

# Stuart hall and ghosts argumentative essay sample

[Sociology](#), [Community](#)



The central theme of Hall's essay "The Spectacle of the other" is about the differences we see amongst ourselves, and how these differences essentially lead to stereotyping. This essay will aim at presenting the four ways in which 'difference' is theorized according to Stuart Hall. Of these four arguments, we will examine one of the arguments namely the psychoanalytical one through another of Freud's works, and its connection to Hall as well as the connection of both these themes to the concept of Hauntology by Jacques Derrida. We will also be briefly exploring each of the four arguments through Hauntology and the concept of Derrida's ghosts.

## **The Arguments**

We now discuss the four arguments briefly as outlined by Hall.

- 1] Linguistics. Saussure presents the main argument here that difference matters a lot, since it is important to meaning, and without differences meaning would not exist. (Hall 234) The idea here is that meaning is dependent on difference between opposites, or what is commonly known as binary oppositions, such as white or black, day or night and so on. While, they seem to be a rather rudimentary way of establishing meaning of a difference, we cannot stop using such binary oppositions completely either, for fear of distorting meaning. Ideally, we would be better off without these binary oppositions, but are forced to use it to convey meaning, in a sense.
- 2] Dialogic Argument. This concept was put forth by Mikhail Bakhtin. The argument in this case is that we need 'difference' since we can only construct meaning in a dialogue with the other. (Hall 235) Basically, this indicated that meaning is fundamentally 'dialogic' as interpreted by Bakhtin, and that meaning arose only when there was a difference between two

speakers in a dialogue. Thus difference here is seen as central to understanding dialogues between two speakers. The flip side to this argument is that meaning can never be fixed, and one group is not in charge of meaning. Meaning is always being negotiated through dialogue between various national and international 'cultures and their 'others.'

3] Anthropological Argument. The central argument here is that each individual culture gives meaning by classification of things into different groupings. This marking of 'difference' is what we commonly call 'culture.' (Hall 236) Claude Levi-Strauss argued that social groups bring meaning to their own world by classifying things into detailed classificatory systems. Levi-Strauss further argued that given many kinds of food, we start by dividing them into two groups - cooked and raw food. Similarly food gets classified into many different groups, making 'difference' fundamental to cultural meaning. On the contrary, such classifications can give rise to negative feelings and practices, especially when a certain group does not classify into any known classification. Basically, this means that binary classifications become important, because a clear difference between things are needed in order to classify them.

In terms of Derrida's hauntology, ghosts also deconstruct the very concept of classification, just like they take apart the concept of binary thought. As mentioned, we cannot classify a ghost either as living or dead, and neither can we classify it as the past or the present. Further, we cannot even classify a ghost as present or absent. The absence of all classification when we talk of a ghost or even the undead, destroys the very concept of 'difference' and consequently of classification.

4] Psychoanalytical argument. The argument here is that the ' Other' is essential to the constitution of the Self, to us as subjects, and to our sexual identity. (Hall 237) Freud is of the opinion here that we start seeing difference starting with ' sexual' differences right from childhood, which Freud illustrates through the example of the Oedipus Complex. This argument is better understood in another masterpiece written by Freud. In this essay, Das Unheimlich translated simply as ' The Uncanny,' Freud talks about the fact that most seemingly familiar things seem alien to us, and it makes us afraid of such things. He begins by exploring the lingual origins of the words ' Heimlich' and ' Unheimlich' in German. In the English context these words mean homely or familiar. However, the opposite namely ' Unheimlich' does not mean the exact opposite in English, and instead has a range of words to describe the same including ghastly, gloom and haunted. (Freud 125)

Freud further explains and elaborates this concept through the story of the Sand-man. From the point of view of our argument, a ' difference' is perpetuated in the mind of the small boy Nathaniel by the nursemaid, merely by telling exaggerated stories of the Sandman to put the children to sleep. One day Nathaniel sneaks out and discovers that this so called Sandman is in fact Coppelius - a lawyer, who comes to meet the boy's father. Nathaniel identifies Coppelius with the Sandman. At this point, Nathaniel is caught eavesdropping, and Coppelius desires to have red hot coal thrown into the boys' eyes. This shocks the boy who falls violently ill. (Freud 137)

Through the essay mentioned above and the reading by Hall, we can

perceive clearly that in psychoanalytical theory, difference arises from familiarity, and difference also breeds fear. We tend to project our own feelings of repulsiveness and uneasiness on others, since projection is a kind of defense mechanism that enables to make an unfamiliar object 'foreign' to our own Self. This projection also is paranoia according to Freud, which are characterized by delusions of grandeur, persecution and jealousy. All these factors are typical of stereotyping minorities, especially when the majority has these kinds of repressed feelings. This is what perpetuates 'difference,' whether cultural, racial or linguistic.

### **Works Cited**

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Hall, Stuart, et al. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2013. Print

Freud, Sigmund. *The Uncanny*. Trans. D. McClintock, London: Penguin Books, 2003. Print