Through the Prism of an Intellectual Life | Featuring Stuart Hall

[TRANSCRIPT]

HALL: I want in particular to express my sincere gratitude and thanks to all those who have in the last two days engaged in some way with my work-- found ideas that I've expressed useful, chosen-- even when I don't believe them-- to attribute inspiration to me in some way. But simply for the act of being here, and being willing to engage my work in that way. Especially, I want to express my gratitude to those who traveled long distances to do so.

Now, I can't in any way repay what they've done, because I can't begin at this point to try to reply or respond in any detail to the many things which have been said-- and the important ideas which have been circulated, and the points which have been raised.

And since I can't respond in detail, what on earth can I do? And I've had to try to express to you a certain experience of myself over the last two days. And that is to say, I keep looking around trying to discover this person that everybody is talking about. Occasionally I recognize them. I sort of know him. He has the kind of familiarity, every now and again. I know a lot of the ideas. I recognize some of the quotes, but I have to confess not all.

There are one or two I'm very grateful to acknowledge. And I hope to get the reference before you depart. But this experience of, as it were, experiencing oneself as an object, of encountering-- of encountering oneself from the outside, now as another sort of person next door, as it were, is very strange-- the kind of intense, serialized set of embarrassments.

And I want just to draw first thought about thought from that anecdotal observation. I think theory is rather like that-- theorizing or thinking-- in the sense that one confronts the absolute unknowingness, or the opacity, or the density of the reality of the subject one's trying to understand. Which presents itself first to one as both too multifarious, too complicated with its patterns, too hidden, its interconnections unrevealed, et cetera.

And there is a sense in which one has to stand, as it were, back outside of oneself, in order to make the detour through thought back to grasp what it is one is trying to, think about in another way, in another mode.

I think the world is resistance to thought. I think it's resistant to theory. I don't think it likes to be thought. I don't think it likes to be understood. And therefore thinking is a kind of labor. It's a kind of work. It's not something which simply just flows from inside one.

And one of the perplexities about doing intellectual work is that of course to be any sort of intellectual is to attempt to raise one's self-reflexiveness to the highest maximum point of intensity. Someone referred-- I think Mike Reston-- earlier on to my early work on Henry James, and what a bizarre thing it is that this is where my career should have started.

But you know, one of the things about James was of course the attempt to gain a kind of maximum intensity of self-consciousness-- to be as self-aware about the finest movements of one's own

conscious thinking. And yet to do that is to become instantly aware of the enormous unconsciousness of thinking, of thought-- what one simply cannot and will never be able to recuperate self reflexively.

And all these thoughts come from being present at the conference in which I somehow am being discussed, and also discussing. I mean, I felt I know a little bit about that too. I can see a figure in the carpet there, that I couldn't see before. And I was tempted to kind of join in and speak of me, as in the third person.

What I wanted to say about that is, of course, that constantly in this context, everyone sees all sorts of things about oneself and one's own thinking, and connections in one's work-- and patterns behind the patterns-- which one could not possibly see for oneself. One never will see for oneself.

In that sense, one is always-- oneself-- escaping the attempt to self-knowledge-- the attempt to become identical with myself. That is not possible. I can't become identical with myself. To think is to have that inevitable distance between the subject that is thinking and what is being thought about. And that is just a condition of intellectual work.

The second thought about thinking-- about the thought that we've been discussing these two days-- was my response to the invitation from Brian, Tony, and Rupert, to as it were become, at this very late stage in life, a Caribbean intellectual.

In what sense could I possibly claim to be a Caribbean intellectual? Not in the most obvious sense of the term at all. My work has not been largely about the Caribbean. I have not been actively present in the enormously important work of trying to write the history of the Caribbean in the period of independence. That's to say, including writing its past from the perspective of an independent nation. I have not been party in that deep way to the project of writing the history of the nation.

I'm a Caribbean in the most banal sense-- in the sense that I was born there. But that accident of birth is not enough to justify owning up to the title.

And I have to confess, although they don't know it, that I did seriously think of saying to them, I'm sorry, but I'm not a Caribbean intellectual in the sense in which I think you ought to be honoring people. And the reason why I decided not to do that was because, reflecting on my own life and practice, I have to say that although in many moments of my life I've been thinking about what many people in the Caribbean would think as other problems, other places, other dilemmas, it seems to me I've always been doing so through what I can only call the prism of my Caribbean formation.

In that sense, I'm committed to the idea of the politics of location in thought-- which does not mean that we can only think the things which are possible to think from a certain position-- that all thought is necessarily self-interested because of where it comes from, or anything like that. But I mean something rather looser than that-- that one never can escape the way in which one's formation lays a kind of imprint on what one's interested in, what kind of take one would have on that topic, what link linkages one wants to make, and so on.

And in that sense that is true even about so-called cultural studies, with which of course, inevitably, my work and my career has been identified. Which I feel a certain responsibility for every now and again. Which I've tried to evade as far as possible being responsible for-- try to evade having to defend it. Made rude noises about it, so people think, oh well, he doesn't really belong to him after all. But nevertheless one feels a certain responsibility for it.

Well, cultural studies has its own internal history as a discipline. But when I think about why I ever got into it, I know I got into it in part because, before what is called cultural studies ever began at Birmingham, I had the problem of trying to understand what Caribbean culture was and what my relationship to it was. And I put it that way because my relationship to it in terms of its natural origins-- that's to say he was born here, so he's a Caribbean. So he's a Caribbean intellectual because he's an intellectual. That kind of natural logic doesn't work.

My relationship to the Caribbean was one of dislocation, of displacement-- literally and figuratively displaced. My life as a young person, as a child, as an adolescent were spent there. I left at 18 years. I've never lived in the Caribbean since then. A relationship then-- a negative relationship, you would think, of displacement and dislocation.

And dislocation in a deeper sense. Because the reason why I was so committed to leaving the Caribbean, and the reason why in some ways I never returned to live there, had to do with my colonial formation-- with my formation as a colonial subject.

Now, because there's so many young people in the audience, I want to remind you that I'm talking about something very specific. I'm talking about being a colonial subject. Not a post-colonial subject, a colonial subject. I left for England 12 years before independence. My whole formation had been as a child of a colored, middle-class Jamaican society.

And my relationship to that background, which I don't want to go into in a personal sense-- I have only to say that I felt, as a subject, consistently out of place, both in relation to my family and my personal formation-- and in relation to the society in which I'd been born.

To the point where I left Jamaica, I did not understand what was the source of that dislocation, but I thought it was a largely personal one. It wasn't until much later that I discovered that this was this experience of dislocation experienced by a whole generation of intellectual people.

When I went to London there they all were, hiding out, all of them making some kind of escape attempt from this colonial society. All of them on the search for becoming modern subjects, but with the bizarre thought that you had to leave the place in order to become a really modern kind of person-- to go somewhere else. Not anywhere, of course, but right to the heart of the dislocation itself-- to that which had, at a distance, dislocated you.

And when I say, dislocated you, I'm talking about serious stuff. I'm talking about never feeling at one with the expectations my family had for me of the sort of person I should become, of what I should do with my life. And of dislocation from the people themselves-- from the mass of the people-- from not being able in some way to find myself in the context in which I was born, brought

up, and lived. And I thought, this is a recipe for disaster. The thing to do is to get out of here-- go somewhere else.

There's a wonderful passage in Lamming's Pleasures of Exile-- a book which I strongly recommend to you, if you're interested in this period of Caribbean intellectual history-- and especially you must appreciate and enjoy the ironies of the word pleasures-- the pleasures of exile-- in which Lamming says, we all at a certain moment-- every one of us writers, without exchanging a letter with one another, a message-- just picked ourselves up and went to England. Turned around, discovered we're all here. Lamming, Naipaul, Victor Reid, Mittelholzer, on and on and on. The Caribbean novel, West Indian novel, as you know, was created in London in that period. What a bizarre thought.

What's more, as Lamming says, this generation first became West Indian in London-- an even worse bizarre thought. When I went to London, I had met-- really seriously met-- only one other person from elsewhere in the Caribbean. He was a Barbadian. And I never met anybody so bizarre in all my life. I'd been taught by the Welsh, taught by the Scots, taught by the English. I was extremely familiar with them. But who and where was Barbados? We didn't know anything about the rest of the Caribbean islands. We discovered ourselves as West Indians somewhere else.

And having, as it were, gone away in order to try to evade or escape the reality of the colonial world with which I could not come to terms there-- below me, first of all, the whole colonial world seemed to deposit itself through Paddington Station on my doorstep. Within two years the black diaspora had arrived.

So the thought that one had successfully escaped the problems of the dislocation of colonial experience, unfortunately that is when the Caribbean decided to take the last leg of the Triangular Trade and discovered where it had all started-- and let us go and see what's happening over there. So the notion of evasion and escape attempts, as I sometimes describe it, was completely unsuccessful.

So the connection with, and the sense in which I can be said to be a Caribbean intellectual, is only through trying to go somewhere else-- trying to put a distance between myself and a way of experiencing myself with which I was always unsettled.

In the wonderful exhibition that you've done for me in the library, there is one missing photograph-- the photograph of myself at about five. I mean, I'm in trouble at five. Something is seriously wrong with my feeling about being at home in that place. I do recommend you to read Edward Said's Out of Place, which is the account of exactly such a moment, of exactly such an intellectual in an absolutely other part of the world.

And I want to say that what happens at that moment is suddenly that one discovers that what one takes to be an entirely personal experience somehow is a representative experience in quite different worlds, right across the world at the same conjuncture, in the same historical moment, from so many different points of the orientation in the universe-- of so many different backgrounds and experiences.

The same crisis of being out of place in the world, of not at one with the person one is summoned to be, is being experienced by very different people-- by writers and intellectuals at a certain moment. It is a certain moment I discover this. It is a certain moment in decolonization. It is the moment when decolonization is coming to a crisis. It is the moment when that process is beginning to unroll. It is a particular kind of colonial crisis. It is lived from the inside as a subjective fact.

And yet at the same moment it is a matter of objective historical conjuncture. It is part of the circumstances into which one has been formed, born, et cetera. So I speak about the experience of dislocation. I want to be absolutely clear, that in this sense and in nothing else that I say is there a recommendation of a general intellectual trajectory-- which every boy needs to now get on the boat and do for themselves. I'm talking about one particular moment. That moment is gone.

Circumstances have changed. And the whole configuration has reordered itself. You may feel out of place now, but it's a different out-of-placeness. And believe me, the solution of that is a different one from the one I took. This is not a recommendation about how to become an intellectual in general. This is an account of how it just happened that I became one. I became a certain kind, in a certain moment, in a certain space, in a certain historical conjuncture-- a certain kind of intellectual. That's to say, I learned to think in a certain way-- in that way. That's what I mean by, through the prism of the Caribbean colonial experience. Through the prism, through the form as that kind of colonial person.

There are many other kinds of colonial persons. There are many other people who did not feel out of place in Jamaica. And I don't know that out-of-placeness has to be a necessary precondition for intellectual work. But I tell you, this is one way of learning how to think. It's one way of coming into that.

But if you come into intellectual work in that way-- I said I believe in the politics of formation-- you have to bear and live with, what are the consequences of that? You are going to be drawn again and again to the figure of dislocation. It's going to be something which you-- I'm not offering you now a biographical reason for why I think the things I do.

And I'm not saying that that's the only thing that you ought to think about. But there is a good reason why I keep going back to the question of dislocation. There's a good reason why I keep going back to the figure of what I call the detour through thinking. Not the straightforward self and the subject, but sidestepping, making the move through theorizing, borrowing the ideas, and coming back to constitute that which cannot be lived as an identity.

You can't live yourselves an identity. You can't theorize yourself. I mean, there is no moment to come in which we will be able to live the relations that we are living, if you understand me. We will not be able to do that. We'll be able to reflect on them. We'll be able to reconstitute them in thought. We'll be able to analyze them in depth. But we cannot simply live them.

That was one of the illusions of Marxism, was precisely that one of these days-- after the revolutionary cleavage-- ideology would end. We would be able to live the social relations in which we were embedded without reflection, without the mediation of ideology and culture.

But I must say, I never believed in that, and it's a hope that I cannot hold out to you. We are therefore endlessly in thought, endlessly in culture. It's just the nature and condition of human lives-- condition of human thinking. Not just of intellectual thinking, but of what Gramsci would call the function of the intellectual in everybody.

Because of course, in this sense, intellectuals may have a specialized duty and obligation to think seriously and rigorously. But as Marx once observed, the best and the worst of architects is better than the best of bees, because bees move instinctively. And even the most horrendous architect has to construct an image of the building he's going to build, while he's building it. And he's always thinking and reflecting on practice while practicing. And in that sense, everybody is committed to the act of thinking, and of thought, and of reflection.

And there is no way that we can, as it were, close the circle so that we can simply be the conditions which have framed us. We have to reflect on, what are the conditions of existence which we have not brought into existence-- which have shaped us, which are always already there before we were born-- through which we become subjects.

It's only through that process of reflecting and representing the world to ourselves as we live it that we become subjects. That is not something which happens in the moment of biological formation. The baby emerges. The separation from the mother takes place, but the formation of a subject takes a very long time.

And that fact of separation, which happens in the individual life but is also a kind of paradigm for all of culture-- because the child, in order to become a subject, can no longer simply exist as one with the mother. And has defined, in language, in representation, in the subjective strategies of fantasy-- some way of imagining back a connection with that from which it is now fundamentally separated.

And that symbolic entanglement, which as it were occupies the space through which we make a connection with the other whom we can't be identical with, that's necessary space between self and other-- is of course the birth of culture. It's the birth of language.

You know the famous story in Freud about the child who drops the object out of the cot-- cannot attract the attention of the mother directly-- cannot feed directly from her any longer. That link, this connection is ruptured. It must find a language with which to say, hey, I'm hungry. Hey, I'm over here. Hey, I need nurturing. Hey, I need attention.

The mother comes, picks it up. What do you want? I want to attract your attention.

This is my first attempt at language. I'm in the domain of symbolization. I'm in the domain where I'm representing my relationship to you. That is the birth of language. But the problem about entering culture in that way is, of course, that you cannot make that language up for yourself. The languages you then enter as you become a cultural subject are already there. Somebody else made them. You occupy the traces and the meanings which are already embedded in them. You can only speak by making active again meanings which have already been made.

Now, the magic of culture is that what happens then is that this language-- which doesn't belong to you, of which you cannot be the author-- you can't make it up. You can't make a language from beginning to end. You cannot. It's a private language You won't communicate. But this language, which you cannot make for yourself, of which you cannot be the author, can, however, be used as you position yourself in it, to say the most extraordinary and unique things-- to say the things only you could say.

So what we think of as our individuality, which is given before culture-- we have as a subject just by being born, and then we learn to use the tools of culture-- is quite the reverse. We enter culture, and by doing so appropriate the language which someone else-- that many other people have created for us. Men and women make history, but not on the conditions of their own making-- with elements which are provided from us from the past. And which in some sense are the conditions of our existence, and shape and form us in ways for which we cannot be directly responsible.

Nevertheless within culture, we then can form intentions, make purposes, create the most extraordinary intuitions into life-- create great works of philosophy, of painting, of literature, et cetera. But only because we are already subjected ourselves to the laws, and conventions, and meanings of a language which we could not have made ourselves.

It is called the de-centering of the subject. It's called a dislocation from the position of authorship. It's the dislocation from being-- that humanist dream, which I think is the humanist fantasy, that actually we made it all. It all proceeds from us, from the origins-- from us.

I could say more about how that figure, of the displacement from the position of origin and identity, has recurred in my own thinking. I don't want to say it's recurred in my thinking because it's recurred in my life. But I don't want to say either that it's recurred in my thinking but has nothing to do with the fact that it's recurred in my life. I think it has something to do with it, but I don't want to think of this as simply a repetition of a pattern formed in my childhood-- which I'm driven therefore to think with for the rest of my life. I think that is, as it were, a profound insight. It's some kind of understanding which I've come to.

It's not my method-- I don't set out in thinking about a new problem to think of it not directly, but through the detour. I don't apply it as a method like that. When I think I'm beginning to see what this problem is about, I realize I've done so by making the detour.

The question has been raised. I'm trying to now respond or refer to things which have been said in the last couple of days, without actually being able to take on directly arguments which have been made. This is the kind that I've been describing-- a kind of thinking under erasure.

What I mean by that is simply that in intellectual thought there are really absolutely new paradigms of thought, which nobody has ever attended to before. But we do live in a period when many of the existing paradigms, established and developed within traditional intellectual disciplines, either no longer in themselves adequately correspond to the problems that we have to resolve, or require supplementing from other disciplines-- with which they have not, as it were, historically been directly connected. This is the opening of what is called the trans-disciplinary field of inquiry.

And I speak about it because I have, once again, somewhat unconsciously always found myself in a trans-disciplinary field. I've never been able to be satisfied with working from within a single discipline. That has nothing to do with not respecting what has gone on in the work of developing intellectual disciplines. But I am at the same time aware of the fact that the organization of modern knowledge into the disciplinary framework occurred at that specific historical moment, and that its historical moment may have passed. Or may be passing, or may be waning, or that that particular way of organizing knowledge may no longer be adequate to the reality it is trying to analyze and describe.

I feel, whether right or wrong, at this juncture between the disciplines on the one hand and the rapidly shifting and changing fragments of reality which one is trying to describe.

Again, I'm not recommending to you an anti-disciplinary pathway. I am simply saying that I have not found it possible to do so-- to think simply within the given disciplines.

Now, that has had you profound costs of my own thought. First of all, it means I really am not an academic in the traditional sense at all. I mean, Barry was very kind, and people are very kind to refer to me as a scholar. But I am not a scholar. It's not what I am. It really isn't. I've lived an academic life, and earned my living-- not terribly well-- from doing academic work. I love to teach. I've wanted to teach from the earliest point that I can remember. And teaching goes on in academic worlds.

I respect and defend the academy to the hilt-- the capacity to pursue knowledge for its own sake. The arena inside of critical thought-- one has to defend that, especially these days when it is under such attack from so many quarters, with one's life. But it doesn't mean that I want to be, or think of myself as having been an academic.

I would claim-- I would insist on my right to the title of having done intellectual work. I am an intellectual. In that sense, I'm an intellectual because I believe in the power and necessity of ideas. I don't mean by that that I think my task is to produce theory. I would do without theory if I could. The problem is I can't.

You can't, because the world presents itself in a chaos of appearances. And the only way in which one can, as it were, understand, break down, analyze, grasp-- in order to do something about the present conjuncture that confronts one-- is to break into that series of congealed and opaque appearances with the only tools you have-- concepts, ideas, thoughts. To break into it, and to come back to the surface of a situation or conjunction one is trying to explain, but having made that detour through theory-- the detour through theory.

Marx, in his 1857 introduction, which is a wonderful methodological text about which I've written, as Larry Grossberg remarked the other day-- a piece describes exactly this process. I'm talking about a working method of Marx. I don't talk about whether one subscribes to all the theories of Marxism or not. It's a different question.

And what Marx says is, you begin with an obvious fact. There are people around-- the category of population. How far can you take the category of population? Well, you can take it quite far. But

really, at the moment when you decide that every population is always divided-- it's not a homogeneous or multifarious single object.

Always within that population are, as he says, capitalists and labor, men and women, slaves and masters-- that the social categories into which people are inserted is probably more important than the sum of the humanity that they constitute. And to make the move of thinking, of analyzing the population, as it were, into its particular categories seems an abstract moment. What does that do?

Well, what Marx says you need to do then is not to rest there, which a great deal of theory does. It's pleased to produce the categories. And it proceeds to refine the categories. And Marx said, far from it. You return then to the problem you're already wanting to solve, but now understanding that it is the product of many determinations. Not of one. Not of a singular logic unfolding through history. Not of a teleology which has its own end. Not of the fantasy of Hegel's resolution of reason and of the real and the rational, which in some moment when thought and the real will be identically the same. None of that. But to a world of many determinations-- many determinations.

Well, some of the things that people have remarked on in my work arise from this method of thinking, which I'm only addressing because you selected the absurd notion of spending two days thinking about the thought of Stuart Hall. So I've been so thinking a bit about the thought of Stuart Hall too. And I'm telling you what I seem to have found out-- certain habits of thinking, certain ways of going about a problem.

If you're not interested in the disciplines, and if your subject isn't given by the disciplines, what is it that you're trying to find out about? Well, David Scott, in his wonderful paper-- I nearly said, when David is finished, we can go home now, because we know all you'd never need to know about the thought of Stuart Hall. And I know a great deal than I knew before he started. But I'm addressing the question of what he called the contingency of the present.

And actually, I wouldn't put it that way myself, although I understand perfectly well why he put it that way. I would say that the object of my study is not sociology, or cultural studies, or anthropology, or literature, et cetera. The object of my intellectual work, insofar as I am an intellectual, is what I would call the present conjuncture. It's the history of the present. It's what is the condition in which we now find ourselves, and how did we get there? And what forces are creating it in order that we might understand how I might do something about it.

Now, David, of course, was absolutely right to say in thinking the history of the present-- which is a kind of Foucauldian way of talking about that-- which I point out to you something extremely important. It brings together two rather contradictory ideas-- the history of the present. The present sound as if it's very presentist in its implication. Right now-- what is happening to us right now? What confronts us immediately now is what he described as dangerous and difficult times.

And yet the history of the present commits us to thinking of that as something which has anterior conditions of existence which we have to understand. So the present, of course, is a force we have to now transform. But nevertheless, we have to understand the conditions under which it came into existence-- the history of the present.

The question of thinking the contingency of the history of the present is not so much my object, but what I always want to say about the present.

And now I try to move to the second part of what I want to say. And here, I'm simply going to try to identify a certain number of ideas or themes which have emerged in the course of what people have said, and just make a few brief remarks about them and pass on.

Contingency-- why contingency? What is it that I've been wanting to say about contingency? I don't want to say about contingency, of course, that the world has no pattern, that it has no structure, that it has no shape. But I do want to say that its future is not already wrapped up in its past. There is no closure yet written into it.

And to be absolutely honest, if you don't agree that there is a degree of openness or contingency to every historical conjuncture, you don't believe in politics. You don't believe that anything that can be done. If it is already given, what is the point of exercising yourself about trying to change it in a particular direction?

This is a dilemma which lies, of course, right at the heart of classical Marxism. If the laws of history are about to unfold, who cares about the class struggle? Let's let them unfold. And there is a whole series of kinds of Marxism, which were precisely mechanistic in that way-- let the laws of capital unfold.

Contingency does drive you to say, of course, these are not forces. The forces at work in any particular conjuncture are not just random. They're formed up out of history. They are quite particular and specific, and you have to understand what they are. But what is the outcome of the struggle between those different contending relations of forces is not yet given. It has something to do with how that particular contest will be conducted.

Now, just listen to what I said. It's extremely determinate, but it is not determined. My job has been to try to think what determination means without what determinacy means without determination. I don't believe it is already determined, but I do believe that all the forces at work in a particular historical juncture, or a situation one's trying to analyze, or a phase of history, or development one is trying to unravel-- I do believe those forces are determinate. They don't just arise out of nowhere. They arise out of specific conditions of existence. So what is the way of thinking a determinantness which is not a closed determinacy. And contingency is the sign of this effort to think determinantness without a closed form of determination.

In the same way, people say, you are a conjuncturalist. What you say is you want to analyze not long, epochal sweeps of history, but you want to analyze specific conjunctures. Why the emphasis on the conjunctures? Why the emphasis on what is historically specific?

Well, it has exactly to do with what I've been talking about already. A conjuncture is simply the fact that very dissimilar currents-- some of a long duration, some of a relatively short duration-- tend to fuse or condense at particular moments into a particular configuration. And it's that configuration, with its balance of forces, which as it were is the object of one's analysis or intellectual inquiry. And the importance about a conjuncture is its historical specificity. That's to

say, to put it very crudely, I'm not so interested in racism as I am in different racisms, that arise in specific historical circumstances, and their effectivity, their ways of operation.

I'm less interested in capital or capitalism from the 17th century to now than I am in different forms of capitalism. I'm interested particularly just now in the enormously important shift in global capitalism which occurs in the 1970s. That's the end of what I would call one conjuncture-- the conjuncture of the period of the post-war settlement, dominated largely, especially in Europe, by social democratic balance of forces-- to the rise of neoliberalism, of global capitalism of a new kind-- of all the forms of globalization which have come to dominate the contemporary world.

That is the move from one conjuncture to another. And what interests me is the new forms of global capitalism, the new forms of economic geopolitical power which arise in that period, the new forms of the organization of power which arises. They're the kinds of things that Tony was beginning to address.

I want to unravel, what is specific about the moment from the mid '70s on? I want to know whether the period around 9/11-- the period of the emergence of a single superpower-- constitutes a new conjuncture, or is simply a new, as it were, configuration within the old conjuncture. Why do I want to know this? Because I want to know what to do about it. I want to know how we are going to deal with it.

And to know that is to know what forces are really active in this conjuncture. What is shaping it? What ideas shape it? Don't tell me the ideas of capitalism. That is what Sartre once called lazy Marxism. It's like saying, Valéry is a bourgeois poet, so he writes bourgeois poetry. It doesn't tell you anything. It tells you at the end what you knew at the beginning.

What is the use of theory that tells what you already knew? That is ideology. Ideology is recognition. Ah yes, that's a great thought, and I had it yesterday. It's of absolutely no purpose. It has no effectivity. There's no guarantee that you will have the right thing. But at least I'd venture with some ideas to try to understand, what is distinctively new about this new moment?

What is distinctively new about the way ideas operate in it? How is power changing? How is even capital changing? How is the way in which societies, which are now engrossed in new forms of global capitalist relations, become complicit with their own exploitation? So that it is impossible any longer to say, the line of division is between there and here, the West and the rest, the whites and the blacks-- because there are some blacks who are subordinate functions right within the operation of global capital itself.

This is the conjuncture that is extremely puzzling. We don't know how to understand it. We do not have any idea about how it actually operates. They don't know how it operates, so we certainly don't. And Gramsci once said, the purpose of analytic and intellectual work is that we have to be cleverer than them, if you want to change anything.

I mean, they want it to go on as it is. They want to expand those relations forever. Under the new dispensation, we are told, we've arrived at the end of history. There is nothing superior to the

system of liberal democracy and global capitalism that we now have. We just need to give it as a beneficent award to the rest of the world.

But the idea of transcending that to some other more complicated set of relation, or some different set of relation is a hopeless task. That is to remain within the settled order of knowledge and understanding. Now of course, intellectuals can do a great deal to help them to do that, and have done so-- the new economist, the managerialist, et cetera. Their ideas pour into supporting and normalizing this new system of power.

But that's not our business. Our business is to try to deconstruct that system. And therefore we have to understand even better than they do how it operates. And you know why? Because the one thing that they will not look at so carefully are the contradictions which every system always produces-- the things that it cannot cohere within its system of power. The thing that's always left out, that remains emergent, or remains residual. The thing that's going to knock on the door of this particular system, and say, you've left us out. How about us? And that is the constitutive outside that is going to disturb and unravel a particular paradigm of power and knowledge, and move the conjuncture onto some other configuration.

And that is the side of history that I happen to be on, and that is why I need the knowledge. That's why I need the understanding. And that unfortunately, since it isn't the system as it was in existence before, but is a new configuration, that is why you have to adventure in thought-- including, I'm afraid, Charlie, you're quite right, being a bit eclectic. You know, trying ideas out there, it doesn't work. You exaggerate them too much. You think people have left out culture. You're absolutely certain that culture is not a residual but a constitutive category.

How do you start to think that? Do you find yourself thinking too much in culturalist terms? Yes, of course. I hold my hands up. Of course.

In the period when I was trying to think about identity, I did make identity too voluntaristic. I did give it too culturalist an inflection. I didn't think sufficiently about the symbolic and material resources that are required to sustain identities, and that embed identities in structures of power. I didn't think about that. Although I must say, I never had a purely voluntaristic conception of identity. I never thought people could just, like a smorgasbord, eat from one identity in the morning-- and another identity in the afternoon, and another one in the bathroom, and another one in the shower, et cetera-- and be anybody you could. That is what I meant by postmodernist nomadism. And I never wanted that.

But what I always tried to say is that identities always come into existence through particular routes. And those routes will mark them. They will limit them. And they will form them in a certain way. But there is now a certain open-endedness to it. And when I say now, I was asking the question whether, as it were, one of the things that's distinctive about the modern world is precisely. Whereas in the past the balance within identities has been largely the culture writing the script of individuals, we had moved to a moment when the emphasis was more on the capacity of people to have an element of choice.

But the element of choice is relatively restricted. I can't accept, unless I'm going to escape in the wilds of fantasy, I am not a free-born Englishman. And I cannot think the world in the position of a free-born Englishman. The question is more, in exactly what way did I discover that I was black? I put it that way.

You asked me why I need this notion of open-endedness. Well, I told you I discovered I was a West Indian. I wasn't born a West Indian. I discovered I was a West Indian. And then, I discovered I was black. I discovered I could call myself black. How did that happen? Well, it happened because of certain historical developments, which made the term-- the conception of myself black-- available to me in history. It happened because of civil rights. It happened because of the transformation of Jamaican society.

It happened because the society that I left, which could not think of itself as black-- though it certainly was-- could after the '60s begin to think of itself as black in a different way. A different conception of blackness became available to the people. That was a cultural transformation, and I was able to become, to discover that that was what I really was.

You might say, more fool you. How come you didn't know that? But this is because your knowledge of yourself is never given simply by the circumstances in which you are born. They are constituted, as Althusser said, in imaginary lived relations. We live in an imaginary lived relationship to our real conditions of existence. We have to imagine them, to fantasize about them, to theorize about them, to represent them, in order to live them.

And so there are always changes in the ways in which we can figure ourselves-- figure ourselves. So I emphasize the question. You ask, why identity? I'm interested in identity because identity is some source of agency and action-- because it's impossible for people to work, and move, and struggle, and survive without committing-- investing something of themselves, of who they are in their practices and activities. And precisely because historically, I thought, there had been an enormous waning and weakening in the given collective identities of the past-- of class, and tribe, and ethnic group, and so on-- precisely because that word was now more open-ended-- though, of course, it hasn't disappeared in any sense.

So those constraints are still on any identity formation. But it seemed to me there was a relatively greater degree of openness in the balance between the giveness of an identity and the capacity to construct it or make it. That's all that I was trying to register, in the new work, an identity. I always refused the notion that a whole politics could be identified with any one identity position.

But I tried to say that identity is always the product of identification. It is the product of taking a position-- of staking a place in a certain discourse or practice. Of saying, this is for the moment who I am and where I stand. And that positional notion of identity enables one then to speak from that place, to act from that place. Although some time later, in another set of conditions, one may want to modify one's sense of who it is that is speaking. So in that sense, identity is not a closed book, any more than history is a closed book, any more than subjectivity is a closed book, any more than culture is a closed book.

It is always, as they say, in process. It is in the making. It's moving from a determinate past towards the horizon of a possible future which is not yet known.

I want to think only of one more set of terms, which have arisen in the course of our discussion. These are around the terms of diaspora and globalization.

I was, as you can imagine, absolutely astonished to discover that the Jamaican government is this week having the first diaspora conference-- the very first conference on the diaspora. The Empire Windrush landed, with all the returning, in 1948. There has been a massive black diaspora in Britain. I mean, I'm not only thinking about the numbers of people from Africa and elsewhere in the colonies, in the colonial world that have landed in Britain over the last 400 years. I'm talking about substantial numbers of people in the post-war world landing up in Britain, landing up in New York, landing up in Canada, et cetera.

So the idea that you are just thinking that perhaps what is happening to the nation here cannot be insulated from its diasporas elsewhere. I don't have time to unravel. This is a really interesting and important question. I don't have time to unravel this. I just want to say one or two very dogmatic things about it.

In this new awareness of the diaspora, something very important is happening. That is to say, your awareness that the nation cannot be any longer identified with its territorial boundaries-- that the nation is much wider is a discrepancy between the nation-state and the nation in its widest sense.

But I think the thinking so far in Jamaica about the diaspora is, of course, transnational. But I do think you largely see them as belonging to you. I think you largely think, these are really us over there. And when they come back, they will come back in and rediscover their us-ness.

And that is, of course, partly true-- partly true. But do you not think they made any connections with there as well as with here. Do you think people live a whole life, survive in the conditions of often poverty, and certainly of institutional and casual organized racism in Britain-- which is a deeply-laid trail in British consciousness. Survived a whole life, brought up children, send the children to school, and it doesn't rub off in any way at all? You know, their Jamaican-ness, which they took there on the boat, just goes on throbbing unchanged, untransformed?

These a-historical citizens, who don't have to put down any roots, how did they survive? Oh, they survived by thinking about home. They planned from the beginning to go back home. They're a little disturbed when they go back home. Everybody says, but you've been foreign. You've been in foreign. Something about the way you stand, walk, talk, shift-- or somebody said, can't move the hips. Only move the left hip, or can't bother. Forget about the right. Or something about the way you slightly mispronounce a thing identifies you as having been disseminated.

Now, there's the problem of the diaspora, is to think of it always and only in terms of its return to its place of origin. And not always and at the same time in terms of its scattering-- its further going out, its dissemination. It's the impossibility of ever going home in exactly the same way as you went. The diaspora is always going to be in a certain way lost to you. It has to be lost to you, because they have a stake, an investment in elsewhere-- in elsewhere.

It's not because they love us, or because elsewhere has been good to them. Just because of the material conditions of having to make a life means that they have to have ideas, investments, relationships with somewhere else as well.

Now, my notion of the diaspora has been to think about, then, these very complicated processes of continuity and rupture of the return to the old-- of the imaginary recuperation of the old, which is all also what goes on, and of the opening to the new. As, what is happening in changing the culture of those people who have been diasporized? So that's one sense of the work that I've done on the diaspora.

Now, here comes the second one. The second one is to remember that in the particular circumstances of the Caribbean the people of the Caribbean diaspora, in North America or in Europe, are twice diasporized, because they are themselves a diaspora. We are ourselves the effect of the dislocation and displacement-- of the dissemination from somewhere else.

Does that mean that we don't have any connection with it? How could it possibly mean that? But it does mean that that connection is not something which can now be naturally summoned up, as if it's in all of us, somewhere down there-- in our bodies, in our genes, in all of us. It's something which has to be recreated. It has to be sustained in the culture. It has to be sustained in the mind, or the connection cannot be made. And we would be utterly wrong to think that it is an unchanging one. We would be wrong to get into a notion of tradition as something which is traditional because it does not change.

As I've had to say to people before, Africa is alive and well in the diaspora. But the Africa we left 400 years ago, under the conditions of slavery, transportation, and the Middle Passage, has not been waiting unchanged for us to go back to-- either in our heads or in our bodies. That Africa is the subject of the most modern forms of new kinds of exploitation. It is the subject and the object of the most vicious forms of contemporary neoliberalism, and of the strategies of the new forms of geopolitical power.

That Africa, after we left it-- even after the war-- was first of all inserted into a relationship with the West in the very moment of decolonization-- in the very moment of decolonization-- in the relations of neo-colonial subordination. In the second phase of the Cold War, everything about the difficulties of creating an independent polity and an independent national economy were overridden by the Cold War struggle between two competing world systems. All the difficulties of the emerging societies and the nascent post-colonial states were overridden by the struggle between the two world powers. A struggle then paradoxically, desperately ironically, fought out on post-colonial terrain, because they were afraid of blowing one another up.

So they one after another around the world fought this war. The distortions that the Cold War imposed on the problems of the emerging post-colonial state. Every time you hear the new Western powers invoking the question of failed states, just remember who is partly implicated in the failure of the capacity of those states.

Now, since 1973, those already failing states-- states with the enormous difficulty, never resolved, of becoming post-colonial-- have been enmeshed in quite new constitutive relations of geopolitical, economic, cultural, and symbolic power-- the new system, the new world order.

Now, that is-- just think about it-- the Africa we are talking about. That is the Africa we are talking about. Africa has been through the inevitable transformation when going somewhere else, having to survive in the teeth of a life made somewhere else-- of the teeth of power, and domination, and subordination. I don't need to unpack that story for you.

But that is the Africa that has survived in the diaspora. There is the most profound connection between those two Africas, but they are not the same any longer. They are not the same.

So when one talks about the way in which identities of this kind have been ruptured by the different conjunctural breaks in post-war history-- reorganized and reordered by them, and have to be rediscovered. We have to rediscover what our connection now is with Africa.

OK, so the diasporic led me to think, first of all, about what is happening-- the complicated cultural processes going on inside the metropole in the black diaspora. Secondly, what exactly is meant by the diasporic nature of Caribbean society and Caribbean culture? What exactly do we mean by that?

And that led me to think about the diasporic nature of cultures themselves. Because what I became aware of was the fact that cultures always represent themselves as unchanging. And when you look at them, that cannot be the case. Some change very slowly, but they all change. They all are interrupted by movement, by conquest, by colonization, by trade. They have external influences. They simply cannot sit where they are outside of history. Cultures are changed within and changed by history.

So the broadly diasporic nature of culture itself is a kind of analogy, that I derive from thinking about a specific diaspora, and reflecting on the diasporic nature of the culture which I thought I had left and had to rediscover in myself and come to terms with in a different way.

OK, just a final twist to that. Because under globalization, everywhere is becoming more diasporic. Nowhere is not by being diasporic. Why is that so? Well, it's not because people like travel, believe me. It is because the very conditions under which the world now operates creates what one can only call the astonishing late-20th century, early-20th century movement of dispersed peoples-- the movement of dispersed peoples.

And from that perspective, one goes back. I go back and look at my own movement in 1951-- of the movement of the black migration, of the Asian migration-- from the Asian subcontinent to Britain in the '50s-- as the beginning of an enormous historical tide-- the disruption of people from their settled places, from their homes, from their subsistence agriculture, from their traditional ways of life-- from their religions, from their familial connection.

The uprooting of history. The people-- the fact-- the fact of people wandering the earth without a home-- of the homeless, of the multitudes. Of the people who can only survive by climbing on a

train, or buying a ticket from some person who is trading in bodies-- by hanging out on the bottom of a train, crossing boundaries at the depths of night. Disappearing into the depths of the cities, trying to never to be there-- crossing every boundary in the world. Mexicans and people from the Hispanic world crossing into the New World. People into Britain-- we were the forerunners.

Since then there were how many? Seven waves. The West Africans, Cypriots, Chinese. Then, the people displaced from Afghanistan. Then, the people displaced from Bosnia. Now the people displaced from central Europe, from the disintegrating Soviet Empire. Wave after wave after wave of peoples living in the metropole-- presenting the question of, how is it possible to make a life where people from very different historical backgrounds-- and bearing a set of different cultural values-- are required to make some kind of common life? To negotiate the terms of some kind of tolerant life with one another, without either eating one another, shooting one another, or separating out into warring tribal enmity. That is what I call the multicultural question of the modern times.

And globalization from above, which is of course the movement of every other single thing-- the movement of capital, the movement of technologies, the movement of messages-- the movement of images, the movement of investment, the movement of entrepreneurs, the movement of the executive corporate global class. Everybody is on the move, according to the logic of globalization, except the poor-- except the poor.

Labor-- ordinary folks are the only people who are not supposed to move. Why? Because how can you take competitive advantage if the $1-a-day laborer in Latin America is going to move to the west coast and claim advanced salaries? The function of the dispersal of capital around the globe-- of the decentralization of capital in the modern global system-- depends on the capacity to exploit cheap labor power where it is. So the controls on the movement of how many people are allowed to cross borders is absolutely central to the new constituent logic of contemporary globalization.

The movement-- the illicit movement of people for economic purposes-- escaping poverty, escaping ill health, escaping ecological devastation-- escaping civil war, escaping ethnic cleansing, escaping rural de-population-- escaping urbanization, escaping 1,001 problems. These are the underbelly of the contemporary globalization system.

And our new diasporas are simply one part of this huge, new historic movement-- of a huge, new geopolitical formation, which is creating the mixtures of cultures, and peoples, and histories-- and backgrounds, and religions, which is the contemporary problem of the modern world. Globalization from above. Globalization by stealth, by illegality, by hustling from below.

So though I started with a question of diaspora in a rather limited, empirical way, it has-- as my last reflection on the thought of Stuart Hall-- in its usual way undergone enormous expansion, that I've tried to apply to another situation-- see it in another way. It's illuminated something else.

I now want to say that what happens to the idea of the diaspora now is that without obliterating the moment of the nation-state-- the moment of nationalism-- it is quietly subverting it. It is quietly surpassing it. It is quietly transcending the project of one life in one nation in one nation-state located in one national economy-- and, as it were, superintended by one national culture, attached

to one national identity. That is a moment which is no longer the moment that the global system is constituting.

Now, what the balance there is between globalization from above, globalization from below-- whether there's any way of holding that system of power-- that's not my purpose at this stage of the evening to discuss with you. I've been trying to suggest what it might mean to be riveted throughout my life by unraveling the present conjuncture-- by being disturbed by systems and structures of power, of injustice, of inequality, which are generated by forces that one does not fully understand-- whose consequences one therefore cannot fully estimate, and whom one cannot therefore effectively resist.

Well, I commend to you the politics of intellectual life. David Scott quite rightly said, though I wouldn't subscribe to everything that Edward Said had said about the nature of intellectual life, I do think there is a kind of vocation there. I do think it is the requirement on intellectuals not only to speak a kind of truth-- the only truth they know. Maybe not truth with a capital T, but anyway, some kind of truth-- the best truth they can find.

To speak that truth to power. To take responsibility for having spoken it. To take responsibility for speaking it to wider groups of people than are simply involved in the professional life of ideas. To speak it beyond the confines of the academy. To speak it, however, in its full complexity. Never to speak it in too simple a way, because the folks won't understand. Because then they will understand, but they'll get it wrong, which is much worse.

So to speak it in its full complexity, but to try to speak it in terms which other people-- who after all can think, and do have ideas in their heads, though they're not paid to think-- need it. They need it like you need food. They need it in order to survive. I commend the vocation of the intellectual life in this sense to you.

I remind you that the academy is one of the sites on which it takes root. It is not the only one. And I do plead with you not to get entrammeled in its internal rituals-- simply because one's on the site, you think that somehow you are thinking. It doesn't absolutely follow. Believe me. But I commend you to defend it. But I commend you to defend it as a space of critical intellectual work. And that will always mean subverting the settled forms of knowledge, interrogating the disciplines in which you are trained, interrogating and questioning the paradigms in which you have to go on thinking.

That is what I mean by thinking under erasure. No new language is going to drop from the skies. There isn't any prophet who is going to deliver the books, et cetera, so that you can stop entirely thinking in the old way and start from Year One. You remember that revolutionary dream? Year One-- from now, socialist man, this is when the new history begins-- from now on the realm of freedom. It's rubbish. The realm of freedom will look mostly like the old realm of servitude, with just a little opening here and there. It's not all that different from what the past was.

But something will have happened. Something will have moved. You'll be in a new moment, and there will be new relations of forces there to work with. There will be a new conjuncture to understand. There will be work for critical intellectuals to do. And I commend that vocation to you, if you can manage to find it.

I don't claim to have honored that vocation fully in my life. But I say to you that that is kind of what I've been trying to do all this while.

Afterword by Brian Meeks

MEEKS: I'm Brian Meeks. I'm Chair of Africana Studies here at Brown University-- previously at the University of the West Indies for many years. Lastly, as director of the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies and the Center for Caribbean Thought. And it was the Center for Caribbean Thought which hosted Stuart back in 2004, at the University of the West Indies.

But in 2001, myself and two other colleagues-- Tony Bogues, who had just gone to Brown University from the University of the West Indies, and Rupert Lewis at the University of the West Indies-- set up what we thought was missing in the Caribbean, which was a center for Caribbean thought-- which would recognize the fact that the Caribbean has been an important center for the development of a variety of critical-- both pre-colonial and post-colonial-- thought in the 20th century, in particular.

And we felt that what we should do is begin by recognizing a number of critical people, who had been missing from that tradition, or underappreciated-- or were not sufficiently understood to be Caribbean. And so we set up the Center for Caribbean Thought. And the first conference that we held featured the work of Sylvia Wynter.

The second person we decided to focus on was Stuart Hall. And of course, Stuart spent much of his adult life outside of the country of his birth, Jamaica. And the question that arose immediately to some of us who were thinking about considering Stuart, and which came most forcefully from Stuart himself, was, could he be considered Caribbean? Could his work be considered Caribbean?

And we thought that the very question itself was at the heart of what we would try to do in our second conference, which was to feature Stuart Hall. And to speak about Stuart Hall from a Caribbean perspective-- from the place of his birth-- but also at a period in his life when he was sufficiently far advanced in the work he was doing-- to be able to reflect in a substantial way on what he had accomplished, and perhaps what he had left to accomplish. So a second conference, in what we call the Caribbean Reasonings Series, was in honor of Stuart Hart.

A word on the notion of reasonings. It wasn't the Caribbean reasoning. It was a Caribbean reasonings, which is a sort of Rastafari term-- which refers to a gathering of people, to talk about their condition. And therefore it has a different resource resonance in it. So we gave the series in which Stuart spoke that title, to connect with the popular idiom-- but also to suggest that the popular idiom carries us beyond the typical intellectual gathering, and involves a deeper level of trying to connect with a body of thought. So that was the 2004 conference.

And so we organized this conference, which represented an interesting coming together of not only people interested in Stuart's work, but parts of Stuart's life-- including students who were with him

at Birmingham. Including people who went before that, and his New Left associations in the late '50s and early '60s-- including students and faculty from the United States, who had been influenced by Stuart's work. And other parts of the world, including from Africa, and from Europe, and South America.

And at the heart of it was, of course, getting him to speak to a younger generation of Caribbean scholars-- who were using Stuart's work, but using it as one would use a chapter of a book in the reading room of a library. And not intimately understanding that Stuart had come from their own context. And had developed out of that context, and was still tremendously influenced by the peculiar juxtaposition of social forces of which he came from, of which Jamaica was.

So that was a very important indeed in the central part of the dialogue. We held eight conferences in the Caribbean Reasonings series, between 2001 and 2010. And that was in many respects perhaps the most poignant, because of this missing son who had come back, and who was telling his tale of travel-- almost like a prodigal son. It had that quality to it.

But at the same time, a tale of travel which explained a lot about the Caribbean-- but also explained and led people to understand a lot more about Stuart himself. And that is what I think gave that particular conference special meaning-- the return of a lost son.

And the conference, of course, was in many respects organized in the typical way in which these conferences are. You have an introduction, and David Scott gave a remarkable introduction to Stuart. We have papers from all the different dimensions of his life.

And then at the end of the conference, we had said, Stuart, it might be good if at the end you say a few words, if you wish. And you may craft them any way you want. And so we imagined Stuart would come and say a few nice things, and maybe a few not so nice things-- but it would be wrapped up in maybe 20, 25 minutes.

But what happened was quite extraordinary, as one of the organizers of the conference was standing to one side. And I noticed that Stuart had a piece of paper in front of him, with perhaps two lines of notes on it.

So I said, OK, so he's going to be briefer than the 15, 20 minutes we expected-- maybe 5, 10. Stuart spoke for more than an hour. And I'm so sorry that I didn't take notes as to what his notes said. I did see diaspora. And I suspect that what he had done is that he had written down three or four key talking points, of which one was of course the question of diaspora-- which I saw.

But it was the most astonishing talk. I've heard Stuart speak on film. I've heard Stuart speak on audio tape. But he never faltered. And he moved from item to item. And at the end of it, there was a stunned silence, and then sustained applause.

I think he sensed-- and you know, one says this perhaps less carefully now that he has passed-- that he may not have had many more chances to speak in the land of his birth again. And here he had a large audience of maybe 300 people, from all walks of life in Jamaica. And of course, the guests to the conference itself, from all parts of the world. And he was not going to have the

opportunity to quite address them again-- and not to address them in a conference about Stuart Hall.

And so he very carefully chose his words, and sought, I think, to encapsulate what Stuart was about, and what he had been about these past decades-- and did it brilliantly. And at the end, the applause was deafening-- just not because he had spoken well, but because he had somehow risen to another level and had encapsulated a life. And that, I think, is what made that outstanding.

[END]