

Through the Prism of an Intellectual Life: Thinking through conversation in the ruins of empire

PLSC 20928 | CCCT 20928 | CRES 26511 | FNDL 20928 | PARR 20928
University of Chicago, Spring 2024

Wednesdays, 9:30am-12:20pm, Foster 107

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Office Hours: Thursdays, 2:00-5:00 PM (by appointment on Canvas)

bell hooks: *For me, conversation is a place of learning. I love a good conversation. It's something I live for, one of the real pleasures of life, and yet, I find as I grow older it is more difficult to have a good conversation.*

Stuart Hall: *Conversation matters to me a lot, too, although, I don't always say I live for conversation. I live for narrative. Of course, conversation is a lot about narrative, but there are many other kinds of conversations. I find that the conversations that I quite like are those where people are telling me stories about themselves, where there is an element of the confessional.*

bell hooks and Stuart Hall in conversation (1996)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

What is the place of conversation in political thought? What makes such conversations generative or fulfilling? What role do conversations about politics play in connecting our present to the past and in helping us to reimagine our futures? These are some of the questions that this course hopes to explore by following along the threads of a conversation that has united the aims, hopes, and disappointments of three generations of anti-colonial thinkers in the Afro-Atlantic world. Taking the intellectual life of the Jamaican-British social theorist, Stuart Hall, as an exemplary site for this investigation, students will engage with a variety of sources—recordings, interview transcripts, memoirs, scholarship, and political writings—in an effort to piece together one strand of conversation out of which Hall's intellectual life took shape and through which he in turn shaped the intellectual lives of others. Of particular interest here is the intergenerational character of these conversations. Students will be encouraged to explore how people are shaped by intergenerational preoccupations and concerns, even as they come to take up these preoccupations in new ways that often mark a break from the past. Together, we will also examine how, in narrating their own preoccupations and intellectual lives to themselves, people lay claim to particular pasts and sketch out hoped-for futures.

Through the writing assignments for the course, students will be invited to consider how they themselves have been formed intellectually, the kinds of intellectual traditions that have shaped them and their preoccupations, and the place of conversation (and especially intergenerational

conversations) in the development of their styles of thinking and individual commitments. This exercise in self-reflection will form the basis of the writing assignments for the class. Each student will produce an interview with someone who has proven formative in their own intellectual development (whether a teacher, mentor, family member, acquaintance, or friend). This interview will explore the interviewee's intellectual development, not least as it pertains to how the interviewee has influenced the student's (i.e., interviewer's) intellectual life. These interviews will be completed by the middle of the quarter, and the final assignment of the class will be a paper in which the student reflects on their own intellectual debts to and divergences from their interviewee.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- (1) Students should come to each class prepared to participate in a discussion of the reading assignment. Class participation requires you to read and take notes on the text that we are studying, to give your full attention to our discussions during class time, and to be willing to contribute questions and comments to our conversations. This requires you to listen carefully to what your classmates have to say: the most successful participants will advance the discussion by directly engaging the contributions of others. Effective participation is a matter of quality, not quantity. There is no expectation that students will have something to say about every topic that arises in discussion, though I would hope that every student would make some kind of intervention in each class session. Effective interventions can also take many forms, whether offering an interpretation of a text, posing a question about the text or our conversations, seeking or offering clarification about some relevant point, or providing textual evidence to support or query the topic under discussion. Students who find it difficult to engage in class discussion should meet with me early in the quarter to discuss strategies for meeting their participation requirement.
 - A brief note on the readings for this class: In many weeks, we will be reading an entire book, perhaps with an accompanying essay. On other occasions, we will read a number of discrete essays or articles. In week 3, for example, there are seven individual essays and articles, albeit united by a common theme. Though the overall page count of this week might be lower than when we read an entire book, you should be mindful that reading many individual essays might be more time consuming because they are discrete pieces of work. In weeks with multiple essays, I would be inclined to tackle these not all at once, as you might do with a book, but by dividing the reading across a number of days.
- (2) You are also asked to write a brief paragraph before each class that develops a question about that week's reading assignment. This exercise will help you to prepare for class discussions. Your paragraph should be at least **200 words** and the question should focus on a specific passage, argument, or concept that you find puzzling or especially thought-provoking (please include citations for reference). This is also an opportunity to engage with the readings creatively and to explore the ideas that interest you the most. **All posts should be submitted via the Assignments section of Canvas by 8pm on the day before class.** You will receive credit for these assignments if you fulfill the stated requirements and submit your work on time. I will give you credit for two late submissions of your pre-class question if I receive

them within 48 hours of the due date and if you make a note about using the extension at the beginning of each post; otherwise, late submissions will not be accepted.

- (3) On one evening in week 6, there will be a screening of John Akomfrah's *The Stuart Hall Project* (BFI, 2014). Attendance is mandatory, and dinner will be provided. The specific date, time, and location is TBD.

(4) Interview assignment

- By **Sunday, March 31 at 6pm**, you must upload a 1-page memo to Canvas proposing who you wish to interview and why this person is an ideal person for getting at the question of your own intellectual development. If you wish for this person to be anonymous, that is not a problem, you may cast your relationship to them in very general terms (a friend, mentor, teacher, family member, etc.). You are required to **meet with me in office hours during week 3** to discuss your proposal for your interview assignment.
- You should have conducted the interview by the end of week 5, and a transcript of the interview should be uploaded to Canvas no later than **Sunday, April 28 at 6pm**. Auto-transcription software may help you with this task, but it will not produce a usable transcript by itself. To do that, you will need to review any automated transcript to clean it up such that it can be read by another person and in such a way as to capture the meaning of the speakers. This editing process may take longer than simply producing the transcript for yourself.
 - There is no need to consult the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to complete this requirement, on the understanding that these interviews will not form the basis of any future publication. Nevertheless the, IRB office asks you to take the following recommendations into account:
 - Student should refrain from interviewing vulnerable populations such as minors, prisoners and decisionally/cognitively impaired individuals.
 - Interview content cannot contain sensitive information that may pose risk of civil liability, insurability, reputation, etc. if that information were to be breached. You should be mindful, therefore, of avoiding leading your interviewee to disclose information that might put them at risk in these ways.
 - You may use the verbal consent form template on the SBS IRB website: [Templates | Social & Behavioral Sciences IRB Office \(uchicago.edu\)](https://www.sbs.uchicago.edu/irb/templates)

- (5) Final paper project: This paper will utilize the interview you have completed to reflect on your own intellectual formation. The aim here is to consider a number of questions (this list is not intended to be exhaustive):

- What about the intellectual formation of your interviewee is relevant to your intellectual formation?
- How did they contribute to the development of your intellectual preoccupations?
- How do the ways that you take up these preoccupations differ from the manner in which they influence or interest your interviewee?
- What, if anything, generationally-speaking, sets you and your interviewee apart?

- What might be interesting to think with in the differences between how you take up your shared interests or preoccupations?

The aim of exploring these questions is to come to a (preliminary) view about how your conversations with this person, and their influence on you, have given shape to your intellectual life. But it is also to consider how you depart from one another, taking up your shared preoccupations in different ways and with different senses of the past, and hopes and aspirations for the future.

You will complete this assignment in two stages.

- First, by **Sunday, May 5 at 6pm** you must send me a 1-page memo outlining how you plan to approach your final paper. You are then required to **meet with me in office hours in week 8** to discuss this plan.
- Second, you must upload your final paper by **Friday, May 17 at 6pm**. This must be 10-12 pages long, double-spaced, 12-font, with 1-inch margins.

ACCESSIBILITY

The University of Chicago is committed to ensuring equitable access to our academic programs and services. Students with disabilities who have been approved for the use of academic accommodations by [Student Disability Services \(SDS\)](#) and need a reasonable accommodation(s) to participate fully in this course should follow the procedures established by SDS for using accommodations. Timely notifications are required in order to ensure that your accommodations can be implemented. Please meet with me to discuss your access needs in this class after you have completed the SDS procedures for requesting accommodations.

Phone: (773) 702-6000

Email: disabilities@uchicago.edu

OFFICE HOURS

I require everyone to come to my office hours at least twice during the quarter. You should meet with me in week 2 to discuss your plans for your interview. And you should meet with me again in week 7 to discuss your plans for the final paper. In addition, I am happy for you to attend office hours for further meetings as often as you wish. It is especially important to see me if at any point you are struggling in the course. Office hours are an important resource available to you to get the most out of the class. They are there for your benefit, so please don't feel shy about making use of them.

Please sign up for office hours through Canvas: go to our course's homepage and click on the link for "Daragh Grant Individual Office Hours" at the top of the Course Summary. If no appointments show up, make sure that you have our class selected in the list of calendars on the right side of the page.

If you have a class, job, or extracurricular activity during my regular office hours, or if all of the appointments are already booked, you may set up an appointment at another time via email.

Please include the days and times that you are available in your message. If you don't have another obligation during my office hours, I ask that you sign up for an appointment during that time. Please also cancel your appointment as soon as possible should you no longer be able to make it.

COURSE POLICIES

Late Essay Policy

Please let me know should you ever find yourself in the position of having to submit your papers late. I do not need to know why your work is late, but it is important to maintain communication when this happens.

Finally, all essays will be submitted via Canvas. If there is a problem with your submission, I will contact you via email and you will be expected to send a new file to me the same day that you receive my message, otherwise the paper will be counted as late. You will not be granted a grace period simply because you didn't check your email account.

Absences

Participation in class discussions is the basis of learning in seminar courses, so absences of any kind are taken seriously and will impact your grade. You will be ineligible for a letter grade for the course after your fourth absence and you must instead request a W from your advisor.

Per university policy, you will not be penalized for an absence due to a religious observance if you let me know about it at the beginning of the quarter.

Finally, coming late to class affects your own ability to participate and disrupts the learning of others. Tardiness will therefore negatively impact your participation grade.

Policy on electronic devices

Given the large number of PDF documents that we will be reading for this class, you may use a laptop or tablet **to consult readings** for the course. However, unless you have received an accommodation to do so, you are **not permitted to use electronic devices for any other purpose**. If you wish to take notes in class, for example, you are expected to do so by hand (again, absent an accommodation stating otherwise).

Grade Distribution

Participation	30%
Weekly reading response	20%
Required film screening	10%
Interview Assignment	15%
Final Paper Project	25%

REQUIRED TEXTS

The following texts are available for purchase at the Seminary Co-Op Bookstore. Please use these editions of the texts to aid in the in-class discussion of specific passages.

1. Hazel Carby, *Imperial Intimacies: A Tale of Two Islands* (London: Verso, 2019)
2. bell hooks and Stuart Hall, *Uncut Funk: a contemplative dialogue* (New York: Routledge, 2018)
3. Stuart Hall, *Cultural Studies 1983: A Theoretical History*, ed. Jennifer Daryl Slack and Lawrence Grossberg (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2016)
4. Stuart Hall and Bill Schwarz, *Familiar Stranger: A Life Between Two Islands* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2017)
5. C.L.R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2013)
6. David Scott, *Stuart Hall's Voice: Intimations of an Ethics of Receptive Generosity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2017)

Texts marked with an asterisk (*) can be found on Canvas and/or from Library Course Reserves.

COURSE READING SCHEDULE

Week 1: Conversations in the wake of colonialism: Stuart Hall and the colonial context

Wednesday, March 20

bell hooks and Stuart Hall, *Uncut Funk: a contemplative dialogue* [ca.1996] (New York: Routledge, 2018), xv, 2-127.

*Talal Asad, "Conscripts of Western Civilization," in *Dialectical Anthropology: essays in honor of Stanley Diamond*, ed. Christine Ward Gailey (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 1992), 333-51.

*David Scott, "'An Obscure Miracle of Connection,'" in David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 106-27.

*Stuart Hall, "Politics, Contingency, Strategy: An Interview with David Scott [1999]," in *Essential Essays, Volume 2: Identity and Diaspora*, ed. David Morley (Durham, N.C., 2019), 235-62.

*David Scott, "Stuart Hall at Eighty," *Small Axe* 16.2 (2012):vii-x.

Week 2: Stuart Hall on the New Left and the rise of Cultural Studies¹

Wednesday, March 27

*Stuart Hall, “The first New Left: life and times,” in *Out of Apathy: Voices of the New Left 30 Years On*, ed. The Oxford University Socialist Discussion Group (London: Verso, 1989), 11-38.

Stuart Hall, *Cultural Studies 1983: A Theoretical History*, ed. Jennifer Daryl Slack and Lawrence Grossberg (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2016), all.

*Your first memo, on your proposed interview, should be submitted by **Sunday, March 31 at 6pm.**

Week 3: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left: Stuart Hall on Marxism, Ideology, and British Politics²

Wednesday, April 3

*Raymond Williams, “Afterword,” in Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy*, Rev. Ed. (London: Verso, 1979), 207-219.

*Stuart Hall et al, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the state, and law & order* (London: Red Globe Press, 1978), “Introduction to First Edition” and “The Social History of a ‘Moral Panic,’” 1-31.

*Stuart Hall, “The great moving right show [1979],” in Stuart Hall, *Essential Essays, Volume 1: Foundations of Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2019), 374-92.

*Stuart Hall, “The problem of ideology: Marxism without guarantees [1983],” in Stuart Hall, *Selected Writings on Marxism*, ed. Gregor McLennan (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2021), 134-57.

*Stuart Hall, “The crisis of Labourism [1984],” in Stuart Hall, *Selected Political Writings: The Great Moving Right Show and Other Essays*, ed. Sally Davison, David Featherstone, Michael Rustin and Bill Schwarz (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2017), 207-22.

*Stuart Hall, “Introduction: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left,” in Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (London: Verso, 1988), 1-15.

¹ Stuart Hall’s scholarly and political writings, and his media work, were voluminous spanning over 60 years. A bibliography of his work prepared for the [Stuart Hall Foundation](#) by Catherine Hall, Bill Schwarz, and Nick Beech can be found in the “Additional resources” folder on the Canvas site.

² The readings for this week frequently make reference to prominent British political figures. For your reference, I will post some brief biographical notes on these individuals to the Canvas folder for this week.

*Stuart Hall, "The great moving nowhere show," *Marxism Today* (Nov./Dec. 1998), 9-14.

***You must meet with me in office hours this week** to discuss your first memo and your plans for the interview assignment.

Week 4: Stuart Hall on Race and Diaspora

Wednesday, April 10

*Stuart Hall, "The Young Englanders [1967]," in Stuart Hall, *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, ed. Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2021), 42-50.

*Stuart Hall, "Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance [1980]," in Hall, *Essential Essays, Volume 1: Foundations of Cultural Studies*, 172-221.

*Stuart Hall, "New Ethnicities," Kobena Mercer, ed., *ICA Documents, 7: Black Film, British Cinema*, (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1988), 27-31

*Stuart Hall, "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities [1991]," in Anthony D. King, ed., *Culture, Globalization and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 41-68.

*Stuart Hall, "Our Mongrel Selves [1992]," in Hall, *Selected Political Writings*, 275-82.

*Stuart Hall with Kuan-Hsing Chen, "The Formation of a Diasporic Intellectual" [interview, 1992], in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996), 486-505.

*Stuart Hall, "When was the postcolonial? Thinking at the Limit," in Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti, eds., *The Postcolonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons* (London, Routledge, 1996), 242-60.

*Stuart Hall, "Thinking the Diaspora: Home-Thoughts from Abroad [1999]," in Hall, *Essential Essays, Volume 2*, 206-26.

*Stuart Hall, "Cosmopolitan Promises, Multicultural Realities [2006]," in Hall, *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, 386-408.

Week 5: Lives of Empire

Wednesday, April 17

C.L.R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2013), entire.

*Stuart Hall, "C.L.R. James: A Portrait," in *C.L.R. James's Caribbean*, ed. Paget Henry and Paul Buhle (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992), 3-16.

*Your required interview should have been completed by the **end of this week.**

Week 6: Between Metropole and (Post-)Colony I

Wednesday, April 24

*Stuart Hall, "Minimal Selves," in Lisa Appignanesi, ed., *The Real Me: Post-modernism and the Question of Identity* (London, Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1987), 44-46.

Stuart Hall and Bill Schwarz, *Familiar Stranger: A Life Between Two Islands* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2017), entire.

*Interview transcript due **Sunday, April 28 at 6pm**

REQUIRED FILM SCREENING: John Akomfrah, *The Stuart Hall Project* (BFI, 2014)

Week 7: Between Metropole and (Post-)Colony II

Wednesday, May 1

*Hazel Carby, "Becoming Modern Racialized Subjects: Detours through out pasts to produce ourselves anew," *Cultural Studies* 23:4 (2009): 624-57.

Hazel Carby, *Imperial Intimacies: A Tale of Two Islands* (London: Verso, 2019), 1-142.

*Your second memo, on the final paper project, should be submitted by **Sunday, May 5 at 6pm.**

Week 8: Between Metropole and (Post-)Colony III

Wednesday, May 8

Carby, *Imperial Intimacies*, 142-342.

*You must **meet with me in office hours this week** to discuss your

second memo and your plans for the final paper project.

Week 9: Echoes of experience: Thinking in the wake of a conversation

Wednesday, May 15

*David Scott, "Stuart Hall's Ethics," *Small Axe* 17 (2005): 1-16.

Required (to watch, via Canvas): Stuart Hall, "Through the Prism of an intellectual life" (Lecture, 2004)³

*David Scott, "The Temporality of Generations: Dialogue, Tradition, Criticism," *New Literary History* 45.2 (2014): 157-81.

*David Scott, "The Last Conjuncture," *Small Axe* 44 (2014), vii-x.

*David Scott, "The Fact of Noncorrespondence," *Small Axe* 46 (2015): 1-4.

David Scott, *Stuart Hall's Voice: Intimations of an Ethics of Receptive Generosity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2017), 1-145.

*The final paper is due by **Friday, May 17 at 6pm.**

I have made a number of recordings available on the "Pages" tab on Canvas, including lectures by and interviews with Stuart Hall. You will also find there a recording of the **Memorial held in honor of Stuart Hall** at the Friends Meeting House in London, on November 29, 2014. It includes tributes to Hall from David Scott, Angela Davis, Charles Taylor, Martin Jacques, and members of Hall's family, among others.⁴

³ A transcript of this lecture can be found in Hall, *Essential Essays, Volume 2*, 303-23 (available on Canvas)

⁴ Becky Hall's tribute to her father, at 1:30:50, is a really beautiful (and surprisingly humorous) tribute.