Stuart Hall and Memory Studies

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clip https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QDH4IBeZF-M

A piece of black and white archival footage shows a white British journalist approaching the Caribbean calypso singer Lord Kitchener, asking him to perform a song in front of the TV cameras facing him. The scene takes place as Kitchener is about to disembark from the SS Empire Windrush docking at Tilbury in June 1948. Initially a piece of analogue film gauge, screened as part of a Pathé newsreel in British cinemas, this piece of archival footage has become part of the audiovisual archive itself (In my book I developed the concept of the "audiovisual archive" to describe those images and sounds circulating in a specific society at a given historical moment. Inspired by Stuart Hall I highlight the situatedness and discursivity of the images and sounds which surround us). The Lord Kitchener-clip has been remediated in a variety of contexts, from historical exhibitions to YouTube – it was screened at the opening exhibition of Rivington Place in Shoreditch (which houses the Stuart Hall Library). The footage has been used in British documentaries on Caribbean migration to Britain and in the legendary essay film Handsworth Songs by the Black Audio Film Collective (dir. John Akomfrah, 1986), in itself, through its reworking of archival footage, an intervention into the audiovisual archive. Today the scene of Lord Kitchener freestyling his calypso has become a central part of the cultural memory of post-war migration to Britain. This has not always been the case: for about 50 years, the impact of the Windrush generation was hardly acknowledged. Today, we have a highly mythological discourse around the Windrush – as the foundation of multicultural Britain. This clip inspired me to rethink notions of the archive, remediation and transculturality and to make an intervention into current trends within memory studies – informed by my readings of Stuart Hall.

Media memory studies and archival footage

Archival footage raises questions on the mediation of memory, its media specificity and the way memory travels, how it is adapted, translated and appropriated. The pictorial turn (Mitchell 1994) has led to a deeper understanding of images as historical sources in their own right. Documentary images are often considered a source of factual, positive knowledge, which is why archival footage is often used as visible evidence to show “how it really was” (“wie es einst
gewesen”) in the sense of Ranke. However, as John Tagg points out in *The Burden of Representation*: “Like the state, the camera is never neutral. The representations it produces are highly coded, and the power it wields is never its own” (Tagg 1988, 63-64). (This is s.th. we can clearly see in the clip) Representation, as Stuart Hall constantly reminds us, is not neutral and is pervaded by power relations. Racist imagery is not an exception of the rule, but the rule itself. As Richard Dyer (1997) has shown, the technological apparatus of analogue photography and filmmaking has been constructed in a way which prioritizes white skin tones. It constructs white skin as the norm. Archival footage such as this allows us to rethink notions of mediality, of the politics of representation, of the colonial and Eurocentric gaze and other power relations prevalent in image making, it can make us think about the workings of historiography and canon formation.

The notion of documentary images as visible evidence has also been challenged within documentary film theory (Minh-ha 1990; Steyerl 2008), via filmmaking (for instance in essay films by Chris Marker, Harun Farocki, Agnès Varda or John Akomfrah), as well as in theoretical writings on photography (e.g. Barthes 1982; Sontag 1977; Sekula 1986; Hall 1991).

My work situates itself at the intersection of memory studies and film studies and regards itself as a contribution to the recently burgeoning field of media memory studies. Given the insight that cultural memory is always mediated, it is surprising to see how small the impact from film and media studies has been until now. And: it is surprising to see how small the impact from Stuart Hall has been until now. Within the vast terrain of memory studies, the name of Stuart Hall has been conspicuously absent. While a number of important memory scholars, such as Bill Schwarz and Susannah Radstone and Astrid Erll, are clearly indebted to Hall's ideas, my aim is to introduce Hall's theorizations in their capacity to become seminal texts within memory studies. I argue that many of Hall's writings provide important insights into the mediation of transnational memories. When I was working on my book, I found that Stuart Hall had something important to say about each new aspect I discovered. The aim of my paper is therefore to re-introduce Stuart Hall into discourses on memory. Revisiting some of Stuart Hall's theorizations put forward in texts such as “New Ethnicities”, “Whose Heritage” and “Reconstruction Work”, my paper suggests new ways of reconceptualising notions such as transculturality, remediation and the archive. However, (when my paper was 15 pages long, I realised it was a feeble idea to do so here). Due to the limited time frame I will only briefly mention the archive and transculturality before showing Stuart Hall's impact on remediation.

**But first a few words on**
**Memory studies**

Memory scholars examine how the past is negotiated in the present. Since the 1980s memory studies have developed into a burgeoning field, with several “turns” - for instance the transnational/transcultural turn, or – right now – the ”media turn”. Currently we can observe two tendencies: first, the tendency to leave the notion of 'collective memory' behind, a fairly homogenizing concept which goes back to readings of Maurice Halbwachs, and second, the move away from the focus on the nation, due to the impact of the reception of Pierre Nora since the 1980s. Within the last decade, cultural memory studies have increasingly shifted their focus towards the dynamics of memory and its global remediation (see Erll and Rigney 2009; Rothberg 2009; Garde-Hansen et al. 2009; Erll 2011b; Hoskins 2011; Rigney 2012). Both the dominant national perspective and the notion of collective memory have been challenged in favour of highlighting the dynamics of cultural memory, theorised in terms of “prosthetic memory” (Landsberg 2004), “multidirectional memories” (Rothberg 2009) or “travelling memory” (Erll 2011b). This ongoing shift towards perceiving memory as a process, as not fixed or stable, is the result of a heightened awareness regarding the impact of media on the construction of cultural memory.

**media**

Memory is always mediated, as Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney claim: “Just as there is no cultural memory prior to mediation, there is no mediation without remediation: all representations of the past draw on available media technologies, on existent media products, on patterns of representation and medial aesthetics.” (Erll and Rigney 2009, 4) Cultural memory is only accessible in its media specific forms and genres, via TV news, as YouTube clips, feature films, novels or newspaper articles. James E. Young has pointed out “that none of us coming to the Holocaust afterwards can know these events outside the ways they are passed down to us” (Young 1988, vii). The role of media in the construction of memory thus needs to be reconsidered: from being regarded as an ‘outlet’ of memory, as an externalization, to acknowledging cultural memory as inextricably linked to its specific media forms. Accordingly, Marita Sturken describes media as “technologies of memory, not vessels of memory in which memory passively resides” (1997, 9). Also Aleida Assmann (2011) has pointed at the fact that cultural memory is defined by the kind of media available in a society at a given point in time. A historical event – such as the arrival of the Windrush – can be said to have been created by newspaper articles, newsreels, photographs, diaries, historiographic works, poems, novels, plays, paintings, memorials, films, TV series, comics and

The transcultural turn within memory studies and its pitfalls

Stuart Hall's ideas about identity as an anti-essentialist concept are well-known, most prominently put forward in his seminal “New Ethnicities”. Therefore it comes as a surprise that the impact of 1980s Black British Cultural Studies on debates around cultural identity has hardly been acknowledged in memory studies – maybe implicitly, but hardly in an explicit way. Migration and diaspora are part of everyday life, both in contemporary multicultural societies and throughout history. In most conceptualisations of the nation these factors have been overlooked. In order to acknowledge the impact of migration and diaspora, memory studies make increasingly use of the concept of “transculturality.” However, transculturality has been used predominantly with regards to nation and ethnicity. I argue that this implies a risk of re-essentialising the notion of “culture”: migrant and diasporic memories are regarded as s.th. which transgresses cultural boundaries. My move (in my book) was to de-essentialise the notion of transculturality: instead of tying it to nation or ethnicity, I am highly skeptical of the notion of cultural boundaries anyway, as I would agree with Stuart Hall that all cultures are inherently hybrid and are constantly undergoing changes. Memory scholars therefore need to avoid to – even unwillingly – re-essentialise the notion of culture when they perceive migrant and diasporic memory as transcultural memory, whereas they would otherwise talk about “cultural memory” or heritage. I have therefore put forward an attempt to de-essentialise the notion of transcultural memory (as it is out there and will not simply disappear). Using the example of Manchester's post-punk memories in the context of urban reconstruction, I suggest to use the term to designate the way memories travel through different contexts, how they are adapted and appropriated according to shifting needs. Mediated memories are recontextualised when – for example – a specific photograph is published in different journals, is re-published a couple of years later, will then be shown in an exhibition or circulate online. The same goes for a film: it might first be released at a festival, then in the cinemas, then on DVD and later online. Each release, each new circulation is situated in a specific historical context. This context is permeated by a number of competing discourses, but also by material aspects: the economics and technologies around production, distribution and reception.

This does not mean to say that the historical event is a fiction or has not actually taken place. The point is that we can only access the event via the various media versions.
The construction of national heritage is a memory practice. It is interesting that the Windrush has hardly played a role in British self-fashioning and historiography alike – until the late 1990s when – inspired by its 50th anniversary, the BBC produced an influential tv-series based on oral history interviews with Caribbean migrants of the so-called Windrush-generation. And here I come to the notion of the archive, as the archive is the foundation of how history is written. Or, as Stuart Hall has put it: “The past cannot speak, except through its ‘archive’.” (Hall 1991, 152)

ARCHIVE
Stuart Hall has published two texts on the archive – and his approaches are symptomatic for the way the archive has recently been conceptualised – oscillating between its materiality and its discursivity. Taking as a point of departure Michel Foucault's (1982, 44) definition of the archive as a system of both control and of enunciation, our understanding of the archive can also be expanded from that of a building housing textual documents to that of the visual – or audiovisual – archive, housing images and sounds of the past that continue to exert an influence in the present. However, since archives have historically been dominated by a Eurocentric, colonialist perspective, immigrants have had few or no possibilities to represent themselves and to enter their stories into the archive of national historiography. "Constituting an archive", published in Third Text in 2001, deals with a real existing archive: INIVA, the other one, "Whose Heritage? offers a more discursive approach – the tension played out here, is what I am interested in.

"Whose heritage is it?" is a question posed by Stuart Hall at a 1999 Arts Council conference in Manchester during his keynote address on heritage politics in Britain and the exclusions it produces. Hall criticises British heritage politics as targeting the white middle-classes, and suggests a more inclusive approach: “It follows that those who cannot see themselves reflected in its mirror cannot properly ‘belong’.” (Hall 1999, 14) In more recent museum exhibitions we can see how notions of diversity are currently replacing the idea of a homogenous past. Museums in Britain have begun to include histories of ethnic minorities which were previously not represented. The Museum of London or the Slavery Museum in Liverpool try to acknowledge different experiences and pasts under the umbrella of contemporary multicultural Britain, acknowledging migrant and diasporic experiences and providing a discursive space for the articulation of cultural memory. If we understand the archive as the foundation from which history is written, a diversification of cultural memory can only be granted if the archival context represents multiple narratives and images, instead of providing representations which would stabilise rather than re-negotiate hegemonic narratives.
Susannah Radstone has argued that memory is pervaded by discourses of power and is itself the result of networks of power and knowledge (see Radstone and Hodgkin 2003). Memory is therefore to be understood as a regime. Drawing on Michel Foucault, Stuart Hall (Hall 1997, 44) states (in "The work of representation") that the discourse "defines and produces the objects of our knowledge. It governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned with. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others."

Highlighting the power structures at work within representation has shaped my understanding of remediation and recontextualisation of images. I argue for an understanding of remediation which not only takes the media specificity of remediation into account, but also its power dimension.

Here we come to the notion of remediation:

My attempt at rethinking the notion of remediation has been inspired by Stuart Hall's article “Reconstruction Work. Images of Post-War Black Settlement” (Hall 1991). (First published in Ten8, in German in Diskurse der Fotografie) In this article Stuart Hall looks at the visual archive of the Black diaspora in Britain after the Second World War. For Hall, photography is not a “unitary thing”, but a set of multiple “practices, institutions and historical conjunctures in which the photographic text is produced, circulated and deployed” (Hall 1991, 152). When employing photographs from the Black settlement in Britain after WWII one should keep in mind that many of them have already been published before, for example, in magazines and press publications. Therefore, these images are “already inscribed or placed by that earlier positioning” and most of them “will already have been organised within certain systems of classification” (Hall 1991, 152). Each renewed publication might create a new context for these photographs, adding a new layer of meaning. For that reason it would be impossible to recreate the original meaning of these photographs, and to look for their 'true meaning' would be an illusionary endeavour. Instead, the images are “essentially multilayered in meaning” (Hall 1991, 152), they are always inscribed into a set of practices and into their industrial context of production, distribution and reception. Therefore they cannot transcend time without having their meaning altered in the process of translation and recontextualisation. Images can evoke contradictory meanings, they are characterised by intertextual relations to other photographs and, as I would add, to the audiovisual archive. Using the example of the now famous photographs showing the arrival of the so-called Windrush generation during the late 1940s and 1950s, Hall explains how the individual viewer's knowledge, affect, empathy and understanding contribute to the way the photographs will be 'decoded' (Hall). What is “beyond the frame”, as Hall (1991, 154) puts it, “registers inside the frame”. Remediation does not occur in a vacuum, but is triggered by specific discursive constellations, by mediated events. The
questions to be studied are: What triggers remediation? What kind of events are remediated more than others – and in which media formats? We therefore need to take a closer look at both the media specificity and the discursive context of remediation. In his article Stuart Hall offers a useful framework for understanding the politics of representation in its industrial context. Media production, but also distribution and exhibition are situated in a specific sociohistorical context. They are not timeless – even if they live on to become classics, each screening or publication will create new contexts. Lord Kitchener and the Windrush experience on YouTube, for example, have been appropriated for diverse purposes. But, I will leave it here.

Hopefully, this paper has shown how memory studies could profit from Stuart Hall's valuable theorizations on anti-essentialism, representation and the workings of cultural heritage.