, to and fro, the formation of the 'world' as potentially one market, in short, the relations of capitalist modernity as a global enterprise and the sinews of empire, which drew these different worlds together and ineradicably implicated their pasts and futures with one another.



**Eddie Chambers, *Destruction of the National Front*, 1979. © Eddie Chambers**

Modernity and its 'Others': Inter-reconnected – but were they therefore the same? Certainly not. Much of the history of the world remains 'outside', or at least moving to a different rhythm, though not untouched by these modern forces. But the way difference was lived after the violent rupture of colonization was and had to be different from how these cultures would have developed had they done so in isolation from one another. There after, they were coupled – conscripted – to modernity. There is, of course – even now, in the latest phase of globalization - no “empty, homogenous, (western or global) time” (Walter Benjamin). There are only the condensations and ellipses, the endless discrepancies and displacements, the syncretisms, mimicries, resistances and translations, which arise when all the different temporalities, while remaining 'present' to each other and 'real' in their differential effects, are also over-written - rupturally convened – in relation to a disjunctive time, a 'combined and

uneven development'. They must mark their differences, their disjunctive rhythms, within the framework of the over-determining effects of western temporalities, systems of representation and power. This is the over-determined, sutured and supplementary character of 'modern times', the dislocated and over-centred character of 'the global', which follows from re-phrasing colonization as a world event with pertinent and continuing effects within the framework of globalization.



**Donald Rodney, *The House that Jack Built*, 1987. Mixed Media, 183x183 cm. Foto: Eddie Chambers. © Donald Rodney, courtesy of the artist.**

The Caribbean was always a paradigmatic instance of this larger pattern. The indigenous peoples having by and large failed to survive the conquest, the region was thoroughly remade by drawing elements from across the globe into plantation slavery, and constructing a system and social order, subaltern and subordinated in relation to the metropolitan 'elsewhere'; and which, in its subsequent development, was shaped in its very differences and inequalities, and its subjects formed, by modern power in its colonial form. C.L.R. James, the great Caribbean Marxist historian of the Haitian Revolution, the only successful slave

revolution of modern times, among others, has always argued that the Caribbean, as David Scott recently put it, "begins in the ordering structure of power and reason that constitutes colonial modernity" (Scott 2004: 125). This was, as Scott remarks, to be conscripted to a process at one and the same time 'civilizing' and 'demoralising'. Writing later about the formation of the black diaspora in Britain in the 1950's, James observed that "Those people who are in western civilization, who have grown up in it but yet are not completely a part (made to feel and themselves feeling that they are outside) have a unique insight into their society. ...What such persons have to say will give a new vision, a deeper and stronger insight into both western civilization and the black people in it" (James 1984: 55).

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In what follows, I try to explore these preliminary thoughts on the relation between Modernity and Its 'Others' through the example of the work in the visual arts produced by artists from the black and colonial diasporas. The purpose of the paper is to identify and roughly characterise three 'moments' in this history of the black diaspora visual arts in post-war Britain. My aim is

not only to continue the project of inserting this 'constitutive outside' into the centre of 'our island story', but – in choosing the visual arts as my point of departure – to do so from an unexpected angle. But first, some words of clarification. 'Black' is a highly contested term – a slippery signifier - whose referent, since the emergence of a sizable black diaspora in Britain the 1950's, has been under almost constant reconstruction. It is used here with a deliberate imprecision; deriving from the 70's, when the term 'black' encompassed all the minority migrant communities, without the careful discrimination of ethnic, racial, regional, national and religious distinctions which has since become de rigeur. I hope it goes without saying that it is used here, not as the marker of an ineradicable genetic racial imprint but as a signifier of *différance*: a set of differences which, being social and historical, are therefore always changing, always located, always articulated with other signifying and matricial elements: but which, though never absolute, nevertheless, continue – persistently – to register their disturbing and differentiating effects.

As to 'the arts': since I am neither an artist, art critic nor art historian, I will not attempt to discuss individual works of art or individual artists in the aesthetic and critical depth they deserve. I will, however, with the help of my collaborator Maria Amidu, who is an artist in her own right, show a selection of work as a visual counterpoint to the talk. The images are contrapuntal to, rather than illustrative of, the theme. My hope is there by to encourage those of you who don't know this work to become better acquainted with its astonishingly rich diversity. My focus in this paper, then, is on historical or cultural moments and their periodization. I discuss the artwork principally as part of a wider cultural/political formation. Works of art appear here as a constitutive element in a wider discursive field of ideas, practices, social movements and political events: though I do also want to insist that they offer us a certain privileged vantage point on that world.



Keith Piper, *A Ship Called Jesus*, 1991. © Keith Piper

The approach, then, is, broadly, 'historical'. Or rather, since I am not a historian either, I had better settle for the term, 'genealogical'. I want to begin to construct an outline 'genealogy' of the post-war Black British diaspora arts.

## References

- James, CLR. 1984, "Africans and Afro-Caribbeans: a Personal View", *Ten:8*, vol. 16.
- Scott, David. 2004. *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*, Durham: Duke University Press.

**NOTE:** The present excerpt corresponds to unpublished material of a modified version of the article "Black Diaspora Artists in Britain: Three 'Moments' in Post-War History" published in *History Workshop Journal*. To read the version published in the *History Workshop Journal* visit <http://hwj.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/61/1/1>.

We would like to thank Prof. Stuart Hall for providing us with this version he thought would suit better the aims of the website and which we have translated into Portuguese.

We also want to thank the artists for authorizing the reproduction of their work.

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Born in Jamaica, **Stuart Hall** is one of the most important theorists in Cultural Studies. A founder-editor of *New Left Review*, he helped established the Centre for Cultural Studies (1964) of which he subsequently became Director (1972-9). He was Professor of Sociology at The Open University (1979-97) and is now Emeritus Professor, and Distinguished Visiting Professor in the Humanities, Queen Mary College, London. He has been inter-alia Visiting Professor at Goldsmiths College, London, President of the British Sociological Association and a member of the Runnymede Commission on The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain. Until 2008 Stuart Hall was chair of **Iniva** (The Institute of International Visual Arts) and **Autograph ABP** (The Association of Black Photographers) and on the team of the Lottery project to build **Rivington Place**. His published texts include *Policing The Crisis*, *Resistance Through Rituals*, *Culture, Media Language*, *Questions of Cultural Identity*. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (Culture, Media and Identities Series) and *Visual Culture, the Reader* are some of the volumes he co-edited for the Open University. Some of his essays were gathered in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (which also includes an exhaustive bibliography until 1996) and *Black British Cultural Studies*. For an (almost) exhaustive list of publications and papers visit the site of the University of West Indies at Mona, Jamaica.

Some of his most important essays have been translated into Portuguese in brought together in the volume volumes *Da Diáspora: Identidades e mediações culturais*. Belo Horizonte: UFMG: Representações da UNESCO no Brasil, 2003 and *A identidade cultural na pós-modernidade*. Rio de Janeiro: DP&A, 2002.