

THE MURDERER WITHIN

Belinda Morrissey

Lisa Downing, *The Subject of Murder*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2013, 241pp

To be honest, the title of Lisa Downing's latest book: *The Subject of Murder: Gender, Exceptionality and the Modern Killer*, didn't immediately inspire me. Here we go again, I thought, with yet another study on the extraordinary otherness of those who kill. This book might provide a different taxonomy, or it might consider why murderers are seen to be exceptional, or it might explain from where the idea of the exceptionality of the killer has developed in the modern West. However, I feared it would be less likely to debunk the whole 'exceptionality thesis' once and for all, which is the only perspective on murder and murderers that I'm still interested in after studying the phenomenon for the past 15 years. How very wrong I turned out to be.

Lisa Downing provides a much needed corrective to a great deal of thinking about murder and the murderous in this fascinating, thoughtfully written survey of the various understandings of murderers from the birth of modernity to the present day. The book does not function to merely catalogue cases and attach them to concepts of the 'murderer' in vogue at the time they occurred. Instead, she catalogues the prime theories of the murderer, locates them within their milieu, and then shows, using a few well-chosen case studies, how these ideas continue to infect and inflect our contemporary theories of who murderers are and how and why they function. In a sense, she's developed a concept of the 'murderer-function' in modern society in much the same way that Michel Foucault developed the 'author-function' in his archaeology of the context of authorship in 'What is an Author?'

Developing her study chronologically, Downing starts her explication of the 'murderer-function' with a comprehensive sweep of the historic theories of the murderer. These include the murderer-as-artist, the murderer as superman, and the murderer as beast. So far, we are on familiar ground, following the concept of the murderer in Romantic and Decadent guise as a male subject desirous of ultimate omnipotence over life and death; to the Nietzschean version of the man so special that ordinary morality could never be considered to apply to him; and finally reaching the nadir of the inborn degenerate pervert who kills because he cannot control his lust. Please note my deliberate use of the male pronoun throughout: murderers in history are typically gendered male.

The most important thing none of these 'exceptional' examples do, according to Downing, is to suggest that murder could ever be in any way normal, and certainly not that murderers could also be ordinary human beings

capable of change. For, to make this argument is to challenge the concept of heteronormative culture which resolutely insists, not only that murderers are different to the rest of 'us', but that to become one is to remove oneself from 'society' and the 'civilized' altogether.

The other thing the 'exceptional' murderer thesis states is that women and children are both incomprehensible, and thus completely inhuman, when they kill. There is no language to 'speak' the female killer or the child who kills. We lack discourse to surround these killers with ready-made philosophies, motives and subjectivities when they forcibly put on the mantle of murderer. As Downing shows, old subject positions of 'murderer' don't fit these very different killers and this is why we struggle so exhaustively to either exonerate or eliminate them within communal fantasies of meaning-making.

Using a traditional Foucauldian discourse analysis methodology, Downing proceeds to analyse her seven case studies, which cover murderers of all kinds and from all walks of life. These include: artist-murderer Pierre-François Lacenaire; poisoner Marie Lafarge; lust murderers Jack the Ripper and followers; partner murderers Myra Hindley and Ian Brady; gay serial killer Dennis Nilsen; lesbian, prostitute serial killer Aileen Wuornos; and children who kill, including the murderers of James Bulger, Jon Venables and Robert Thompson; Mary Bell; and the Columbine school shooters, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold.

In each case, Downing takes a unique approach, demonstrating not only the main lenses through which the murderer was viewed at the time of each of the case studies, but also the lengths to which each killer attempted to manipulate those same discourses in order to gain control over their story and to present themselves as a murdering subject. Downing eschews media coverage for the most part in her analyses, preferring to consider the huge variety of material emanating from these cases in terms of more considered responses. These include critical studies, biographies, True Crime responses, novels, plays, films, documentaries, docu-dramas, poetry, and artworks. Downing also includes discussion of the murderers' own contribution to the overdetermination of their own public images through looking at the prose, poetry, art and autobiographical material left by them. Indeed, she observes that 'one criterion for choosing the murderers to be discussed is the sheer wealth of representation they have provoked and, in most of these cases, produced' (p29). Hence, the murderer is shown to be as involved in their representation as the usual suspects in these cases.

The traditional 'understandings' of the murderer are illustrated very cleverly to drive discourses of the murderer from the earliest cases studied in this work, even unto the most recent. The roles the triumvirate of murderers - artist, superman or beast - weave through our subjectification of the 'murderer', provide a wholly separate subject position which murderers can draw upon, just as easily as the media or critics, in order to represent themselves. We do have a 'place' for murderers, or at least, for male murderers.

The first two case studies demonstrate how this gendering of the subject position 'murderer' plays out most graphically. These two cases show very clearly the different responses men and women can expect from their actions. Both Lacenaire and Lafarge wrote copious amounts of material regarding their crimes, motives, personalities, but only Lacenaire was considered by some to truly occupy the 'murderer-function' in all its Romantic and Decadent glory: 'the artistic creator of the murderous act, who produced poems in addition to corpses, and both with the same attention to artistry and flair' (p37). Lafarge, on the other hand, was considered unnatural for writing at all, and especially for attempting to express herself both on the page and in her murder. No discourse existed to 'explain' Lafarge's apparent lack of fit with the prevailing gender roles.

This early conclusion becomes a theme throughout the rest of the book, where women are shown as incomprehensible and unspeakable, while men are consummately understood and spoken, when they kill. Such a division persists even into the present, with cases such as those of Myra Hindley and Aileen Wuornos providing far more consternation than similar cases of male serial killers, such as Dennis Nilsen. Women may kill, but they cannot 'fit' within the space of the murderous subject as it is currently articulated.

The final case study chapter expands this idea further to include the concept of child murderers. Demonstrating that the notion of 'children' killing is so oxymoronic, given prevailing understandings of 'The Child', so that any child who does kill automatically loses their right to the status of 'child', this chapter also shows, once again, that no lexicon is available to provide us with convenient and even comforting models of the 'child murderer'. Instead, the twin discourses of childhood and motherhood are used as blunt instruments to beat the deviance of these children into the public consciousness, even as their impossibility is carefully mutated into an equally impossible early maturity by which they can be held accountable.

It is certainly a truism to observe that murder remains a perennially fascinating topic, and that a great many studies, both academic and popular, are available. However, Downing's contribution to the field is an exciting one. For this study puts forward an important and revolutionary thesis: that the murderer is only made exceptional in order to avoid the realisation that murder is a capacity belonging to everyone. The requirement to dress up murderous actions under the guises of artist, superman or beast only exists so that we don't have to countenance the murderer as ordinary. Of course, murderers can commit the most extraordinary acts; they truly do enact exceptional behaviour. Yet, Downing argues that immediately stereotyping them, or else rendering them devoid of comprehension, means only that we have missed the true reason for their exceptionality: 'that they are aberrant reactions to, *and symptoms of*, normative and normalizing culture' (p197). Indeed they are 'extimate' in the Lacanian sense: 'the kernel of otherness that is ... at the heart of ... our own culture' (p197). Finally, Downing delivers

her coup de grace: any of us, in certain circumstances, could murder, and the ways in which we would automatically be understood as exceptional would depend on our status, in relation to gender, race, class and sexuality, and upon the available stories told of the 'murderer', rather than upon the details of the case or the intricacies of our own personalities. The murderer lives within, not without, and *The Subject of Murder* details where, when and in what form we come to face that possibility, and indeed, if we are able to face it at all.

BLAME THE MUMMY

Nicholas Daly

Roger Luckhurst, *The Mummy's Curse: The True History of a Dark Fantasy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012, 336pp; £18.99 hardback

In *The Mummy's Curse* Roger Luckhurst explains why the funerary practices of a long-dead and geographically-distant civilisation came to exercise such a fascination in modern Britain. More precisely, he analyses the way in which Egyptian mummies almost always come trailing disaster in our popular culture. To do so he ranges broadly over a diverse array of cultural phenomena, from exhibitions to supernatural fiction to late-Victorian theosophy. He also pursues the most ephemeral of trails, tracking the circulation of rumours and club-room stories about the dire consequences that ensue for those who meddle with mummies. The most familiar of these curse narratives attached themselves to the Carter-Carnarvon excavation of the tomb of Tutankhamun in 1922-23, but as Luckhurst shows, such tales of mysterious illnesses and fatal accidents appear long before then.

In the first section of this entertaining and thoughtful study Luckhurst outlines the stories that came to circulate around the tomb of Tutankhamun, and around some earlier mummies. The first of these is the 'unlucky mummy' in the British Museum, otherwise Acquisition 22542; this is actually a painted inner coffin lid from the mummy-case of a high-status individual, and was described by the Victorian Egyptologist Ernest Wallis Budge as that of the Priestess of Amen-Ra. Its magical powers first manifested themselves in 1868 at the expense of Thomas Douglas Murray, who was said to have lost an arm in a shooting accident in Egypt immediately after acquiring the unlucky artefact. (In fact he seems to have lost the arm the previous year; and he soldiered on until 1911, leading a relatively uneventful life, unless you count his role in introducing the Pekingese breed to England) In untangling the skein that leads from the actual life of Douglas Murray to the curse legend, Luckhurst introduces us to a complicated cast that includes the amateurs of the supernatural of the Ghost Club, H. Rider Haggard and his friend, the journalist Bertram Fletcher Robinson, and Wallis Budge himself. Luckhurst also trails the version of the mummy curse that came to follow Walter Herbert Ingram, whose 1885 Egyptian souvenir-buying (in this case the painted Coffin of Nesmin, now in the collection of the Rhode Island School of Design) resulted in his death at the hooves of an angry elephant. Again a gap exists between the verifiable facts and the far more lively curse tales that mutated over time to draw in, inter alia, a mummy's hand in the collection of the 'Ripley's Believe It Or Not' museum. While Luckhurst offers some provisional political readings of these curse stories at this juncture (e.g. in

terms of their resonance with Britain's military presence in Egypt), he points out that the most interesting things about them is that they appear at all, that is to say that after a long period in which Egypt was more associated with the sublime or with popular antiquarianism, it came to be read in decidedly gothic terms; the stories are part of a more general 'curdling in the English cultural imagination about Egypt' (p83).

In the succeeding chapters Luckhurst explores other aspects of the presence of ancient Egypt in modern Britain: commercial entertainments, official exhibitions, mummy fiction, and the late-Victorian revival of magic in the Order of the Golden Dawn and other mystical circles. The rich historical detail of these chapters is impressive, and Luckhurst moves smoothly from the Egyptian Avenue in Highgate Cemetery, to Cleopatra's Needle, to the forgotten novels of Andrew Haggard (brother of H. Rider). On the one hand he offers a revisionist account of the exhibition of Egyptian artefacts, and the panoramas and dioramas that put the ancient world on display. The Foucauldian accounts of Timothy Mitchell and Tony Bennett have in different ways suggested the disciplinary aspects of the will to see, and the will to catalogue and display, but Luckhurst notes that the actual responses to panoramas of Cairo and museum cases of Theban artefacts were often more complex: bewilderment and confusion were more common than a sense of imperial superiority, or of the march of progress. On the other, he keeps in focus that 'curdling' of the imagination that seems to be in place by the 1880s, and that increasingly represents Egypt as a place of gothic curse-narratives. In this respect the most fascinating chapter, for this reader at least, is that on magic, and the place of Egypt, occult powers and maleficent gazes in the febrile imaginations of W.B. Yeats, Aleister Crowley, and other would-be magi of the fin de siècle. Luckhurst shows, inter alia, that what becomes twentieth-century modernism begins in some strange places, and that its practitioners kept some very dubious company.

In the end, we are returned to a fairly familiar reading of the progressive gothicisation of ancient Egypt in late Victorian England: that the mummy's curse represents the projected rapacious violence of the imperial project; we are not too far here from those readings that see *Dracula*, say, as a fantasy of reverse colonisation. It is a perfectly sensible but scarcely surprising conclusion. More interestingly, perhaps, Luckhurst speculates that the blurring of the line between the subject and object in tales of curses and reanimated mummies represents a sort of *pensée sauvage* within modernity itself, a sign that we have never been entirely comfortable with our elevation of the subject over the object world.

Anyone with an interest in Egyptomania will learn from this book, which takes quite a different tack to Jasmine Day's study of the adventures of the mummy in twentieth-century popular culture, also entitled *The Mummy's Curse* (Routledge, 2006). But this book should also be read by anyone with a more general interest in nineteenth-century and early-twentieth century imperial

history, or in popular fiction. The archival research is particularly impressive: Luckhurst has pored over the minutes of the Ghost Club, assembled the biographical *disjecta membra* of some long-forgotten figures, and spotlighted the less well-known facets of famous ones, while also managing to provide succinct and thought-provoking accounts of some of the shows of London. At times, indeed, the reader may feel, like a visitor to an Egyptian diorama, a bit overwhelmed by the detail, especially in the opening chapters about shape-shifting rumours and curse narratives. But overall this is a valuable and highly-readable book that offers shrewd reassessments of dominant narratives about Europe's figuration of the exotic other, and more generally about the shifting sands of lucks and curses.

SMALL DIFFERENCES

Ben Noys

François Laruelle, *Anti-Badiou: The Introduction of Maoism into Philosophy*, Robin Mackay (trans), London, Bloomsbury, 2013, 288pp; £18.99 hardback

The tradition of 'anti-' books is, in the explicit form, not particularly large. There is Engels' *Anti-Dühring* (1877), his polemic against Professor Eugen Dühring (early in his career Engels had written an *Anti-Schelling* (1841) as well), Nietzsche's *The Antichrist* (1888), Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* (1974) and, more recently, Malcolm Bull's *Anti-Nietzsche* (2011). At first sight it seems surprising that the contemporary French thinker François Laruelle should join this select band with his *Anti-Badiou*. This is because Laruelle's work has been devoted to developing *non-philosophy*, which explicitly tries to avoid the antagonistic link implied by being 'anti-'. For Laruelle philosophy is a narcissistic exercise that absorbs any opposition within itself, so to be anti-philosophy is to remain tied to philosophy. Yet, in this case, Laruelle argues that the malicious genre of the polemical anti- book is a worthwhile exercise to sharpen his own non-philosophy against Badiou.

The reason for this is that Badiou is not only the major contemporary representative of French or Continental philosophy, but also that Badiou comes close to dethroning philosophy from its privileged position. Badiou suggests that philosophy can no longer account for ontology and instead it is mathematics, and more particularly set-theory, which can perform this task. Also, Badiou insists that philosophy can only respond to events that take place outside philosophy - in the four sites of love, art, science, and politics. Laruelle writes this antagonistic work not simply to attack philosophy, but to attack Badiou for not going all the way to non-philosophy. The tone of this polemic is not simply violent attack, although there is much of that, but also one of disappointment.

I'd suggest, like many such disputes, that this antagonism is born of proximity, in line with what Freud, in *Civilization and its Discontents*, called the 'narcissism of small differences'. Laruelle's turn to the anti- is to (violently) mark out a difference between his non-philosophy, or what he now calls non-standard philosophy (NP), and Badiou's philosophical minimalism, or what Laruelle calls the 'ontology of the void' (OV). Laruelle's non-standard philosophy must be distinguished from Badiou's minimal philosophy precisely because Badiou's deflation of philosophy still serves what Laruelle calls a modernist philosophical project. For Laruelle, Badiou cannot accede to a new way of thinking, but remains within the conservation of philosophy as a meta-discourse. So, this book proceeds along two paths: the first is the critique

of Badiou's surreptitious saving of the dignity of philosophy, and the second is Laruelle's latest iteration of non-philosophy. Laruelle seeks to go beyond Badiou's 'immobilization' of thought in philosophy, into a new discourse that can experiment or practice with philosophy.

Laruelle's critique of Badiou is at once philosophical and political. I've already noted the substance of his critique of Badiou as the saviour of philosophy. The political critique comes with what Laruelle calls, in the book's subtitle, Badiou's 'introduction of Maoism into philosophy'. Laruelle argues that the political and philosophical fuse in Badiou's 'authoritarian' stance which aims to re-educate philosophy (as in Maoist 'self-criticism') by mathematics. Laruelle's political critique is violent and unremitting - Badiou is accused of offering a 'manifesto of terror' and a cult of personality (now in the figure of the philosopher). Laruelle is explicit about his lack of close textual engagement, and he offers little consideration of Badiou's own reinvention of Maoism. The result is a repetition of Cold War doxa concerning Maoism - as dogmatic, authoritarian, and terrorizing - which lacks nuance. This is not to excuse the many crimes of Maoism, but rather to note that Laruelle's refusal to engage in any detailed debate with Badiou's position reproduces clichés.

What is of more interest is Laruelle's attempt to sharpen his thinking against Badiou, in both senses, to articulate his non-standard philosophy. In contrast to Badiou's 'strong thought' (to use Jason Barker's phrase), Laruelle elaborates a 'weak' thought that tries not to oppose force with force. In this Laruelle is not so unusual. Although he makes no references, we could draw parallels with the 'weak thought' elaborated in the Italian context by thinkers like Gianni Vattimo or, perhaps more relevant, the anarchist-mystical model proposed by Simon Critchley. At base is a fear of a strong thought that will treat human beings as mere material. In Laruelle's version this involves the recovery of the 'weak force' of generic humanity that can resist reduction by the force of philosophy.

Again, the stakes are political as well as philosophical. While Laruelle's focus on philosophy as master discourse may serve to give philosophy too much credit, especially in an Anglo-American context, he does draw attention to the tensions of recent attempts to philosophically rehabilitate the 'communist Idea'. In particular, and I think rightly, Laruelle is critical of the philosophical treatment of poverty as an absolute, which will then reverse itself into a superior power. This kind of move is found in Negri, Agamben, and many other forms of contemporary thought, especially those indebted to vitalism. What is more questionable is Laruelle's own attempt to detach his discourse from this kind of move, to find a generic humanity that will not return to the benefit of philosophy or transform itself into a superior force.

One problem is Laruelle's return to a form of science that can, he claims, undermine the privileges of philosophy. In opposition to Badiou's ontology of the void, resting on mathematics, Laruelle's non-standard philosophy rests on quantum mechanics, although shorn, as Laruelle notes, of its

mathematical apparatus. This explicitly metaphorical use of science hardly seems convincing as a mode of making experimental use of science. My knowledge of quantum physics is limited, but I am aware enough to know that mathematical formalisation is essential and that most of the thought experiments and metaphorical explorations (Schrödinger's cat etc.) are merely preliminary, although they can provide fruitful guides for experiment.

Laruelle's resort to the language of 'superposition' and what he calls the 'undulatory' modelling of quantum physics remains explicitly at the level of what he calls 'philo-fiction'. True to the 'anti-' in this work it mainly, and repetitively, serves as the means to distinguish Laruelle from Badiou. Where Badiou is rigid, philosophical, and mathematical, Laruelle claims to be flexible, non-philosophical, and quantum. While Laruelle accuses Badiou of 'planification', incarnating a typical contemporary fear of any sort of planning, his critique remains schematic, oppositional, and rigid in its own way. Although much of the book is dedicated to a remarkably dense attempt to reinscribe the various terms Laruelle deploys - democracy, the generic human, immanence, etc. - not much thought seems to be given to how consonant these are with the ideological consensus of what Badiou has called 'democratic materialism'. Part of the salutary effect of Badiou's intervention has been to dispute with the various accepted ideological forms of the present moment. As it stands Laruelle's response doesn't seem to me to take the measure of this intervention.

Laruelle's *Anti-Badiou* is frustrating in its inflexibility and a surprising lack of inventiveness or sense of what kind of experiment and invention non-standard philosophy might offer. This could be the result of a choice to parody the rigidity of Badiou's thinking and to try for a form of sly mimicry. Yet, even if we were to accept that this is more of a parody than a polemic, the resulting rigidity seems a high price to pay. While I have sympathy with Laruelle's project, and with Badiou's attempt to put philosophy under pressure, the staging of the dispute here remains very philosophical, in the bad sense. It seems that it is difficult to break with the habit of polemic and antagonism.

GIVING A DAMN

Ben Highmore

The Stuart Hall Project, directed by John Akomfrah, Smoking Dog Films/
BFI, 2013

At the end of an essay from 1981 Stuart Hall claimed that popular culture is 'one of the places where socialism might be constituted. That is why "popular culture" matters. Otherwise, to tell you the truth, I don't give a damn about it'.¹ I was reminded of Hall's words last week while listening to a radio programme marking fifty years of Cultural Studies (*Bingo, Barbie and Barthes: 50 Years of Cultural Studies* BBC, Radio 4, 2013). Along with various accounts of Cultural Studies' emergence and consolidation there was a sound bite from an interview with Hall; he was complaining that he couldn't bear to read yet another Cultural Studies interpretation of the US TV show *The Sopranos* - frankly, my dear, he just didn't give a damn. The radio programme had a strange atmosphere about it; it seemed to suggest - *contra* Hall - that the spirit of Cultural Studies had migrated into all sorts of places and that its mission was now complete. The logic seemed to suggest that now, when newspapers would dedicate many more column inches to a new Dizee Rascal CD than to any classical offering, a need for Cultural Studies had passed. Not so much a celebration of Cultural Studies, then, as a valediction, sending it off to the great paper shredder of history.

A different feeling of Cultural Studies is offered in John Akomfrah's latest film *The Stuart Hall Project*. The title mimes a category used by Hall and others to insist that Cultural Studies wasn't going to be just another discipline, rather it would be a 'project'. We should take Akomfrah's use of the term 'project' in the title of his film as similarly embracing the unfinished, on-going, contingent and necessarily inadequate state of any 'study'; while also recognising a striving towards something unknown and, perhaps, as also actively encouraging contradiction and inconsistency. As if to make this condition clearer still Akomfrah titled the three-screen video installation portrait of Hall that preceded the film *The Unfinished Conversation*, which is both Hall's description of identity-work, while also being the condition of the artwork. So anyone looking to *The Stuart Hall Project* for a bio-pic or for a fully adequate representation of the intellectual odyssey of Hall will be disappointed. The film stays for the most part in the 1950s and '60s: so for those desiring the Stuart Hall who has done so much in recent years to establish a platform for multicultural visual arts in the shape of iIVA (the institute of International Visual Arts) will find little sign of him; if you are looking for the Hall who grappled with feminism and non-heterosexual identities in the 1980s and '90s there's a tiny bit more to go on but not much;

1. Stuart Hall, 'Notes on Deconstructing "the Popular"', in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, Raphael Samuel (ed), London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981, p240.

even if you desire 'the architect of Cultural Studies' from the 1960s onwards there is really very little to indicate what Cultural Studies was and is for Hall. It will, I think, be hard for many not to measure the film in relation to their own desire for Stuart Hall, and of course this is a totally understandable way of greeting a film with such a title. Yet to apprehend this film in relation to its adequacy as a representation of Hall's life would be to fundamentally misrecognise the film and mistake its primary mood. To my mind the first thing that needs to be established in attempting to grasp what *The Stuart Hall Project* achieves is to attend to it as a John Akomfrah's film - as part of a practice, as part of an aesthetic engagement with the world - an engagement that has been fundamentally shaped as a response to the work of Stuart Hall and to aspects of Cultural Studies.

Akomfrah's default aesthetic is elegiac: previous films have evidenced a mournful, haunted quality, often produced by the use of electronic soundscapes and slowed-down images, rendering the recent past as distant and almost ethereal (no wonder that the late Chris Marker was a fan). One consistent aspect of Akomfrah's practice (and the practice of the Black Audio Film Collective, of which he was a founding member) has been to take a public archive and alter it, unmoor it, interfere with it in some fundamental way. And a crucial part of this interference has been to alter the mood of an archival corpus. For instance in his important 2010 film *The Nine Muses* (which like *The Stuart Hall Project* began life as a multi-screen installation) Akomfrah takes the public archive of the post-war 'Black Experience' and re-reflects it. All those newsreel film clips that we know from television history, showing us confident men and women from the Caribbean, disembarking at Tilbury docks or arriving at Waterloo station; all those clips showing slightly less confident people struggling to find lodgings; or images of black men and women finding somewhere to live in tawdry bedsits in Notting Hill and Brixton; images of a livelihood found at the foundry or via the local authority (road sweep and 'dinner lady'); all those images that are already seen, already known form the substance of *The Nine Muses*.

The work of Akomfrah in *The Nine Muses* is to take this archive and set it on a detour away from the destinations perpetuity seems to have promised it. Filed away in the archives under 'social issues', or 'the coloured problem' it seemed forever destined to play the role of giving evidence in the court of history concerned with viewing a troubled post-war Britain. Akomfrah takes this archive and interlaces it with other materials altering its mood and meanings: he shows us familiar images of this post-war migration with a soundtrack made up of Arvo Pärt and Franz Schubert alongside calypso and Paul Robeson; the words of Emily Dickinson, Shakespeare and John Milton take their place alongside James and Lamming and *vox pops*. Also, and perhaps most memorably, he inserts himself into the film as a witness who has journeyed far: we see him dressed in bright yellow 'extreme weather' gear, staring out to sea in frozen, other-worldly fjords (like a futuristic figure

in a Caspar David Friedrich painting). The post-war migration is rendered as heroic world-making achievement; as poetic epic of mythic proportions seen by a witness from some unspecified time and place that is clearly not the time and place of the archive or film.

In *The Stuart Hall Project* the archive is mainly Stuart Hall as a public figure on the BBC; first as New Left activist, CND supporter and intellectual in the '50s and '60s; later as the seated sage of late night BBC2 Open University programmes; and later still as the wonderful and woefully underused guide to understanding our contemporary history, captured in his series *Redemption Song* - seven documentaries about the Caribbean (BBC, 1991). This public archive is interfered with by inserting a family archive made up of photographs of holidays, a film of his wedding to Catherine Hall, pictures and film of children and grandchildren, and with aural archives of interviews of Hall remembering his life. And lastly it is interfered with through the persistent presence of Miles Davis (with Brian Eno as a mournful undertow).

It is difficult to overemphasise the role of Davis' music in this film. For Hall, Miles Davis was the first music that he recognised as being 'his': as he tells us in the film, 'when I was about nineteen or twenty Miles Davis put his finger on my soul'. The temporality of the film is marked by the release dates of the Miles Davis tracks on the soundtrack which fit with the period described by the archival material. In another context Hall had written about 'the young black intellectuals I knew in Kingston, Jamaica, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, dreaming of freedom to the subtle, haunting, but forbiddingly complex and uncompromising "modern" tonalities of Charlie Parker and Miles Davis'.² To find yourself dreaming of freedom via the 'forbiddingly complex' and haunted improvisations of Davis' jazz is to find a soundtrack that might just work to constitute socialism: it was and is popular culture worth giving a damn about. Throughout the film we hear Davis' plaintive and muted trumpet cutting through acoustic and electronic worlds as a lonely coruscating voice. This is 'other-worldly' music in as much as it offers, like the best painterly abstractions, a view of the future where an improvisational ethos has released some as-yet un-channelled potential. By 1969 this is a fully-fledged afrofuturism made out of psychedelic and jazz fusions (*In a Silent Way*, for instance).

One of the most affecting aspects of *The Stuart Hall Project* is that the mood of Stuart Hall is fundamentally altered and expanded: the pedagogue becomes the poet as well; the trenchant political analyst (always sensitive to 'profound' changes) becomes the doleful mnemonist; the decisive agent of struggle and resistance becomes caught in the desires of others. Two of the most moving and rupturing moments in the film concern the women closest to him. The first is Hall describing visiting his family in Jamaica after being in Britain for a few years. This is Hall remembering what his mother said to him: "I hope they [the British] don't think of you as one of those immigrants", and I thought to myself that is exactly what I am. She said: "England, beautiful

2. Stuart Hall
'Assembling the
1980s: The Deluge
- and After', in
*Shades of Black:
Assembling Black Arts
in 1980s Britain*,
David A. Bailey, Ian
Baucom and Sonia
Boyce (eds), Duke
University Press,
2005, p7.

England, full of those black people. The best thing they can do is push them off the short end of a long pier". I thought to myself, she is talking about me'. As an element in Hall's on-going identity-work it is hard not to hear his mother's words - the words of her misrecognising, misapprehending her son (no doubt for a host of local and world-historical reasons) - as not just echoing but ricocheting across the film. It opens up a void. The second moment is hardly there at all: it concerns his relationship with his wife, with feminism and with the heterosexual imagination (and lack of it). It points to a crisis and to a lacunae too: the archive is forever incomplete.

John Akomfrah has spoken of how the installation and the film portraits of Stuart Hall have been a work of gratitude and friendship: a love letter of sorts. Writing of another, very different biographical project (*Who Needs a Heart* from 1991, a film of the troubled life of Michael De Freitas, Michael X) Akomfrah has written that 'to make a biographical film is to ask to be possessed; it's like asking to be haunted by the traces and deposits of another life'.³ That possession, that haunting works both ways. Akomfrah might be haunted by Hall, but in turn we now have a Hall possessed, inhabited, ruptured by an elegiac aesthetic that grasps recent history from an uncertain future.

Today in the face of all sorts of morbid symptoms Cultural Studies is in need of energising and reimagining. In the 1980s there was a real sense that Cultural Studies researchers would make common cause with all sorts of other cultural workers operating as photographers, filmmakers, as playwrights, painters, musicians. There was a common energy there. One of the most vital collaborations of that period was between Stuart Hall and the artists associated with the Black Audio Film Collective. *The Stuart Hall Project* is a reminder of the generative energy of that collaboration, as is, in an institutional setting, the work of inIVA. In the more professionalised world that we inhabit today Cultural Studies seems primarily a scholarly activity: in going 'all scholarly' it has lost some of its solidarity with artists and writers keen to fashion a popular culture worth giving a damn about. If Cultural Studies is going to survive and grow in the current climate it has to be a project that 'gives a damn' and is worth giving a damn about: a project that strives at world-making, at constituting a socialist culture - not just as an endless critique of the system. What would a popular culture look like that was worth giving a damn for? What would we want to see from a culture that could participate in constituting a socialism open to polymorphic sexualities, and working to free us of racism and sexism? If by socialism we would include a place where our collectivity-through-difference can be explored in a range of moods (angrily, mournfully, joyously, didactically, elegiacally) then I hope we would find space to include *The Stuart Hall Project* as well as Miles Davis' plaintive improvisations.

This review was written shortly before the death of Stuart Hall.

3. *The Ghosts of Songs: The Film Art of the Black Audio Film Collective 1982-1998*, by Kodwo Eshun and Anjalika Sagar (eds), Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2007, p181.