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'The kaleidoscopic conditions' of John Akomfrah's Stuart Hall

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ABSTRACT

The Unfinished Conversation – and the extended cinema release, *The Stuart Hall Project* – is, on the one hand, a continuation of Akomfrah's engagement with iconic black public figures (*Days of Hope* and *The March on Martin Luther King*; *The Wonderful World of Louis Armstrong*; *Mariah Carey: The Billion Dollar Babe*; *Urban Soul: The Making of Modern R&B*). Unlike Akomfrah's conceptual approach in those films though, the Stuart Hall films are the dialectical sum of two major thinkers' ideas. Focusing on Hall's life and work, the films incorporate what Hall termed 'the kaleidoscopic conditions of blackness' into their aesthetic design. This article engages closely with the extended cinema release to explore Akomfrah's approach to Hall's mode of analysis, analysing the films' decentering of wider social narratives, which, I argue, are seamlessly interwoven into both the design of Akomfrah's montage and the analytic methods of Hall's work in the field of Cultural Studies. Through close analysis of sequences in *The Stuart Hall Project*, I demonstrate how Akomfrah's refined approach to archival montage hails Hall's writings on identity, realising new analytic possibilities in the coming together of two major postcolonial intellectuals.

KEYWORDS

postcolonial; race;
documentary; nation;
biography

Article

In 2012, John Akomfrah premiered *The Unfinished Conversation* (2012) – a new work on cultural theorist, Stuart Hall. Screened initially at Toronto International Film Festival and in the same month as a three-channel installation at both Liverpool Biennial and Taipei Biennial, *The Unfinished Conversation* applies Hall's ideas to an elegiac biographical montage of personal and social events during his lifetime.¹ Hall died in February 2014, just months after the release of the extended cinematic version of the film, titled *The Stuart Hall Project* (2013). While the film was initially intended to pay homage to a life's work of exceptional thinking, the sombre tone, melancholy recollections, Super-8 home videos and family photos evoke a mournful celebration of a life lost in ways similar to previous Akomfrah films. *The Unfinished Conversation* pieces together fragments of Hall's television appearances (on news programmes and as part of BBC's Open University programming)² with personal material, as well as other archival material from related global political events throughout the course of his youth and arrival in

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England. *The Unfinished Conversation* ends with Hall embracing blackness as a cultural identity, during the socially tumultuous late 1960s. *The Stuart Hall Project* builds on this, taking the viewer up to the early 2000s and including original conversations with Hall.

The film uses Hall's memories to speak to, for and about the experiences of the post-colonial diaspora of the former British empire, portraying Hall's intellectualism in ways similar to Edward Said's definition, associating the intellectual with 'dissent against the status quo . . . on behalf of under-represented and disadvantaged groups' (Said 1996, xvii). Others have highlighted tensions between Hall's status as a public intellectual and as an academic (Ang 2016; Sender and Decherney 2016; Pimlott 2014); Hall himself explicitly prioritised intellectual labour as public good over and above academic status and achievement (Hall 1992). Such a tension would appear to exist between Hall's recognition of his own positionality as an intellectual and the subject on whose behalf he routinely spoke. He has claimed that his biography precisely matches the post-war migration to Britain of 'the Windrush generation', distinguishing between this diasporic community and the black North American identities theorised in the emergent American Cultural Studies of the 1980s and 90s. In a 1998 interview with Julie Drew, Hall explains that while his 'identity was formed in relation to the formation of a community itself he 'was deeply and profoundly . . . privileged in relation to the majority experience of blacks' (Drew 1998, 180). Nevertheless, throughout Hall's theoretical and public engagements, the theorisation of black identity within a postcolonial diasporic framework is a foremost concern. *The Stuart Hall Project* manages to delineate this while also, implicitly, making clear overlaps between Hall's and Akomfrah's status as postcolonial intellectual. Bringing together Hall and Akomfrah's thought and practice, this article argues that *The Stuart Hall Project's* reconstruction of testimony from various sources tells Hall's story as one of multiple conjunctural narratives. In so doing, Hall's life story becomes emblematic of what Hall (with curator, David A. Bailey) termed 'the kaleidoscopic conditions of blackness' (Bailey and Hall 1992, 21). As I shall demonstrate, Akomfrah uses montage techniques to connect apparently disconnected things, events, times and space into a kaleidoscopic image that mirrors Hall's theorisation of the black diasporic subject. I aim to highlight through analysis of a few sequences how the evocation of similarity and difference, change and repetition, formalises these kaleidoscopic conditions.

Akomfrah's Stuart Hall

Conveyed through, and because of, an ongoing conversation between the two figures, Akomfrah's Hall is the product of Hall's theories, Akomfrah's films, Hall's insights on those films, Akomfrah's consciousness and incorporation of those insights. Akomfrah's montage practice operates as a 'critical interrogation of the archive' (Power 2011, 62), receptive to the aesthetic, even phenomenological, relationship with the spatial politics of culture, which has elsewhere been so richly conveyed through Hall's lexicon. When Hall wrote about 'the Third, "New World" presence' evidenced through 'the complex relationship of young black British filmmakers with the "avant-gardes" of European and American filmmaking' (Hall 1990, 234), Akomfrah and Black Audio Film Collective's films would have been in mind. Over the course of five decades of archival salvaging and artistic achievement, Akomfrah has become an authority on the topic and, as such, might be described as an intellectual figure whose conceptualisation of the postcolonial diaspora is significant enough to rival Hall's own.

As director with Black Audio Film Collective, Akomfrah's early work contributes to an influential era of artistic output that engages with the historical experiences of the black diaspora in postcolonial Britain. Manthia Diawara referred to the collective as part of 'a black film movement in Britain that is as significant politically and aesthetically as the Brazilian Cinema Novo, the French New Wave, and the Argentinian Third Cinema' (Diawara 1993, 147). Since the dissolution of the collective in the late 1990s, Akomfrah's films and installations have covered themes from popular RnB to climate change, but a preoccupation with diasporic memory remains a constant. He has discussed how 'diasporic artists face a monumental task ... forced to connect with the question of memory, with the question of the ghost, with the question of the intangible ... the artist discovers the monumental ... the ways in which they are located in their culture and in their present' (Akomfrah 2015, 28). Referencing *An Absence of Ruins* (2012), Orlando Patterson's critique of postcolonial intellectualism, Akomfrah recognises here the absence of monuments testifying to the historical existence of diasporic people in the host nation (in this case, the postcolonial black diaspora in the UK), and how memory (or, rather, the lack thereof) connects (or does not connect) each subject to their forebears. Such is the case for many of the diasporic subjects populating much of Akomfrah's work. The activist groups of *Handsworth Songs* correct such absences in the official histories of the 1980s 'race riots'. The effectiveness of this correction lies not in the utterance of unheard truths, but in the testification of one's own memory – 'a form of enunciation not yet positioned in and by discourse' (Fisher 2007, 27). This disconnects such testimonials (present, in varying ways, throughout Akomfrah's films) from the Western ideological structures that govern them and instead allows people to speak for themselves, as themselves, about themselves. These testimonies have implications beyond the film, too. As Roxana Waterson argues, testimony is an 'event, which itself becomes part of history, of the ongoing work of memory in re-evaluating the past ... testifying as a performative act has the potential to exert a transformative effect upon both participants and audience' (Waterson 2007, 66). Regularly charged with the task of conveying a previously unspoken aural account, the testimonies in Akomfrah's films (whether in talking head, voiceover, archival or intertitle) are first-person, performative interventions into public memory.

With *The Stuart Hall Project*, Akomfrah rehearses many of the principles central to his other engagements with the 'conscious and purposeful staging of memory' that Annette Kuhn terms 'memory work' (Kuhn 2010, 303). Jean Fisher has referred to Akomfrah's films as 'memory-images', due to their ability to 'work inside the film against narrative continuity and outside as a metonymic sign of the continuities and discontinuities of diasporic experience' (Fisher 2007, 24). While Fisher's deployment of Gilles Deleuze's philosophical framework elucidates a consistent structural and temporal tendency in Akomfrah's films, she is forced to look elsewhere to account for Akomfrah's postcolonial frames.³ The postcolonial itself, for Hall, is 'something new', inflected by 'a certain moment of high imperialism and colonial occupation' (Drew 1998, 189). He located a similar novelty when championing Black Audio Film Collective's *Handsworth Songs* (1986), crediting the film with an attempt 'to find a new language' to convey the diversity of 'the black experience' (Hall 1987a, 17). Akomfrah's films have taken the memory-image into a vital new direction, crafting a new cinematic language of postcolonial diasporic memory. The aesthetic language most suited to their very specific political

situation, Akomfrah's approach to montage arose from a connected but distinct environment – one related to the historical avant garde of the twentieth century. In the 1980s, proponents of the filmic avant garde had a highly motivated presence in London. A regular interlocutor with the London Film-makers Co-op (now part of LUX), Akomfrah has described how he 'would never disown the experiential value of watching avant-garde cinema and the psychic transformations that took place as you watched', something that Kobena Mercer has attributed to 'the materiality of the process' (Mercer 2015, 85). This transformative experiential relationship with filmmaking and film spectatorship quickly came to inform the aesthetic language of Akomfrah's practice, leading to the production of his first 'tape-slide' work (whereby slide film approximates the materiality of 35 mm film), *Return to My Native Land* – a multimedia piece, appropriating and reconfiguring parts of Aimé Césaire's epic poem of the same name, borrowing from the source material a fragmented form as well as a first-person figure returning to a space of desire and dread (Mercer 2015, 89). The theoretical framework of Akomfrah's practice forms during the beginnings of Black Audio Film Collective then, through a dialogue with seminal postcolonial literature, the diasporic arts scene of 1980s Britain and a history of experimental cinema. It is against these apparently divergent backdrops that Akomfrah's own intellectual persona is formed, towards what has become a very familiar and influential approach to filmic montage and the archive – one that remains in *The Stuart Hall Project*.

Decentring hall

In his analysis of the film, Rajinder Dudrah makes two passing references to Akomfrah's use of one of Hall's concepts: 'decentring'; he argues that Hall deconstructs the biographical and autobiographical literary forms (Dudrah 2015, 388) in order to highlight Hall's continuing social relevance (391). Dudrah's acknowledgement of conceptual kinship here is perhaps more important than these passing references let on. In his 'Through the Prism of an Intellectual Life' (originally presented as a keynote lecture at a conference devoted to his thought, at the University of the West Indies in Kingston, Jamaica in 2004), Hall defined 'the decentring of the subject' as one's subjection to 'the laws and conventions and meanings of a language, the circumstances of history and culture' (Hall 2007, 275). In the first issue of the politics and culture journal, *Soundings*, Hall (along with esteemed geographer Doreen Massey and the journal's co-editor Michael Rustin) argued that 'a continuing radical programme today needs to be built on a "decentred" basis' (Hall, Massey, and Rustin 1995, 18). Between these two uses, Hall's Gramscian position theorises the subject as both decentred *within* a society, but also capable of decentring *from* overarching political agendas; it is a hegemonic mode of subjection, but also a potentially counter-hegemonic strategy of subjectification. It is within this context, I am arguing, that Akomfrah focalises Hall's claim that we are all involved in 'a series of political games around fractured or decentred identities' (Bailey and Hall 1992, 21). *The Stuart Hall Project* reflexively centres/decentres Hall's body, raising/challenging the notion of a unified subject, as well as its primacy in the space of the classical narrative mode. The film foregrounds Hall's voice, but also envelopes it with the sounds of other

events through a ‘three-dimensional montage’ (Butler 2010, 319), thereby formalising ‘the kaleidoscopic’. While the film refigures the life of Hall, it is as much concerned with conceiving of transnational experiences testifying to connected ‘conditions of blackness’.

When Hall discusses colourism in colonial Jamaica, it is his sister Patricia whose story he foregrounds (Figure 1). Such is the caste system in Jamaica, we hear, Patricia’s wishes to marry were flatly rejected by their mother, who was more committed to the dream of British imperialism than the Jamaican fight for independence. Racial tensions began, Hall explains, within the family – a social unit that reflects the racial hierarchies of colonialism. Later, when the topic shifts to Hall’s own children, there is a similar shift of attention from Hall to others. Prefaced by a television appearance of Hall discussing identity (‘we’re always trying to negotiate between notions of ourselves and our cultural meanings, and the values which enable us to live’), the sequence begins with archival footage of a woman giving birth, before cutting to a photo of Hall holding his new-born child on a beach. Archival photography of the 1965 civil rights march across Alabama then appears, with more narration from the earlier interview (‘I think identity is always constructed as a conversation between who we are and the ideologies out there’). It is significant that the introduction of Hall’s children accompanies narration leading up to the film installation’s titular concern (‘identity is an ever-unfinished conversation’). Parcelling major life events for Hall along with political events and the everyday lives of others, the film bears witness to a relationship between a postcolonial diaspora and an emergent global neoliberalism through the twentieth and twenty-first century. Hall’s voice navigates – and is navigated through – the kaleidoscope of sounds and images conveyed therein.

We return persistently to several of Hall’s intellectual preoccupations, which centre/decentre Hall and demonstrate the significance of his thought to an understanding of history and contemporary culture. On the arts, for instance, Hall’s formative contribution to the establishment of Cultural Studies as a discipline, was to develop systems for the analysis of texts and their ‘politics of representation’ (Hall 1993, 111). There are references to film, music and literature – often to texts with no clear relation to his own preoccupations. As demonstrated through his discussion of film pedagogy; reading James Joyce as ‘an escape from colonialism’; and forms of protest through ‘strange music’, the



Figure 1. Hall tells the story of his sister Patricia, whose forbidden romance and mental decline speaks to the racial hierarchies experienced in his personal life and wider society.

film manages to summon underlying, transnational connectivity between these apparent tangents in Hall's thinking. This is especially notable in the case of Miles Davis, whose music surrounds the film and is introduced through some of the film's first spoken words:

When I was about 19 or 20, Miles Davis put his finger on my soul. The various moods of Miles Davis matched the evolution of my own feelings. There continued to be a regret for the loss of a life which I might have lived, but didn't live. And the uncertainty, the restlessness, and some of the nostalgia for what cannot be is in the sound of Miles Davis's trumpet.

As his voice utters these words, photos of Hall as a young man are intercut with the moving image of a turntable spinning a record. We hear that modern jazz formed in Hall 'the aspiration to go out and get it – whatever "it" was'; Davis's music appears to epitomise this form. The opening sequence also provides an expanded narrativisation of Hall's story, deepening the sensory dimensions of his memory work and proposing a kaleidoscopic ecology of black cultural life; Hall's ability to remember is dependent on the music of Davis. In Grant Farred's terms, Davis's music allows the film to explore 'how the various cultures of black life sustain each other under difficult circumstances – often without recognition, often in the most unexpected ways' (Farred 2017, 14). The memory of Davis's cultural impact as well as the affective dimensions resonating from and within Davis's music are shown to connect Hall to a broader discourse, narrativising the cultural afterlives of black musical icons. A similar expansion of discourse occurs through the recurrent montages of global political events. The film contains several such montages, including footage of early twentieth century Jewish migration; the arrival of HMT Empire Windrush; the Suez crisis; the Hungarian revolution; Bay of Pigs; and the Vietnam war. When these events are shown, we hear commentary from Hall's television appearances; the discussions do not always directly relate. Yet – as is typically the case with Akomfrah's use of montage – an 'affective proximity' (Akomfrah and Eshun 2017, 42) is achieved across the sounds and images, realising new dimensions both in Hall's thinking and the referenced events.

One notable example occurs around the halfway point, during the discussion of Indian migration to mainland Britain. Hall's explanation is accompanied by (1) images of food preparation (that is, British food – 'bacon and eggs'), followed by (2) images of white women eating, (3) white women using exercise belts (a strange body-toning technology of the era), (4) cows grazing on British farmland – the scene ending with a close-up of a puddle, which match-cuts to (5) a birds-eye-view over the Pacific Ocean, as American Air Forces fly over Vietnam, with the accompanying text, 'Vietnam, 1967'. The sound of an English child reciting William Blake's *The Tyger* then (6) overlays images of Vietnamese child amputees being carried into a hospital. This sequence draws together very different locations, contriving a line of continuity between them (with Davis's *Mademoiselle Mabry* on the soundtrack, as well as match-cuts between images) while allowing each image to retain its original import. It concludes with a television appearance of Hall discussing his changing experiences of teaching *The Tyger*. His insight is revealing in the context of the montage: 'every time, I have to teach it in a different way, or read it in a different way, and I see something that I have not seen before' (Figure 2). The placement of this narration at the end of this montage, by affirming the need to constantly reassess our understanding of things, appears to demand a consideration of



Figure 2. A child recites William Blake's *The Tyger* ("Tyger tyger, burning bright, In the forests of the night) over images of child amputees during the Vietnam war, before a cut to footage of Thích Quảng Đức's self-immolation.

the interconnection between the preceding images. Transnational connections are made between migration from the global south to the west; white British consumption of foreign produce; and the quotidian traces of colonial war. The montage's demonstration of the vast gulf between the European and Asian experience of these events reinforces (and is reinforced by) Hall's analysis of his own experiences of marginality and alienation. Recycling Hall's words, Akomfrah appears to demand repeated revisiting of major political events, to better understand the interconnectedness between them. In this sense, the film incorporates something of the Benjaminian philosophy of history Akomfrah references in earlier films, articulating the past historically by seizing 'hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger' (Benjamin 1968, 257) – a statement Hall also employed in reference to the archive (Hall 2001, 89). Such formative moments represent the conjunctural political narratives of diasporic subjects – 'subjects in history', as Hall defined them (Hall 2021).

Reframing Indian economic migration alongside white consumption, and Thích Quảng Đức's self-immolation alongside the US invasion of Vietnam, the sequence approaches Western political narratives in a way that foregrounds the marginalised other in their construction. In the context of global politics, this amounts to an upturning of hegemonic binaries subordinating east to west, south to north, communism to capitalism, black to white. When it comes to discussions of internal British culture and identity, though, the dynamic is less straightforward. It is an issue that causes Hall to freeze when asked by an interviewer, 'What was that moment of encountering Britishness, and England, for the first time?'. The camera holds on Hall's face; the motion is slowed; then a cut takes us to flooded suburban streets, water crashing up against the front doors of houses. Then a cut back to Hall, this time in a close-up profile shot, his clenched fist pressed against his mouth in tense deliberation. More Davis trumpet is then heard (*The Blue Room*), cutting to an aerial view of an anonymous city. 'I wanted to get to a big city – I wanted to get to London, I wanted to get to New York'. We then see archival photography of Hall as a young man in Jamaica, with his narration explaining, 'we had to get out in order to become writers, become intellectuals, somehow we had to get out'. Following this brief reference to his own emigration, we see archival footage of Hall discussing West Indian migration to the UK, with accompanying footage of Windrush

arrivals. Hall's description of his arrival at Oxford shifts away from the hopeful tone of the diaspora's originary move to urban centres, towards a wholly negative critique of the English class system: 'What I realised the moment I got to Oxford was that someone like me could not really be part of it. It's the peak of the English education system . . . One was coming to the heartland of the English class system'. Hall closes on the line, 'that was a very profound shock', offering a damning indictment of black inclusion in the upper echelons of English society.

The film's use of archival footage, as well as intertitles framing events in the context of mid-twentieth century Britain, suggests that the hostile environment of Hall's initial period in England settled down throughout the course of his life. As the film traces historical events over the course of the following decades (and this is to the benefit of *The Stuart Hall Project* over the shorter, *The Unfinished Conversation*), this is clearly not the case. The same alienation and hostility experienced by Hall is shared by countless others, who suffer the lower social and cultural tiers of British society. It is in this sense that Hall's value as an intersectional thinker becomes clear, incorporating a critique of class – and, at later stages, gender and sexuality. 'I understood London, I understood Oxford, I understood the south', Hall explains, before exclaiming, 'but Halifax is a completely different thing altogether!'. This narration accompanies archival footage of millworkers with smoke ascending from factory chimneys. Hall's acuity in regard to the distinct circumstances of the postcolonial diaspora is clear by this point, but these broader cultural evaluations of regional Britain expand the reach of his thinking. He is shown to have implicitly delineated the myriad forms of social fragmentation in the UK, beyond those spawned from post-war migration. The montage includes images of Castro's Cuba and the erection of the Berlin wall, intercutting between complete ideological otherness (communism) and brave little Blighty. The sequence is a lesson in cultural difference and how it operates transnationally, disinterested in borders. There is difference everywhere, the sequence implies, irrespective of any one nation's levels of self-deception on this subject. Even in England – that green and pleasant utopia longed for by outsiders, cherished by natives – 'there are no large collectivities which can always be whipped up in line', as Hall announces in archival talking head. Hall's investment in a decentered mode of reflexive identity formation provides a mode of connection across different marginal concerns, breaching racial and cultural parameters. The film's gathering of disparate subjects in montage form provides insight both into Hall ('Britain is my home, but I am not English') but also allows such insight to elucidate wider postcolonial British identities – from Jamaicans at the bottom of the caste hierarchy to miners in north Yorkshire.

'The "real me" at last!'

Hall opens his essay 'Minimal Selves' voicing his confusion at young black people's apparent sense of ownership within a territory they are systematically marginalised within, which he describes as the 'long discovery-rediscovery of identity among blacks in this migrant situation' (Hall 1987b, 44). Writing in the late 1980s, when postmodern theorisations of identity were becoming more complicated and the diasporic arts and cultural scene in Britain had developed a great deal since his early writings, *identifying as black* follows his *assignment as migrant*. This is a 'recognition of the self through

difference', he says; 'a resolution of irresolutions'; 'the "real me" at last' (ibid.). Hall's turn to the politics of migration coalesces in this brief essay with a recognition that the British are beginning to feel 'marginally marginal' (ibid., 46). This is an exemplary illustration of Hall's own kaleidoscopic, montage-like thinking, bringing together apparently discrete political problems through this particular conjuncture: empire produced migration, which produced new experiences of difference, and identities forged in that difference. Akomfrah picks up on this theme in the film's closing sequences, whereby Hall is centred/decentred in a way that reorients his experience towards other forms of social marginality.

The final sequence titled 'The Neoliberal Problem-space' provides a montage of Hall's late media appearances, from the late 1990s (discussing the acceptance of multiculturalism in the UK) to an appearance in 2000 on BBC's *Newsnight*, where he explains the geopolitical background of recent migration to the UK (Figure 3). Decades on from his initial interventions, Hall is still forced to explain these issues, which affect both him personally and countless others. Having articulated these emergent cultural phenomena so effectively in the 1980s, Hall remained one of the foremost voices on migration in the late twentieth century and early 2000s. This final section opens with Hall's voice declaring, 'we can now begin to identify a range of different processes, which do tend in our kinds of society to deliver a significant number of people at the bottom of a number of different ladders'. The voice overlays archival images of working-class Britons caring for children, familiar from scenes in social documentaries such as *Housing Problems* (Arthur Elton and Edgar Anstey, 1935). While the film has long departed from post-war Britain, the combination of 'we can now' (i.e. in this 'neoliberal problem space', originating in the late 1970s but still prevalent at the time of the film's release) with these earlier images of British poverty connects the alienated of the past with the alienated of the present. A cut seamlessly brings us up to date, with footage from Mike Figgis's *The Battle of Orgreave* (2001), documenting the 1984 National Union of Mineworkers strike. Hall's ability to form these connections is mobilised by Akomfrah through a montage that traces a historical lineage of social alienation. As the soundtrack shifts from the anguished strings laced over this section thus far to the film's closing theme (Brian Eno's majestic, *An Ending (Ascent)*), Hall is heard reflecting on his early work, providing something of



Figure 3. In the final sequence, titled 'The Neoliberal Problem-space', Hall appears on BBC's *Newsnight* explaining the consequences of military intervention in Kosovo and the refugee populations that followed.

a pathway through Hall's career, piecing together archival footage from three BBC segments – the first from 1991 on the topic of sexual politics; the second from 1999 on multiculturalism; and the third from 2000 as part of a debate on immigration.

In the first, Hall explains that 'people are driven into identifying themselves as a sexual minority when they confront a particular culture that gives a particular valorisation of normality'. While prefaced by images from a pride parade, the montage's connection to the next segment suggests that this statement rings true across many different identarian categories. 'Things will never be the same again', we hear, because 'a slow glacial time' has overtaken some of the earlier questions around identity; 'the ground has shifted'. The materialism of Hall's lexicon is matched visually, as he dissolves into deep space imagery, which then cuts to time-lapse footage of urban spaces and, ironically, the Houses of Parliament. The second segment derives from BBC Radio. Hall's voice accompanies day breaking across an urban landscape: 'there is a common sense that Britain is being accepted as a multicultural society ... we haven't really confronted *what then are the problems which that poses?*'. The statement is accompanied by a still of military aircrafts viewed through a screen – a metonymical link to the state intervention Hall will raise in the next segment, where he appears as part of a panel on immigration on BBC's *Newsnight*. Hall is asked, 'why do they have to all come to this country?'; he replies by referencing Britain's intervention in Kosovo and its aftereffects. As we have heard throughout the film, this is not the first time Hall encountered this question. It is addressed when we learn about Hall's arrival in Britain in the film's fourth section, titled 'The Spectre of Difference'. Hall's commentary accompanies archival footage of a steam train charging forwards (shot from above, face-on and from a POV), exiting a tunnel into the light, intercutting with still photographs of black passengers enjoying train carriages. He explains how, living in Paddington, West London at this time, he witnessed people 'pouring off the trains'. He then describes the 'ordinary English' response as: 'my God, we have a black population that is going to stay'. While he, like these new arrivals, is in Britain as a citizen of the Commonwealth, Hall articulates a popular response which continues to resonate today for diasporic people living in Britain. Later, a section titled 'Minimal Multicultural Selves' references Hall's aforementioned essay. Rather than addressing the black youth of 1980s Britain, the film locates us in the late 1960s and pulls together some of Hall's television appearances and Open University lectures, where he is seen and heard presenting the social and cultural dimensions of texts (deriving from 1960s youth culture and the British New Wave) and discussing Indian migration to mainland Britain. He identifies three main reasons for Indian travel: training, education and employment – a succinct analysis, which Akomfrah anchors with archival imagery. Brought together, these two sections illustrate Hall's personal and intellectual response, both to migration and the native reception of the new arrivals.

Enoch Powell is introduced towards the end of a section titled, 'The Coming of the Hyphen'. Powell's name and image exists as a kind of signifier for the backlash against immigration in this period, which would culminate in the election of Thatcher at the end of the next decade. This sequence includes archival footage of anti-immigrant rallies, using montage to focus on the anxious expressions of the black and brown people who faced these aggressions. Footage from a 1968 BBC debate on immigration shows Hall being confronted with the same line of questioning he will face thirty-three years later on *Newsnight*. He takes issue with the rhetoric underpinning the claim 'we want to invite

people from all over the world', correcting the speaker on the origins of the new migrant population, who are in fact 'from a very special part of the world that have had a very long relationship with *you*'. As a cut reveals racist graffiti on a suburban street ('Keep Britain White'), original audio of Hall elaborates further on the situation: 'the British looked in the faces of these black and brown people whom they have been ruling for 400 years as if to say, 'I don't really know where you've come from, or why you've come here, or what we have to do with your futures?'. Accompanied by further archival images of violence ensuing, the sequence exposes the public backlash to postcolonial migration as the product of anti-immigrant discourse from those with a platform (politicians, media channels), which is founded on an utter disregard for Britain's earlier relationships with other nations and their people.

Akomfrah traces Hall's remarkably consistent theorisation of both migrant travel and native backlash as constituent conditions in a subjective kaleidoscope. The montage's polyrhythmic movement between the two themes formalises the aesthetic construction of a discourse: migrants arrive, natives react, migrants acclimatise, natives are hostile, migrants react, natives accuse. A call-and-response is shown to exist in the social fabric, which is mirrored sonically by the Davis soundtrack. Hall's testimony is shaped in such a way as to underline qualities shared with a wider, transnational, postcolonial, diasporic public. While Davis might have had a finger on his soul, *The Stuart Hall Project* shows how Hall's connectivity to other bodies exceeds 'conditions of blackness' alone.

Between the theorisation of migratory experience and its audio-visual formalisation through montage, *The Stuart Hall Project* conveys Hall's sensitivity to new forms of marginality. This holds a diasporic lens up to neoliberal globalisation, shattering its illusory wholeness into a kaleidoscopic image of lives lost and battles yet to come. Akomfrah locates this in Hall's life and work, but he also *projects* it on to Hall's body: a duality captured by the DuBoisian diptychal photo late on in the film (Figure 4). But if Hall's consciousness is conceived as *more than one*, it surely exceeds the double – the plurality, precision and apparent prescience stray far beyond his own time and space. Akomfrah's montage constructs an image of a supremely compassionate intellectual, whose writings are as capable of articulating today's crises as they were of convening the fragmented multiplicities of his own era. In turn, an explicitly theoretical frame is applied



Figure 4. A DuBoisian dispersal of identity, embodied by Hall, captured in one of the film's final images.

to Akomfrah's now-familiar montage aesthetic. Where some of his earlier films have utilised a relatively consistent form to engage with major intellectuals,⁴ *The Stuart Hall Project* explicitly foregrounds the continuing influence of one thinker above all.

Notes

1. The title quotes Hall's definition of identity as, 'an endless, ever-unfinished conversation'.
2. Open University delivered education programming for the BBC, screened late nights and weekends, beginning in January 1971. These programmes became less regular through the 1990s and 2000s, before ceasing altogether in 2006.
3. Deleuze barely recognises the existence of filmmakers from the postcolonial diaspora in his encyclopaedic exposition of film history (Deleuze 1985).
4. Such as Black Audio Film Collective's neo-expressionist documentaries on Malcolm X and ideas of sonic Afrofuturism; or Akomfrah's three-channel installation, *Psyche*, which springs from the writing of Jacques Derrida.

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