



Book Review

Tony Jefferson (2021) *Stuart Hall, Conjunctural Analysis and Cultural Criminology—A Missed Moment*. Palgrave Macmillan

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Stuart Hall (1932–2014) exerted a colossal influence on British intellectual life across numerous fields, including cultural studies, media studies, race and ethnic studies, political theory and criminology. That influence stretched well beyond his adoptive home, as the avalanche of condolences and obituaries from across the globe following his death testifies.

Tony Jefferson's book, *Stuart Hall, Conjunctural Analysis and Cultural Criminology—A Missed Moment* (2021), is primarily concerned with Hall's contributions to criminology. However, it reflects Hall's intellectual sensibility and concerns that such disciplinary boundaries counted for little. Indeed, Hall brought many different fields, such as those mentioned above, into novel and creative dialogues with each other. Thus, while Jefferson focuses on criminology, the intellectual scope of his book necessarily encompasses, in one way or another, all those fields to which Hall made pioneering contributions. Hall's two books, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (1978; *PTC*) and *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* (1976; *RTR*), both products of that most fertile collaborative institutional setting led by Hall, the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, are Hall's most important and enduring studies of relevance to criminology. Jefferson, among others, was a key collaborator in these endeavours. The unifying thread, however, is the idea of 'conjunctural analysis'—the capacity to elucidate a political moment and a societal trajectory in all its dynamic complexity—that Jefferson traces so incisively across the entire corpus of Hall's work. In Part I, Chapter 2, of the book, Jefferson follows Hall's development of conjunctural analysis from some of his earliest political writing to *RTR*. Chapter 3 (also in Part I) is devoted entirely to *PTC*, and it is Hall's work in this period that is of particular interest to me in this review.

Few with knowledge of Hall's intellectual achievements could cavil at the claim that it is in *PTC* that the power of conjunctural analysis is demonstrated in such a compelling way. As a co-author of *PTC*, Jefferson tells the story from inside the research project, which culminated in the 1978 publication. Jefferson's account of the project is in and of itself an original contribution to the understanding of conjunctural analysis; Jefferson offers a rather meticulous anatomy of how, beginning with a particular local crime and the draconian sentences imposed on young perpetrators, the project moved to successive levels of analysis, each revealing the multiple determinations that linked a particular local event to what ultimately was revealed to be a crisis of hegemony in wider British society in the second half of the 1970s. It is important that the researchers did not set out to conceptualise the crime from the summit of neo-Marxist theorising. Indeed, Jefferson acknowledges that there was an element of inadvertence to the way the study unfolded. It was led by the method, which itself was also being adapted and refined as the



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researchers engaged with the subject matter, the theoretical tools to hand and the various layers of analysis. This story is recounted beautifully by Jefferson.

Published the year before the election in Britain of a government very different from its post-war predecessors—a Conservative government led by Margaret Thatcher—*PTC* proved to be profoundly prescient, as the crisis of hegemony it delineated brought forth a radical shift to the right in the British political landscape. In the years that followed, such a shift proved to have counterparts across much of the liberal democratic capitalist world, thus increasing the significance of the analysis in *PTC*. In Hall's interventions in the ensuing years—articles, debates and talks—he further developed the analysis in *PTC* and reflected at length on its implications for left and progressive politics. He described the 'drift into a law-and-order society' (Hall 1980) that accompanied—and indeed was a defining characteristic of—what was often referred to as the politics of the New Right and subsequently neoliberalism. Hall coined the term 'authoritarian populism' to describe the Thatcher regime, and this some years before criminologists began talking about 'penal populism' to refer to a somewhat narrower phenomenon confined mostly to the politics around crime and punishment.

Criminologists (this reviewer included) and others of critical inclination have tended to seize on the rich theoretical analysis in *PTC* and apply it to their own local circumstances, but in so many ways this overlooks *PTC*'s core contribution—the conjunctural analytical approach. It is this shortcoming, more than anything else, that led Jefferson to write *Stuart Hall, Conjunctural Analysis and Cultural Criminology—A Missed Moment*, and correcting it stands as its key justification. What Jefferson regards as the 'failure by criminologists to take up the conjunctural message from *PTC*' (p. 47) is the 'missed moment' of the book's subtitle.

But what is conjunctural analysis? Jefferson describes this in clear terms in his dissection of the research project upon which *PTC* was based, but he also explains it in more general terms in the second part of the book (Chapter 4) in which he rigorously (and rather unsparingly) takes to task more recent work in cultural criminology for overlooking the 'conjunctural injunction'. More specifically, Jefferson chastises cultural criminology's tendency to begin not with a historically specific moment or event—in short, with something concrete, particular and empirical (in *PTC*, a crime and the reaction to it)—but with a general theoretical or abstract account or characterisation of present conditions (late modernity/late modern capitalism), which is then used to frame and explain (and select and interpret) the particulars in a way that confirms the theory. The analysis is pre-empted by the theory rather than, as he puts it, 'using crime as a route to understanding the power relations that underpin both the act of crime and the responses to it' (p. 79). Conjunctural analysis does not eschew theory in favour of remaining at the level of empirical description—far from it. Instead, theory is introduced reflexively (i.e., critically) at each stage of the 'route to understanding' the many and complex determinations that comprise the conjuncture in question: 'Conjunctural analysis ... uses the act of theorizing to illuminate the realities of specific historical moments: it thus starts with the particular and is disciplined by it, not by theory' (p. 107). This, it might be added, underlines the potential value of Jefferson's book as a text for use in advanced critical methods courses.

In the following chapter in Part II (Chapter 5), Jefferson shows how some other leading work in cultural studies remained faithful to the conjunctural method, and he highlights the pay-off in understanding that such fidelity yields. He also demonstrates (in Part II, Chapter 6) how the method involves a certain critical eclecticism (or 'principled eclecticism') when it comes to theory. As theoretical tools are applied in a non-reductionist way to identify the social forces, processes and power relations underpinning a particular event or moment, the limits of, or gaps in, their explanatory power are also revealed, thus pointing to another necessary layer of analysis and the introduction of further theoretical tools or refinements to account for those gaps and to deepen the analysis. However, insights relating to the event, uncovered as part of the initial or subsequent layers of analysis, are not discarded or sought to be simply reduced to the ensuing or some higher level of theoretical analysis. In this way, the event—the empirical particular—serves as a check on (or disciplines) the analysis, directing the search for yet deeper, more complex determining forces and the theoretical tools required to uncover them while preventing the analysis from lapsing into theoreticism. A simple example from *PTC* is the way in which mugging was seen to trigger a 'moral panic'. This phenomenon had been earlier studied and conceptualised by Stan Cohen in his highly influential book on the mods and rockers, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (1973), in which moral panic was understood as temporary or episodic in character. However, since the mods and rockers, there had been a succession of moral panics around youth subcultures and crime, and with the mugging panic, the political and legal shifts—the gearing up of the state into a more coercive mode—had assumed a more permanent form. This required further layers of analysis, and eventually the analysis of the conjuncture as one comprising a society-wide crisis of authority or hegemony and the advent of an 'exceptional state'.

Beyond the contribution to empirical and theoretical understanding, conjunctural analysis has a political purpose: to (better) grasp the prevailing balance of social (political, ideological and economic) forces at a particular moment and to inform responses to it. Hall was a close student of Marx's methods, as much as he was of Marx's general theory of capitalist

development; however, his greatest intellectual debt was probably to Antonio Gramsci, the Italian communist leader and theoretician, whose thought was shaped by conditions prevailing in the relatively advanced Western European capitalist countries. There, insurrectionary politics and change no longer appeared to carry any prospect of success. Gramsci directed his attention less to rule by coercion and the Leninist concept of revolution as frontal assault on the state than to the nature of rule where it involved a process of constructing the substantial consent of, or moral leadership over, the masses. Thus, it was the heightened importance of politics, of ideology, of culture and, especially, of the concept of *hegemony* in the writings of Gramsci and in his political theoretical legacy, that was widely embraced and deployed in the work of many neo-Marxist thinkers in the '70s, none more assiduously and creatively than Stuart Hall.

Jefferson's *Stuart Hall, Conjunctural Analysis and Cultural Criminology—A Missed Moment* does much more than provide an elegant and incisive account and appraisal of Hall's intellectual legacy. In Part III, Chapter 7, Jefferson turns to the leitmotiv of Hall's later work around identity, race, and nation—the problem of 'living with difference'—to bring conjunctural analysis into the present. He undertakes perspicacious examinations of Brexit (Chapters 8 and 9) and the Trump phenomenon (Chapter 10). Of particular value is the manner in which Jefferson tackles the articulations between race, class and gender in the present conjuncture in Britain and the United States and how he links the analysis back to aspects of the analysis in *PTC*. I referred earlier to the fact that the 'Thatcherite moment' was a precursor to the advent of neoliberalism as a global phenomenon that left few corners of the world untouched. This was symptomatic of conditions—and manifestations of crisis—obtaining in the latest stage of world capitalist development, to which neoliberalism proved to be a (if not *the*) hegemonic response, albeit in varying forms and conditioned by national and local differences. It points to the demand to think also in terms of a global conjunctural frame. As Jefferson makes clear, this is a need that has lost none of its urgency given a whole host of more recent events and developments, including global terrorism, the global financial crisis, climate change, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, the #MeToo movement and the Coronavirus 2019 pandemic. The new global media and communications landscape constitutes an additional crucial development, but one that also amplifies the effects of all the others. It is not possible to do justice to these analyses in a short review, but they seem to represent a great advance on what so often appear to be identity-driven modes of analysis that eschew specificity, complexity, contingency and contradiction—all those features so central to conjunctural analysis. Instead, messy, multifaceted historical and contemporary realities are squeezed into theoretical frameworks in which domination appears seamless and monolithic. Such accounts hardly begin to tackle the multiple determining factors and contradictions that sustain the conditions they execrate and thus what might be needed by way of political response to challenge and transform them.

In the Coda—the chapter following 'Conclusion: From Policing the Crisis to Trump, and Beyond' (Chapter 10)—Jefferson draws on psychoanalysis to explore how in conjunctural analyses of Brexit and Trumpism, one might make sense of the particular role of populist anger. Hall did not ignore it, but he had limited use for psychoanalytic theory in his own studies and had difficulty in seeing how it could be deployed in political analysis. Conversely, Jefferson, with his long-standing engagement with psychoanalysis, sees the value of incorporating non-reductive psycho-social analysis into the study of the present populist moment, one in which the emotion of anger at the individual level and the social level is manifestly central. Jefferson does not shrink from the considerable difficulties of doing so but offers some tantalising pointers, always in the spirit of intellectual openness and relentless inquiry. This is the hallmark of *Stuart Hall, Conjunctural Analysis and Cultural Criminology—A Missed Moment* and of the life and work of its subject.

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