Unaccented Beat:

Positional politics and the enigma of visibility in *The Stuart Hall Project*

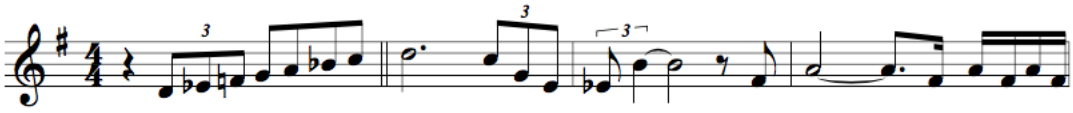
Hager Weslati

In his essay film, *The Stuart Hall Project*, Akomfrah resumes his exploration of the multi-layered screen approach to political aesthetics, offering a complex portrait of his subject's abiding concern with social inequality, tracking its manifestations in the 'conjugated cultural realities' of colonialism, post-colonialism and neo-colonialism down to its vanishing point in the 'neo-liberal problem space' of present-day Britain. Paying close attention to the use of associative editing, Vertovian color montage, and contrapuntal rhythmicity, this paper highlights the film's critical take on the coalescence of multicultural drift, the slow moving glacier of feminism, and the paradigm of the diaspora into three-layered screens through which positional politics is redefined within the framework of *Présence Africaine* and the larger trajectory of contemporary African and diasporan artists, intellectuals, and activists.

Keywords: Stuart Hall, John Akomfrah, Franz Fanon, essay film, color montage, rhythmicity, displacement, multiculturalism, sexual politics

Neither the drawing nor the painting belongs to the in-itself any more than the image does. They are the inside of the outside and the outside of the inside.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and Mind' (1993 [1960], 126)



'I Waited For You' (1953) (Fuller, Gillespie, Trumpet solo transcription, Miles Davis)

What exactly has Stuart Hall become the name of in contemporary thought? What do we think *with* when we cite fragments of his work? To paraphrase a question addressed to Jacques Derrida at the end of his life, how would Stuart Hall 'respond to his life and his name?' (Butler 2004, 32)

Resuming the *Unfinished Conversation* (2012) started in his three-screen video installation piece, John Akomfrah's essay-film *The Stuart Hall Project* (2013) is a glimpse into archival broadcast material, which introduced the *face* and *voice* of Stuart Hall to a generation of Black British young men and women as a media person and a public intellectual without prior knowledge of his academic work. This is not the case for a younger generation mostly familiar with textbook fragments from his writings on representation, ideology, ethnicity, diaspora or culture, in abstraction of the context in which these (shifting) *paradigms* have been conceptualized and arrived to.

Stuart Hall once reproached Foucault with 'saving for himself "*the political*",' while 'denying himself "*a politics*"' (Hall 1986, 49). The latter, he claimed, is situated in a 'field of force' which is yet to be 're-theorized in a radical way' (50). Ironically, there is a widely held assumption that Stuart Hall's life-long engagement with theorizing never materialized in any theory to his name. Akomfrah's film is, I believe, a corrective to such hasty judgements and a significant contribution to re-orienting critical attention from the written to the (in) audible in the work of Stuart Hall, for whom the untranslatable in the rhythmicity of paradigmatic shifts or cultural drifts points at on-going conversations between notions of self and the world. Akomfrah's approach to montage attunes the viewer (turned listener) to what Gramsci (1971, 383) describes as 'the search for the leitmotif, the rhythm of thinking' in Stuart Hall's unfinished conversation with the history of the present.

Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's 'The Intertwining—The Chiasmus' (1959), Jessica Wiskus (2013, 120) explains that the structure of rhythm, which 'binds the past and the present, subject and object,' is nothing other than the silent 'interval *between* articulated sounds [which] can be instituted only retroactively' (9). This sound that articulates silence and the silence that articulates sound correspond to the theme of the untranslatable both in *The Project* and in its subject's rhythm of thinking. Each sequence of the film counterpoints voiceover with still photographs and moving images, multiplying the intervals between them. Such an approach to montage is 'meant to affect [the viewer] not only contextually, but also on an auditory

level' (Petric 1978, 35). As such, the film's cinematic aesthetics intersects Edward Said's contrapuntal reading of the culture of imperialism with Dziga Vertov's theory of intervals; the latter in particular resonates with the rhythmic composition of sequences into measured phrases whereby 'each phrase has its rise, peak and decline' (Vertov cited in Petric 1978, 35). Akomfrah's film deepens the intervals between shots to intensify the encounter of metropolis and periphery, past and present, the private and the public. It creates what Vertov once described as 'montage battle' (cited in Petric 1978, 36).

This paper explores two related layers of rhythmicity in the film, focusing, first, on the tuning of its color-themed montage to Stuart Hall's rhythm of thinking following Blaudel's (1980) three-fold temporality: the glacial, the social, and the ephemeral. Seen through the prism of Fanon's 'Fact of Blackness' (1952), a second level of rhythmicity pertains to the film's ambivalent take on multiculturalism, feminism, and sexual politics in the neoliberal 'problem space' of modern day Britain. Known to be the last intellectual refuge where Stuart Hall redefined the grounds of his political engagement at the end of his life (Hall & Back 2009), the film depicts, albeit in a silent way, 'the paradigm of the diaspora' as alternative positional politics against 'the long march of […] a crisis which refuses to "fuse"' (Hall 2011, 705).

Blue-tinted montage: the lost sister and the Caribbean disease

Signposted with intertitles, the thirteen chapters of the film reconstruct a chronological narrative of the life and career of Stuart Hall against the background of major political and cultural events that marked post-war Britain and international politics in the second half of the twentieth century. From the outset, the viewer is ushered into the maelstrom of the *lived* whose ambivalent grammatology evokes both *the no longer is* and *a now*.

In the same way silence precedes the first note in a musical composition, the frozen portrait of Stuart Hall's sister is the haunting moment of silence that marks the beginning of the film and the structuring element on which its rhythmicity rests. Rather than suggesting an inward leap into the private self and the distant blue-tinted coldness of the past, the framed portrait functions like a reflective surface, shifting its 'bruising' photographic *punctums* onto that which remains untranslated in an on-

going conversation between 'our sense of who we are, what we feel entitled to, and what society makes available to us' [01:52]. Already from the outset, social change and social inequality are given a human (black) face and the theme tune of *Filles de Kilimanjaro*. The 'regret for the loss of a life which [one] might have lived but didn't live and nostalgia for what cannot be' [02:55] are by no means peculiar to one part of the world or to any ethnic group. Who knows, there may well be a lost sister in every family!

More details of the 'family tragedy' emerge in the second chapter of the film, (*From the Colony to the Post-Colony*) attuned to Davis's *Chasing the Bird*. Stuart Hall recalls the circumstances of his sister's descent into depression after their mother refused to let her wed a black man 'three shades darker than her.' This episode confronted him with the concrete manifestations of 'classic colonial tensions [which] were lived as part of [his] personal history' (Hall 1996c, 486).

By the time the still photograph of the lost sister appears in the film for the third time (chapter nine, *In a Silent Way*), it seems to have been detached from the private sphere of the family album to confront the viewer with a contagious sense of estrangement. 'I don't belong anywhere any longer,' says Stuart Hall, 'there is not one single thing that can now tell us who we are' [59:11]. Something in the lost sister's haunting apparitions resists signification and eludes representation; it remains too unbearable to articulate, impossible to translate, stuck between closeness and distance, intimacy with the past and estrangement from other possibilities and other lives. Ineffable desires silenced for all eternity cast their shadow over the entire film.

The theme of the blurred 'distinction between the public and the private self' (Hall 1996c, 490) is resumed in the twelfth chapter of the film (*Winds of Feminism*, 1:19:24) at the end of a montage sequence where the photograph of the lost sister fades into images of pale, undernourished, ghostly portraits of workers on the breadline. Those images evoke the outcome of Thatcher's two-front battle against the 'enemy without' and 'the enemy within'. While she, literally, parked her tanks on the former's lawn, in 'some South Atlantic speck of land' (Hall 2011, 713), she subdued the latter with her infamous shock treatment of the 'British disease'. Without directly commenting on the aforementioned historical events in this sequence, Stuart Hall's voice echoes in a slow montage of still photographic images of his children, as he reflects on the collapsed distinction between 'the objective and the subjective' in his thought. 'Once you open those gates […] you are speaking as if you are allowing

something of a psychic energy to flow into the world' [1:20:04]. The sequence concludes with a close low angle shot of a spaceship detached from its launch pad and shooting into space. The indistinguishable voices of astronauts are engulfed into the dense plume of bright orange flames spreading across the screen. Paradoxically, and instead of allowing something to be seen, the framing shots of the sister's portrait seem to be pointing at the void in the frame. The gaze is directed to the unseen, ears are tuned to the unheard and the unsaid *In a Silent Way* (anticipating Davis's theme tune intro to the ninth chapter of the film).

Three shades darker: chromatic melting of metropolis and periphery

If in *The Unfinished Conversation*, Akomfrah turns Stuart Hall's family album into strange fruits, '[hauntingly] left hanging in the branches' (Stacy 2015, 45), in *The Project* he splices this same album with moving images of black migrant workers disembarking from trains, buses, ferries and planes. His black subjects are on the move and in the make at the heart of the metropolis whose urban uniformity appears to be working with all its multi-layered disjunctive planes and parallel realities like a giant machine on land, in the seas, and in the air. Archive footage of post-war British domesticity, industrial capitalism, migrant labor, and the military industry is edited seamlessly to appear like one long panoramic shot across interconnected sites.

Framed between blue and sepia-tinted contemplative static shots in the opening and closing credit sequences, the metropolis comes alive in black and white from dusk till dawn. Although this format is a direct borrowing from the avant-garde aesthetics of city symphony films, Akomfrah reframes its characteristic generic elements contrapuntally, repositioning 'the old black mole […] in the bowels of society' (Hall & Backs, 680) at the center of the frame.

The black and white montage sequence is particularly prominent in the fourth chapter of the film where Stuart Hall's voice contextualizes the silent encounter of 'ordinary English who never had a direct experience of the colony' with their 'next-door neighbor […] the guy who will be driving [their] bus,' and the one 'at the labor exchange coming for their jobs' (*The Specter of Difference*, 24:48). This sequence concludes with images of a snowstorm spliced with footage of steel factories, and

black workers clearing the snow from railway tracks in anticipation of many winters of discontent to come!

The sixth chapter of the film (*A Public Intellectual*, 35:47) uses a similar montage of images in black and white, but unlike its counterpart in chapter four, the sequence in question is punctuated with transition footage of a tropical storm. In this chapter, which unfolds through a systematic parallel between intellectual and industrial labor, the spatial and temporal scale of the metropolis is extended from local to global perspective, from the abstract context of national economy to anti-colonial struggles and Cold War politics unfolding on its (invisible) margins. The immateriality of Stuart Hall's off-screen voice evokes recollections of his political rallies in Halifax and the deep impression that his first encounter with the North left on his memory [40:34]. All that is solid in the previous images melts in the thick air of a sequence composed of successive shots, alternating between panoramic images of billowing smoke-clouds above a northern industrial complex and close-ups of steel workers tarrying with giant furnaces. The trumpet of Miles Davis (*So What*) is carried over to the next montage sequence showing the simultaneity between two related creations of industrial capitalism during the post-war settlement: on one side, colonial struggles and national movements abroad, and on the other, a disenfranchised industrial labor force in the metropolis. Once again, the voice of Stuart Hall brings together these two worlds, contesting the ethnocentric and 'peculiarly British' distinction between liberty and equality. People mobilized in support of nationalism because, he says, 'what they were facing were in fact inequalities […]. Therefore, when they said we want to be free, what they meant was we want to be free not to be unequal' [43:40].

A similar sequence of montage in black and white (chapter six), spliced with archive footage from the Cuban revolution and its aftermath, cuts back to the black and white transition footage of a tropical storm, juxtaposed with the decelerated tempo of an aerial shot of British terrace houses, panning down towards street-level shots of urban residential neighborhoods. The camera movement suddenly cuts to images of passersby staring at pavements painted with the slogan 'England my England.' The rapid montage of these images ends with a timid, almost prurient shot showing a large crowd of white men and women through a wide-angle lens, dancing demurely to barely inaudible music. The voice of Stuart Hall intervenes on two occasions in this sequence: towards the end to announce the rise of English provincial

culture [46:12], and before that to reflect on the inadequacy of politics grounded on universalizing metaphors to mobilize people. 'Self-reflexive politics,' he says, will have to remain vigilant, 'constantly inspecting the grounds of its own commitments' [45:29].

In summary, the black and white sequences of the film capture the muffled and repressed history of British imperialism, and can be read as 'Freudian chromatic *melting* [which] indexes the *non-temporality* of the unconscious' (Stonebridge 2007, 60, *emphasis added*). Underscoring the shared *material* conditions of a disenfranchised workforce across the racial and ethnic divide, these sequences can also be read as portraits of colonial subjectivity both inside and outside the metropolis. Although the question of race is not presented as the central paradigm of the above-mentioned examples of montage in black and white, the 'public intellectual' (chapter six) has already identified the 'specter of difference' (chapter four) in the same 'time-zone marked by the march of capital simultaneously across the globe and through the Maginot Lines of our subjectivites' (Hall 1996a, 227). Akomfrah composes the black and white phrases of his city symphony with intervals punctuated by the sound of Miles Davis and the voice of Stuart Hall to synchronize unrelated lives, events, histories, spaces, and worlds while anticipating the gathering crisis on the horizon of Britain's post-war settlement.

From the fact of blackness to the facts of Britishness

Images of trains speeding in and out of the frame are prominent in the black and white sequences discussed in the previous section. It was on a train similar to the ones portrayed in the film that Franz Fanon entered the maelstrom of the disjuncture through the utterance of a *little* b*oy*: 'look, a Negro […] Mama!' (Fanon 1986, 84) Fanon's random encounter with his racialized (and colonized) being, an external stimulus experienced on a cold 'white winter day' (86) at the heart of the metropolis, triggers a long train of thoughts whose rhythmic articulations are recorded in 'The Fact of Blackness'.

The film makes a direct reference to the 'little boy' scene in the beginning of the third chapter (*Freedom Road* 20:06) using one of Stuart Hall's early 90s TV educational broadcasts from Martinique. This very short excerpt appears in the middle

of a sequence that begins with footage of a steam train speeding across a rural landscape and concludes with Stuart Hall recalling his coming to Oxford in the early 1950s. The chapter's theme tune, *Miles Ahead* (Davis, 1954), takes the viewer on a long journey, which will end seven chapters later, where Stuart Hall articulates his reasons for the delayed focus on the question of race in his work. 'It was not until the movement of decolonization and civil rights in the States,' he says, 'that I recognized that whatever is the actual color of my skin, socially, historically, culturally, politically, I made the identification with being black' (*The Coming of the Hyphen*, 1:02:18). The viewer is left to mull over this declaration, drowned in the silence of fast cuts between footage of a seabird covered in oil, flailing in the surf, and the tilted shot of a sinking ship battered by the waves.

Central to Akomfrah's critical take on positional politics, the identification with being black is introduced in the film narrative as neither gifted nor inherited, neither a conceded fact nor one drifted into. It is rather a place that one needs to learn to occupy. Rhythmicity, defined as such, pertains to the work of 'waiting', the labor of compiling one's own history out of the debris saved 'from the civilizing deluge' (Fanon, 91). Akomfrah's film remains very close to the syncopated rhythm of Fanon's thoughts in the 'Fact of Blackness', bringing them to bear on his portrait of Stuart Hall in a poignant way. There are several examples in the film that can be cited to substantiate this claim, but I can only point out the most pertinent ones to give the reader a sense of the relevance of Fanon to Akomfrah's cinematic coding and use of rhythmic montage.

Transition scenes, which alternate snowstorms in the metropolis and tropical storms in the periphery, are ripples of that same sky 'tear[ing] at its navel' (Fanon, 86) in the immediate aftermath of Fanon's encounter with 'the little boy'. A montage sequence in the opening chapter of the film evokes Fanon's reflection on the exceptional black man. That 'something out of the ordinary [which] still clung to such cases' (Fanon, 88) is shown in the archive footage of numerous white male media presenters introducing Stuart Hall at the start of the film as 'a highly intelligent splendid fellow' [04:26 and 05:100], and as 'the foremost intellectual of the left in Britain' [06:01]. Fanon's 'white song' (86) can be heard in two disturbing montage sequences in the film. In chapter four, an all-white community choir breaks into hymn singing as the scene cuts between a montage sequence of jet planes and footage of a black man wandering in the snow-covered deserted streets of the metropolis. The

white choir makes a second appearance towards the end of the film, interspersed with footage of elderly men roaming a disused Welsh slate quarry.

The rhythmic tempo of 'The Fact of Blackness' can be inferred from sequences where Stuart Hall intervenes to question 'white rationality' and counter unreason with reason. 'It is tradition, it is that long historical past, and it is that blood relation between Pascal and Descartes that is invoked when the [black man] is told, "there is no possibility of your finding a place in society"' (Fanon, 92). These resonances can be heard in Stuart Hall's reflections on his Oxford education throughout the film, and culminate in the bookshop sequence in chapter thirteen. This intriguing sequence opens up with a close shot gliding on the covers of de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Queen of Navarre's *Heptameron*, and Goncourt's *Woman of Paris*. The scene rapidly cuts between footage of white men inspecting the books on display, and close ups of groping hands leafing through other books on Freud, McLuhan, and Descartes. The viewer's speculations about this eroticized montage of images is soon interrupted with the voiceover of Stuart Hall reflecting on the intellectual routes and pathways that have gone into the making of the public intellectual he became [01: 25:46]. Soon after, the scene changes abruptly from the aforementioned black and white images to color footage of a black farmer looking helplessly at burning fields of sugar canes, juxtaposed with a fragment from Stuart Hall's TV program (in the *Dominican Republic*, 1991) where he revisited the history of sugar on its journey to the civilized tea-cups of Englishness.

Surveying 'contrasting visions of Africa' in the '*Présence Africaine* project,' Benetta Jules-Rosette (1992, 22) identifies the ambivalent poetics of 'burning fields' as a shifter from the imagery of '*Afrique nature*' to an '*Afrique dé-naturée*' at a point when the intellectuals and artists affiliated with the movement were 'emerging from idyllic dreams […] into the nightmares of modernity' (Jules-Rosette 1992, 25). In Akomfrah's film, such resonances with the political aesthetics of *Présence Africaine* are brought to bear on the emergence of Britishness from the idyllic dreams of industry and empire into the repressed nightmares of the post-war settlement. The associative editing in the bookshop sequence draws a parallel between the shared roots/routes of commodities and ideas, situating them both, contrapuntally, in intersecting fields of power, knowledge, and regimes of truth. The sequence concludes with the fiery oration of Stuart Hall, standing on stage, with microphone in hand, surrounded by young people from different ethnic backgrounds. 'We are here to

stay, we are at the center of the creative life of the society […], we are the people of the future, and our project needs organization and funding.' The fragment taken from this speech is a variation on the words of Malcolm X as heard in a previous chapter [*The Coming of the Hyphen*]. To Malcolm X's 'we have been begging' [1:01: 48], Stuart Hall's words respond: 'go out and get it, because it's ours' [1:27:27]. Such an inspiring rhetoric reminiscent of what Jules-Rosette describes as the '*Afrique en combat*' imagery in the literature of *Présence Africaine*, does, however, end on a deflationary note. Once again, Fanon's text can shed some light on the rhythmic coding of this seemingly pessimistic note in Akomfrah's cinematic aesthetics.

In the concluding lines of 'The Fact of Blackness', Fanon is 'without responsibility, straddling Nothingness and Infinity' (Fanon, 108) before he ultimately bursts into tears. Similarly, Akomfrah's film ends with the skyline of London bursting into a time-lapse shot, melting the motion-blurred city lights and the darkened clock tower of Westminster into the blazing bright orange disk of the sun. The film's alternation of defiance and deflation, accelerated optimism and decelerated pessimism, depicts the present as 'an open horizon, [which remains] fundamentally unresolved' (Hall 2007, 279). Seen from that specific angle, the film can be read as a spin on the 'lived experience of the black man' (as the original title of Fanon's text suggests), insofar as it captures the complexity of the multicultural experience of *the facts of Britishness*. This specific moment in the film seems to evoke the fourth thematic imagery of '*Afrique anti-thétique*' in the literature and art of the *présence Africaine* project as studied by Jules-Rosette. This imagery brought the intellectuals of the movement in conversation with Jean-Paul Sartre's *Orphee Noir* (1948). Citing Sartre's dialectical formula that 'negritude exists in order to be destroyed,' Jules-Rosette recalls that when Fanon read Sartre's description of 'Africa as a final philosophical solution,' he 'felt that [he] had been robbed of [his] last chance' (Jules-Rosette 1992, 27-8). Is British multiculturalism a realization of Sartre's synthesis? Is it 'the realization of the human element in a society without races?' (Sartre cited in Jules-Rosette 1992, 27)

There is, however, an entirely different dimension to the filmmaker and his subject's conversation with the *Présence Africaine* project via Fanon's text. In the abovementioned third chapter of the film, Stuart Hall retells the traumatic scene from 'Fact of Blackness' with a minor Freudian slip, unwittingly replacing the 'little boy' in the original text with a 'little girl'. I propose to look closely at the way this

revealing verbal blunder takes on a life of its own in several articulations of the film, shifting the viewer's attention from *Présence Africaine* to *présence feminine*.

Colonial desire and the enigma of visibility

Fanon's black man is shielded from the rending experience of 'his being through others' as long as he remains 'among his own' (Fanon, 82). There is nothing really 'dramatic' about 'minor internal conflicts'. The 'little gulf' (82) between different shades of black can find a satisfactory resolution through 'intellectual understanding' (83). But this is not the case for Stuart Hall who 'could not rest on what [he] was given' since he 'was too black in [his] family, the outsider from the time [he] was born' [18:00].

Between the image of the humiliated father who had to 'beg [his] way into acceptance by the American or English expatriate business community,' and the 'old plantation world, with its roots in slavery, but which [the] mother spoke of as a 'golden age' (Hall 1996c, 487), Stuart Hall experienced the (missed) encounter with the *real* of blackness at the heart of Kingston, even before his mother 'delivered him' to Oxford in the comical English dress in which he was expected to 'pass' [19:38].

To re-enact the utterance of the 'little body' in Fanon's text, Akomfrah casts Stuart Hall's 'little girl' in domestic settings (in chapters seven and nine), and in the public sphere of British politics (in chapters eleven and thirteen). Through associative editing, he brings the tension between seeing and saying to bear on the silent intervals of the real of blackness. As Alessandra Raengo explains in her reading of Glenn Ligon's self-portrait, the artist's re-enactment of the primal scene of 'Facts of Blackness' contests the constitution of the black body 'as immediately transparent and directly accessible […]. It situate[s] the color line elsewhere […] [to] open up a place of a-visuality' (Raengo 2013, 10).

The first re-enactment of the Fanon scene in *The Project* appears in the middle of chapter seven, in a sequence framed with excerpts from one of Stuart Hall's educational TV broadcast on Northern British working class domesticity spliced with footage of industrial labor. Out of the billowing smoke-clouds of steel plants, emerges a bride in a white dress. 'I met Catherine,' Stuart Hall recalls, 'things were called out to us […] it was a pretty traumatic experience' [47:50]. In the next sequence, the

personal tone of his voice changes into the 'received pronunciation' of a radio broadcaster speaking of the psychology of the 'colored child' [48:54]. 'Every child, whether white or colored,' the voice says 'wants to belong to the world. But the world must seem a completely different place when the price of belonging to it is that you want to change the color of your skin or the shape of your features and your face' [50:50]. The rest of the sequence shows that the world outside belongs to rioting mods and rockers in the sepia-tinted seaside towns of England.

Still situated in the private sphere of autobiography, the film's most dramatic re-enactment of Fanon's 'lived experience' is recounted in chapter nine (*New Times*, 57:28) spliced with a slow montage of individual and group photographs of Catherine, Stuart Hall and friends on vacation, sunbathing on a ship deck. The portrait of the mother flickers ominously through this peaceful dreamy atmosphere while Davis's *In a Silent Way* (1968) plays in the background to archive footage of a cruise ship sailing away into the middle distance of the frame. 'I went home once,' Stuart Hall recounts with a mixture of amusement and bitterness, 'and my mother said to me, I hope they don't think you are one of those immigrants, and I thought to myself, that is exactly what I am.' The mother laments the suffering of 'England, beautiful England, full of those black people,' and wishes them all to be rounded up and 'thrown off the edge of a pier.' Once again, Stuart Hall concedes, as if he were in doubt the first time around, 'she is speaking about me!' [57:30]. Later in the same chapter, a sequence opens up with an extreme close shot of a (white) woman giving birth in an almost surreal very stiff-upper lipped repressed pain, then cuts between photographs of Stuart Hall and his children, an aerial shot of a sepia-tinted British seaside town, and photographs of the march on Edmund Pettus Bridge (Selma, Albama USA). The image montage sequence concludes dramatically with a close up on Malcolm X, lying motionless on stage immediately after his assassination, his head resembles the blood-covered head of the new-born pulled out from the womb of the (white) woman shown earlier in the sequence. Does this associative editing from the words and photographs of Hall's mother to the corpse of Malcolm X hint at the stillbirth of black consciousness?

Still reeling back from the unsettling montage of birth and death in the abovementioned sequence, the viewer is once again confronted with Stuart Hall's 'little girl' in the film's eleventh chapter. Foregrounded with the distorted worldview and towering figure of Enoch Powell, in this chapter, Stuart Hall evokes 'one of the striking moments of the 60s [when] the British *looked in the faces* of black and brown

people… and dared to say, well I don't really know where you've come from, or why you've come here, or what we have to do with your future' (*The coming of the Hyphen*, 01:08:48). The chapter ends on a defiant note: 'people *are saying* we are not going to stay on the terms of becoming just like you. Black people discovered the complex things that made them black can never be traded away' [01: 11:55]. This statement marks a significant shift in the film. In contrast with his silent conversation with his mother ('she is talking about me!'), Stuart Hall is now speaking directly, loud and clear, to his 'little girl'. The way out of 'look mama…' is neither a Fanonian torturous psychological inner monologue nor a Sartrian synthesis, but rather a political articulation and a political position from which one speaks back (as opposed to a position where one is spoken about), a positional politics of seeing (as opposed to the positional politics of the being-seen).

In the last chapter of the film (*The Neoliberal Problem Space*), Stuart Hall appears in an excerpt from a TV news program, listening impatiently to a white woman, throwing her hands in the air, and contesting the government's policy to allow war refugees into Britain: 'tell me why they have all come to this country?' she protests. Stuart Hall interrupts the panelist with a pronounced expression of revulsion on his face: 'not long ago, you were bombing Kosovo, this is the result of that situation […] how can you describe people by simply looking in their faces as bogus?' [1:30:47].

Glacial temporality and the disorganized in-between

Both in the New Left Club experience and in his work at the CCCS, Stuart Hall sought to 'occupy a space without organizing it, without imposing on people a choice of institutional loyalty' (Hall 1996c, 497). Decades later, he will come to realize that this political space was neither vacant nor eternally reserved for a politics of class. Akomfra's critical take on these developments brings to the fore the coexistence of other cultural and political forces and 'other voices' in that same disorganized in-between. This moment is situated in the 'cultural explosion' [30:48] of the mid-50s. It is depicted in black and white footage of a young audience at a Rock concert, dancing hysterically to '*get out in the Kitchen and rattle those pots and pans*' [30:32]. This sequence foreshadows the 'winds of feminism' seven chapters later and makes an

interesting associative montage with rioting bikers and rockers in one scene, and the silent marches of black protestors after the murder of Kelso Cochrane in the next one. The film multiplies such ambivalent instances of associative montage, leaving the viewer uncertain about the emancipatory potential of positional politics emerging from or relegated to the in-between.

In his published (academic) interviews, Stuart Hall recalls the 'unpredictable' rise of academic feminism and sexual politics as a major moment of rupture in his intellectual biography. 'As classical "new men", when feminism did actually emerge autonomously,' he says 'we were taken by surprise by the very thing we had tried—patriarchally—to initiate (Hall 1996c, 501). The collapsed boundaries between the private and the public, the objective and subjective, which Stuart Hall experienced in Jamaica within his family, re-appear in his encounter with 'the slow moving glacier of feminism and sexual politics' [1:29:06]. Does *The Project* suggest some affinities between tensions and bruises caused by imperial-colonial reality and the ones caused by the rise of academic feminism? Already the title of the film's twelfth chapter, a pun on Harold McMillian's 1960 speech 'Winds of Change', hints at the reluctant recognition ('whether we like it or not') of a 'political fact'. Symbolically and politically, McMillan's speech announced the end of empire 'on the golden wedding of the Union'. The pull towards independence, McMillan acknowledges, is 'happening everywhere'. All this resonates with the way Stuart Hall describes the end of his time at the CCCS, 'I couldn't fight my feminist students. […] I was checkmated by feminists; I couldn't come to terms with it, in the Centre's work. It wasn't a personal thing […] it was a structural thing. I couldn't any longer do any useful work, from that position. It was time to go' (Hall 1996c, 502). This same episode is evoked in the film's twelfth chapter using excerpts where Stuart Hall repeats some key words and phrases heard earlier in the film in his reminiscences about his mother and his sister's tragedy. The imperative to 'shut up' and the drive to 'get out' evoke familiar experiences lived in colonial Jamaica before they caught up with him in Birmingham.

Images of patriarchal figures haunt the domestic and academic struggles and defeats recounted in the twelfth chapter of the film. A profile view close-up of Raymond Williams driving in a small white car, returning to a deserted railway station in the Welsh countryside bears a disturbing resemblance to another sequence, *in the same chapter*, showing a profile view close-up of Khomeini gazing down from the small window of a plane on masses of men, lining up the streets of Tehran.

Another sequence cuts from Stuart Hall's words evoking 'something of a psychic energy flowing into the world', to still photographs of his son, to a spaceship detached from its launching pad, to archive footage of the miners' standoff with Thatcher. This fast montage concludes with a black and white footage of a woman rushing through a back alley and then disappearing into a striptease club. The chapter ends with an extreme profile view close up of the same woman transformed into a *fire-eater*. What is to be made of the associative montage of Williams with Khomeini, or the launching of a spaceship with the female fire-eater?

In a blue-tinted sequence of the film, in the very last chapter, Stuart Hall is speaking directly to the camera, sitting in what looks like a space capsule as he reflects on the 'slow moving glacier of feminism and sexual politics.' The sequence is spliced with black and white footage of men and women, indistinguishable from one another, modelling boots and leather jackets, pausing between two massive Roman columns and on the giant steps of this imposing monument. Is this a fascist inspired fashion photoshoot? The montage sequence cuts back to the space capsule setting where Stuart Hall is bulkily sat in the right hand corner of the frame like Nam June Paik's TV Buddha. The on-screen voice is slowing down, acknowledging the potential and promise of sexual politics even though the associative editing of the sequence suggests otherwise. Flakes appear across the screen, as the speaking body of Stuart Hall is slowly detached from the frame. It drifts away and fades into black screen.

Sepia-tinted fusional rupture

As outlined in the previous sections, when blue-tinted images are read together in juxtaposition with their grey-scaled counterpart, the latter are re-signified to ground the question of inequality in class politics, anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism. By contrast, sepia-tinted images are deployed essentially as self-contained sequences, an emerging field of forces that is yet to be seen, heard and understood relationally. In that sense, and rather than framing the color-themed montage of images they precede, follow or burst out from; sepia-themed sequences function as de-framing and un-framing intervals in the film.

The first self-contained sequence of sepia-tinted images appears, in the film, for the first time in chapter eight (*Minimal Multicultural Selves*), engulfing black and white footage into a British rural landscape. In this sequence, Stuart Hall draws a self-portrait of vacancy, which appears to be the counterpart of his lost sister in the blue-tinted frames. This widely known theme from Stuart Hall's (auto) biography is repeatedly re-told in the present tense: 'you feel at home in both countries, you know a great deal about them both from the inside, you find it difficult to say We or Us about either of them: this is the multicultural experience' [51: 42]. Elsewhere, in published interviews, Stuart Hall links the condition portrayed in this sequence of the film with the diasporic condition rather than with his 'minimal multicultural self.' In such instances, the tensed structure of the narrative shifts from present to past. In the diasporic experience, one is 'far away enough to experience the sense of exile and loss, close enough to understand the enigma of an always-postponed 'arrival' (Hall 1996c, 492). Sepia-themed montage used in the beginning of the film's chapters captures this experience of the 'familiar stranger,' the one who 'cannot go home' in whichever direction he/ or she travels.

Such autonomous sepia-tinted sequences are, however, used differently when placed *in the middle* of a chapter rather than in its beginning. This is the case in chapter ten's fast montage of the late sixties club scene (*The Coming of the Hyphen*). In this instance, the 'minimalism' of the familiar-stranger's 'multicultural self' is distinguished from and contrasted with the opacity of post-modern selves. The sequence shows a space 'outside of politics' where one can 'tune in, turn on, or drop out' (Hall 1968, 7- 8). Something monstrous, not to say evil, in this subterranean confluence of forces and political polarizations begins to take shape, and is nowhere in the film more haunting and confusing than in the back-shot of a late 60s young woman, slowly turning her head towards something outside the frame with terrifying vacant eyes. This shot marks the strangest and most random rapid montage of the counter-culture in sepia tones to frame Stuart Hall's reading into the hostility and drug-induced cultural experiences of those years 'straws in the wind of trouble to come' (Hall 2001, 712). In his writing, Stuart Hall recognizes the difficulty of disentangling the post-colonial condition from the diasporic experience or the metaphor of postmodernity. 'In a curious way,' he says 'postcoloniality prepared one to live in a "postmodern" or diasporic relationship to identity. Paradigmatically, it's a diasporic experience' (Hall 1996c, 492). Conversely, Akomfrah paints the distinction

that Stuart Hall makes between the diasporic, the postcolonial and the postmodern with the same sickly and fiery brownish sepia tones he uses to portray multiculturalism.

In addition to its fusional rupture of multiculturalism, the diasporic and the post-modern, sepia-tinted sequences also appear in association with references to feminism and neoliberalism. In the middle of chapter twelve (*The Winds of Feminism*), a montage sequence cuts abruptly to a static high-angle shot of the skyline of modern day London. In the next shot, the bright and sunny cityscape is recolored with sepia-toned hues, melting the contours of vertical corporate buildings horizontally into the cranes dangling above half-finished constructions, and vertically into old heritage buildings below. The sequence cuts to the same static view of the cityscape, but this time shot from the other side of the river. The first plane of the reverse shot rests on the edge of redbrick terraces and naked unkempt tree branches. Further off, in the background, the corporate city's construction sites seem to be closing in on the viewer, looming menacingly into the foggy distance. The slowed tempo of Stuart Hall's voice continues against this background, reflecting back on yet another space of intimate exteriority, which he tried in vain 'to learn to occupy'. 'Feminism,' he says, 'taught me the difference between a conviction in the head and a change in how you live. […] It was a very difficult moment both intellectually in the center, and domestically at home' [1:14:36]. These words are carried over from the shot and reverse shot of London's cityscape through a high angle panning shot of protestors in Chile, spliced with black and white footage of yet another failed popular uprising, and then cuts to level-angle tracking shots of women and children fleeing some danger and walking away in the pouring rain past tropical farm lands. As the image cuts to a low angle shot of jet planes ripping off the sky, the viewer's disorientation is deepened with Stuart Hall's concluding statement: 'we don't know the connection between these conditions' [1:16:50].

The associative editing of feminism, neoliberal capitalism, armed conflict, and natural disasters appears once again in the final chapter, but this time not in the beginning or the middle but at the *end* of a sequence, punctuated with the reverse shot of London's cityscape as in chapter twelve. In this sequence, a framed photograph of Stuart Hall used in the blue-tinted sequence at the start of the film, is placed against a large window and re-colored with a sepia tone. Speaking off screen, he continues his reflection from the previous chapter on his inability to predict the rise of sexual

politics, and the mistake he made in underestimating its powerful impact on contemporary thought. Stuart Hall is now approaching the evening of life and the enhanced golden tones of the film evoke the end of an era. A fragment from one of his late 90s radio interviews is used to mark the end of *The Project*. 'There is a common sense that Britain is being accepted as a multicultural society, I would describe this as a multicultural drift, we just found ourselves in the situation where we are surrounded by people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds […] we haven't really confronted the problems that this is posing' [1:29:54].

Contemporaneity and the paradigm of the diaspora

In her comment on *The Unfinished Conversation*, Jackie Stacey (2015) read into Akomfrah's 'fleeting poetic associations' (43) and 'exhilarating cacophony of sounds and images' (46), an aesthetic performance of 'what Cultural Studies has sought to achieve intellectually and politically' (48). Unwittingly, she commits Akomfrah's cinematic practice to the double reduction of aestheticism and intellectualism. If the syncopated rhythm of *The Unfinished Conversation* may have been lost in translation, diluted in an aesthetic gesture, and framed with the 'field imaginary' of cultural studies, *The Project* is perhaps much more resilient against such aesthetic or disciplinary reductions.

Stuart Hall believed that 'the problem of theory' must not be engaged in separation from the 'problem of politics and strategy' (Hall 1996b, 24). Similarly, Akomfrah's film remains faithful to the politics of the essay film, which is by definition, subversively un-cinematic insofar as it films and un-films at the same time, and as such, it opens up a space beyond the aesthetic or intellectualist reduction. This other space resembles the structure of the event. It can be seen and *heard* retroactively in the film's interruptions, pauses and silences. Snippets are taken from the beginning, middle or end of radio and television broadcasts. Some lines are used as a refrain, repeated in different sequences of the film. But there are also suspensions, interrupted lines of thought, and discontinued threads. The film's transition from one chapter to the next is marked with red titles written across a black screen; it is as if the lights are constantly switched on and off. Is this a silent film, or a theatrical rearrangement of the stage, resetting 'the furniture [of the viewer's] mind' (Hall & Back 2009, 676)?

The film is in the final analysis an attempt to reframe narratives of social inequality and social change by 'eventalising them' as 'that intra-phenomenality which is *kept away* from our view' (Zarader 2005, 32). The question remains as to whether the work of 'revealing' eventicity concealed in phenomena is the duty of the philosopher or the artist. If, following Godard, the filmmaker as essayist and critic is she who approaches cinema as 'form that thinks and thought that forms' (Godard 1997 cited in Rascaroli 2008, 25), *The Stuart Hall Project* captures its subject's fundamental definition of conjunctural analysis as thought that theorizes and theory that thinks.

In another respect, and in addition to its deployment of the political aesthetics of the essay-film genre, Akonfrah's multi-layered visibility *Project* can also be interpreted as a notable intervention in the unfinished project of *Présence Africaine*. His cinematic coding of Stuart Hall's rhythm of thought resonates with the literary and political concerns of the movement as they took shape between the launch of the journal it was named after in 1947 until its spectacular showdown on the occasion of the first International Congress of Black Writers and Artists at the Sorbonne a decade later. Establishing this intellectual genealogy, albeit in a schematic way, must, nevertheless, recognize not only the striking similarities and intersections between the *project* of *Présence Africaine* and Akomfrah's *Project* but also the departures and divergences of the latter from the former. The affirmation and/or the counteracting of 'the cultural imaginary of Africa' as a trope of self-affirmation, which is, nevertheless, always already in conversation with the (European) other, is central to the ideological and aesthetic premises of the movement. In Bennetta Jules-Rosette's words (1992, 19) 'the *Présence Africaine* project makes sense in terms of the international absence of Africa as a source of value in European thought.' But unlike the congregation of sub-Saharan African, African American, and West Indian intellectuals, writers and artists that converged towards the project of *Présence Africaine* in 1956, Stuart Hall, who at the time had just been 'delivered' to Oxford University by his mother, a loyal subject of the symbolic ruler of the British Empire, was engaged in an entirely different project. If the intellectuals and writers affiliated with the Parisian *Présence Africaine* were challenging the cultural hegemony of 'Latin culture', Stuart Hall was right in the thick of it, immersing himself in the study of its literary imperial canon. These biographical references are prominent in Akomfrah's film, which gives ample space to its subject's almost apologetic

recollections about the life-changing opportunity of being the lucky recipient of a prestigious scholarship to study at Oxford University.

Stuart Hall confessed to his late encounter with the paradigm of the diaspora as a primordial groundless-grounding continuously 'rediasporising itself.' A curious trajectory extends from his early active engagement with the all-white and male-centered project of the New Left Review to the third generation black British 'photographers, film-makers [and] people in the theatre' (Hall 1996c, 503). Was the 'diaspora' Stuart Hall's last refuge from multicultural drift and the 'feminization of the social' (Hall 1996a, 234)?

The 'diasporic intellectual' is undoubtedly a suitable subject of the essay film's disjunctural take on thought and form. It is, nevertheless, worth remembering that Stuart Hall was a latecomer to the notion of diaspora. In the heyday of its theoretical hype, he expressed cautiousness and ethical reservations about its muddled connotations (Hall 1996c, 492), and on one occasion, he even described '*diaspora-ization*' as 'an ugly word' (Hall 1996d, 448). However, and at a pivotal moment in his thought, which marked the beginnings of his self-reflexive project to synthesize and systematize his intellectual *routes* and *roots*, Stuart Hall came to see the paradigm shifts of the *history of the present*, albeit retroactively, through the prism of the diasporic condition. It is, nevertheless, important to retain the radical distinction between the *metaphor* of the diaspora and the *paradigm of the diaspora*. While the former transfers determinacy from one closed form of determination to another, the latter 'thinks determinacy without a closed form of determination' (Hall 2007, 280). The paradigm, by definition, marks a shift in perspective, and is itself not fixed once and for all but always shifting.

The work of the diasporic intellectual begins with identifying, 'connections in [his] work, the patterns behind the patterns' (Hall 2007, 270), but the conclusion of this self-searching will also have to remain faithful to an act of self-erasure. Stuart Hall's confessing to his inability to 'become identical with [him]self' (Hall 2007, 270) resonates with Agamben's observation (following Nietzsche), that 'those who are truly contemporary, who truly belong to their time, are those who neither perfectly coincide with it nor adjust themselves to its demands' (Agamben 2009, 40).

'What is [then] this strange object called *The Thought of Stuart Hall*?' (Hall & Back 2009, 663) Akomfrah's film captures the unaccented beat, the counterpoints and intervals of its subject's engagement with the history of the present. Following

Agamben, it is possible to say that Stuart Hall is contemporary because he 'dipped his pen in the obscurity of the present' (Agamben, 44) and 'perceived the darkness of his time' (45) to see 'this light that strives to reach us but cannot' (46). Stuart Hall's Gramscian *pessoptimism* can be seen in this idea of contemporaneity as 'distancing and nearness' (50). This is perhaps the project that his name and his life sought to respond to.

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