

An Interview with Sut Jhally

Articulation, Cultural Studies, and Education

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Justin Paulson (JP): As you know, *Alternate Routes* was recently relaunched after several years of dormancy, and we are quite pleased to have the opportunity to hear from you again. You were not only one of the first contributors to *AR* (vol. 3, 1979), but I understand that the journal also carried your first publication as a scholar?

Sut Jhally (SJ): Yes, that's why *Alternate Routes* has always held a very fond place in my heart. I was a Master's student in Sociology at the University of Victoria, and this was the very first thing that I had published. I remember having to provide a copy-ready piece to the journal, and because this was before the age of computers, a secretary had to type up my paper. The process was just very different than today, and reflects how the practices of intellectual life have changed over the last 30 years—from a time when almost every thing was written by hand, and then someone typed it, to a situation now where writing by hand is almost non-existent, and everyone types straight into a computer. And I think that is a very significant change. I remember talking to Stuart Hall about this a few years ago, and he believed that writing on a computer had actually negatively affected the quality of his prose. His reasoning was that using a typewriter makes major corrections difficult, so you really had to think carefully about sentence construction, etc., before committing it to paper. Whereas with computers, you just write down your first conceptualization, knowing you can always change it later on. The problem is, once un-thoughtful stuff is in some (if only virtual) form, that becomes the starting point for both theorizing and writing.

JP: Let's talk about that early piece for a minute. In "Marxism and Underdevelopment: the Modes of Production Debate," you reviewed the debates of the 1970s on what constitute the modes of production and how societies transition to capitalism. On the face of it, your work since then took you in a very different direction: you are well-known today as a leading media critic and an expert in cultural studies. But I'm wondering how, or if, this early publication nevertheless helped to shape your future direction as a scholar. Do you ever find yourself taking up such theoretical debates in your more recent work, or in your teaching?

SJ: Although I didn't really follow up on the specific content of that piece—I haven't written about underdevelopment or international relations since that time, in fact—I think the broader problematic that they were located in has never gone away. There is a very key theoretical term—"articulation"—that has been important to me, and to the debates in cultural studies in general, that is infused throughout the article. So when I teach these issues today, for example in a graduate class I teach on the cultural studies theorist, Stuart Hall, I refer back to the Frank-Laclau debate as the first time that I really came across the term articulation, and the modes of production debate as really one of the first places that it was used to theorize relations between things that seem separate but are connected in some way, a way to talk about sameness and difference.

JP: I'm reminded of Hall's working paper from the mid-70s on Marx's 1857 introduction to the *Grundrisse*, which touched on similar issues. Were you influenced by that as well?

SJ: Absolutely. What I find interesting right now is that the modes of production debate that focused around articulation led Laclau then to move from thinking about modes of production within a social formation, to thinking about the relationship between different levels of the social formation (between culture and politics and economics, etc.) and he really became, along with Chantal Mouffe, one of the leading theorists in how to conceptualize that question. But the first place he dealt with this was not in the realm of politics, culture or social movements, which is where he ended up, but in the articulation between much larger structures. Hall also has a 1980 piece "Race, articulation and societies structured in dominance" where articulation is employed in an analysis of modes of production, colonialism and neo-colonialism. So I always refer back to this kind of forgotten genesis of articulation, that it actually really emerged in

another place and then went from the modes of production debate to becoming a central conceptual piece within western Marxism to talk about social movements and culture, politics, the state, etc. So, going back to your original question, although I haven't really bumped into the same themes in content, conceptually I think I have retained that interest in how to conceptualize connection.

JP: I wonder if we ought to go full circle and bring the concept of articulation back into conversation with political economy.

SJ: Actually, that is my trajectory into these issues, because my first cut into media studies per se, in the realm of communication specifically (rather than through sociology, for example), came through the work of Dallas Smythe, who was a Canadian communication theorist teaching at Simon Fraser. He argued that Marxism had a "blind spot" when it came to communication in that it regarded the media as principally an ideological institution, whereas it's really an economic institution. So he wanted to re-think within the Marxist tradition how media should be properly conceptualized. Because at that time, and we're talking in the late 1970s, within political economy the media were still largely regarded as ideological institutions that were functional to the state, that were functional to the reproductive process of capitalism. What Dallas argued was that instead, we should think about them first as economic institutions that produce surplus in and of themselves, but then also look at the role they play in the circulation and distribution of commodities. And in this understanding advertising was absolutely fundamental. So that was really the first time I started to think about advertising.

And it was the same problematic of part-whole understandings, of how to understand what seems to be secondary and peripheral in terms of its place within the entire system. Looking back, actually at around the same time I got interested in the debates that were taking place in cultural studies, through the Working Papers series of the Birmingham Centre, about how women's domestic work, housework, should be understood in economic terms. Was housework part of wage labor? Was it separate from wage labor? Did it produce value? Essentially it was asking those same questions, which is 'what's the relationship between this activity, which seems to be not an economic activity or a key economic activity, and what people thought was real economic activity in the workplace?' Again, the same set of questions as the modes of production debate. Are housework and wage labor the same? Are they different? What's the

connection between them? What's the articulation between them? That was really interesting to me, and then from that I started to think about advertising within the context of all this material I was reading about the relationships between things that seem different but are connected. That was what the modes of production debate was really about. So as I said, the content of it certainly didn't stick but the general kind of conceptual questions that were raised have remained with me since then, and partly I think they remain with me because they were always central to cultural studies.

JP: Could you talk a little bit about the concept of critique that you worked with? The 1979 essay operated within a particular framework, yet also subjected that framework to significant criticism. In one sense this is the true meaning of critique, but it also strikes me as somewhat distinct from our academic publishing environment today, in which young scholars are too often content to simply denounce those who preceded them and move on—even if it means throwing the baby out with the bathwater. It's less common to see students arguing that a particular framework is basically correct, and yet needs to be critiqued and improved for X or Y reasons. Have you noticed a change in the nature of critique over the thirty years you've been engaged in scholarship?

SJ: I'm not too sure I've seen it change a great deal because I think there have always been those different kinds of approaches to criticism, those different dimensions to it. What I do think exists is good critique and bad critique, and that has always been around. For me critique has to be productive, a kind of sympathetic critique, otherwise it's just criticism. I don't think you should be sympathetic to everything, I think there are some things that are just wrong and you need to say that they're wrong. But in my view theory doesn't proceed with giant steps. Theory proceeds in small steps, and it proceeds on the shoulders of people who have gone before. I think that's exactly how Marx operated. He started his work with existing economic thinkers because that was the most developed work at that time. He didn't say this was all wrong, he didn't say classical economics was all wrong—he started there because he thought that was the most sophisticated understanding of where things were, but it didn't get everything. And he proceeded to critique it in a pretty fundamental way. He called his work after all “a critique of political economy”. Everything operates on the basis of what has gone before.

I guess I take my intellectual lead here again from Stuart Hall, who I think has always had this kind of very generous way of reading theory—which is, you can evaluate literatures, you can evaluate people’s work, but if you want to move it on, let’s take the best of what’s there without rejecting everything. So, I think that’s the notion that I would urge young scholars to engage in. When I think back to when I was first a grad student, I think the piece that you refer to may be the first time where I was perhaps becoming more thoughtful and really trying to dig out what was useful in people’s work. It was only when I realized how much I didn’t know, how much we didn’t know, that’s when I think I started to develop a more mature view of intellectual work and research. Not starting off with what you know you want to find out, but by really not knowing what it is you’re going to find out, really not knowing where you’re going to end up. If you know where you’re going to end up when you start doing research, I wouldn’t really call that research, I’d call that something else.

So for me, open-mindedness, a kind of sympathetic view of what’s gone before is a key aspect of advancing knowledge. I am not saying that everything that’s gone on before is great, but taking the most productive aspects and moving theory on, one step at a time. I think that Marx operates that way and I think that Stuart Hall operates that way—in this very, very sympathetic and productive way where you keep on theorizing, you don’t stop at any time and it’s a constant process of evaluating what’s there and moving on slowly.

JP: I liked the way you framed that. I think you once noted that your interest in the question of determination is not based in political dogmatism, it’s simply in the nature of being a social scientist. And similarly you’ve argued that the function of universities is to train people to change the world in some way—not necessarily to offer them a pre-written script for how to do that, or to tell them what kind of world to change it into—but universities shouldn’t merely reproduce knowledge about the world nor merely train people for jobs. And this conviction has led you to become a public intellectual. But as a public intellectual based in the university, do you find much resistance to these principles? Is the university changing in its ability to train students to think critically, and try to change the world in some way? Is it becoming less receptive for criticism and praxis, and more about career training?

SJ: I think it depends on which university, and which sector of higher education you look at. There’s no doubt that the American univer-

sity is changing. Public universities are becoming less public in that there is just less public money that goes into education now. And as that has dried up, what's taken its place is corporate money, and so I think you're seeing a kind of corporatization and a militarization of the university in terms of its funding that you never saw before. For example, at the university where I am there are essentially two campuses: there's the sciences which have all the external research money (either corporate or federal) and then there's the social sciences and humanities, and we're very much the poor neighbours of the rich people who live up the hill. Our function is essentially to teach people, and the function of the north side of the university is to bring in the money and do the research.

And as public money is drying up, the nature of teaching is changing as well in that there are just less tenure track people and positions, with a lot of them being converted to adjunct positions, or to limited term positions. So there's just a lack of stability on the employment side. I think tenure is fundamental to the intellectual life of a university in that it gives you the chance to experiment, it gives you the chance to take a risk, it gives you the opportunity to say things that might be unpopular in the classroom. And that aspect of academic life is changing, at least in the U.S. I don't think that tenure is being taken away in some major way; it's just being slowly eroded because there's fewer of those kinds of positions. So the people who are teaching students these days, especially in the social sciences and humanities, don't have the stability and the protection that they perhaps once would have had. And I think that is influencing both research and teaching.

At the same time I think students are also changing in the sense that a post-secondary education is seen by many students as a necessity, and as training for a job. So there is a push for professional training, the push for something that's practical, that will provide a more or less immediate return on the very large personal investment many students make in their education. There has of course always been an element of this, but I think the emphasis is increasing, and it's really putting the notion of a "liberal education" under pressure, and changing the context within which we operate in the classroom. So I think we just have become much more aware of what we are doing in our pedagogy.

Teaching for me is a key component of being an intellectual (as important as research and writing). Actually, it is a key component of being a public intellectual, because the public is not just out there

beyond the ivory tower—the classroom is also a public space populated by people who do not read our disciplinary journals. These publications have an important role in our professional lives, but our scholarly articles are written for a particular audience of our colleagues that require a quite specialized, technical and sometime jargonistic language.

So in that sense I think teaching is a vital practice for people who aspire to have some kind of “public” presence, who regard the function of knowledge as being broader than just job qualification. I think there is a sense that if you want to have this kind of more engaged public presence, you have to think beyond the walls of the academy. But there is a great opportunity within the academy to talk to people who you wouldn’t be otherwise able to reach, and to be able to get them to ask questions in a new way.

Now one of the questions you asked me was about the nature of critique, and how you engage that. I don’t think my job, especially in the classroom, is to tell people *what* to do—that’s *their* job to figure out, and will be driven by their own ethical and moral sense about their lives. That’s not a function that universities should engage in, to tell what people what kinds of political action they should take. I think our job is to get people to see the world as clearly as possible, and that in itself is a radical act. To see the world as clearly as possible in all its complexity and with the implications of why the world operates like it does, and then to say, look, the world isn’t just created, it doesn’t fall from heaven fully formed, it’s created by people, it’s created by interests, it’s created by human activity, and you can either be a bystander to that, or you can participate actively in the creation of the world in which you want to live. But if you’re a bystander, don’t tell me you’re not political, bystanders are also political, bystanders are essentially going along with the world the way it is. That is also a political statement.

So what is the function of knowledge? It’s to destroy the illusion that people are somehow separate from the world. I want to destroy the illusion that people do not have a responsibility to the world. In my classes, when students leave I want them to think about what their moral responsibility is. My student evaluations at the end of the semester are quite interesting sometimes. One person wrote, “I guess it’s good to know this stuff, but I just wish I didn’t.” Because ignorance is, literally, bliss. I think that should be the key intellectual function of universities, to destroy ignorance, and to give people real

information and understandings about the world in which they live, and to empower them to be able to take a stance in and to the world. I'll say to my students, "Look, I'm not telling you what to do, you want to go and work in business, in corporations, then that's fine, but be aware of what you're doing, that you're making a moral decision, an ethical decision, that you are going to participate in this system which we just spent a semester looking at. That the values of that system are now *your* values, you are not just going along blindly, you are now part of that." That's what I want to do, to empower people in terms of their own responsibilities and on the basis that they really understand the world as clearly as possible. Beyond that I don't think that's there's much we can, or even should do.

But having said that, I think there's a reason why a lot of students come out of universities with a different political viewpoint than when they went in. Because the post-secondary sector, at least in the United States, is the last place in the culture where there is any kind of intellectual diversity left. The political culture is now totally bought up, it's totally colonized, and there is no way that you can have any kind of real meaningful debate about fundamental things within the political sphere. That was one the most brilliant things that corporations figured out—we'll take over not only the Republican Party, that's our traditional party, but we'll take over the Democratic Party as well, and in that way take over the whole of politics. That is how corporate interests become the national interest.

The political sphere is gone, the media sphere is gone, the public sphere is gone, the state is gone. The universities and colleges are the last place left, and that's why they're now coming under attack from the right wing, why they're coming under attack from corporations—it's an attempt to shut down the last bastion of seeming diversity. But it's no accident that when young people are exposed to diversity, when they're given opposing view points, it's not surprising to me that they often think that those left wing progressive ideas actually make sense. That's what always gives me hope, that the right is scared stiff of real debate, the right is scared stiff of real knowledge because they know the vast majority of people, if you presented things to them in a fair way, that the game of hegemony will be over. So they have to shut down that debate through monopoly. For those of us who are in the university, I think we are engaged in one of the last efforts of resistance to this corporate takeover.

JP: And this was one of the insights of cultural studies, was it not? That most people aren't simply stupid or beset with 'false consciousness', but that if given the opportunity to think critically, without proselytization by the Party, that they will look somewhat askance at what's going on in the world.

SJ: The question I would want to pose is "Why do the majority of people vote solemnly every four years against their economic interests?" I don't think that's because they're stupid, I think that's because there are more aspects of people's identities than just their economic identities. And the right has figured this out, and especially in the United States, has really made quite explicit appeals to racial identity. And I think that's one of the things that Marxists couldn't quite figure out, that there are other things in people's experiences were just as powerful, perhaps more powerful, than class. For them it was as people got poorer and poorer, the more radical they would become, the more the proletarian consciousness will rise.

What that ignored was some of the key findings of cultural studies, that there is never a straightforward relationship between reality and peoples' perception of that reality. That the perception of reality always goes through a cultural and symbolic filter, and if you can control that cultural and symbolic filter you can appeal to people on some other level, and tell a story about why they're poor, and how the people to blame for why they're poor aren't capitalists but those filthy immigrants who have come and taken our jobs. This is what Althusser called an "imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence." It is important to stress that it wasn't a "false" relationship, but an imaginary one that audiences have to actively engage with, and there is no guarantee as to its success.

However, I think sometimes cultural studies went too far on the active audience stuff, the idea that people are really active and you can't control them. Well, I think people are active, as human beings we are always active in the creation of meaning because there is never such a thing as natural meaning. Meaning is always up for grabs, so the idea of an active audience is fundamentally built into the nature of us as human beings. But that doesn't mean that active audiences can't be controlled. The "imaginary relation" that we are encouraged to experience the world through can be a very powerful filter of control that talks to you, again in Althusser's terms it "interpellates" you in powerful ways, and leads you down a particular direction.

In that way you can actively make meaning (actually I don't know any other way you make meaning if not actively) but someone else can direct it because the conditions of interpretation are not of your own making. And that is why the institutions of public relations and advertising form such a large part of the work of control of modern society.

Unfortunately, cultural studies lurched for a time into a direction where that broader social, economic and cultural context of interpretation kind of disappeared, and what we got were lots of fan studies about pleasure, about why people were doing certain kinds of things, making certain kinds of meanings divorced from this broader structure. And I think that's still the case.

So I encourage graduate students to go back to the kinds of concerns that animated cultural studies in the original phase. For example the book *Policing the Crisis*, which I think is one of the seminal pieces that emerged out of cultural studies with a central focus on questions of articulation and of conjuncture, is in my mind an exemplary methodological and theoretical text. It starts off with the phenomena in the mid 1970s of British (English actually) judges starting to hand down these ridiculously lengthy jail sentences, twenty years, for what were very common crimes that used to be punished by a few years. And Stuart Hall and his colleagues at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies started to ask, 'What is going on here? Why are black youth being treated in this way?' And starting from these small incidents they teased out, theoretically and empirically, what was going on in society as a whole, that this was part of a new conjuncture, a new economic-political conjuncture that was responding to the changing imperial role of Britain in global terms. Hall argues that we are still in the hegemonic project that was birthed at that time: Thatcherism was the first part, Blair was the second, and now the Conservative-Liberal Coalition is the third.

JP: You've seen the reaction to the riots—someone was jailed three years for stealing a loaf of bread?

SJ: And four years for simply posting on Facebook! Again, we are in that moment where these sentences tell you something else about what's going on. That was the brilliance of *Policing the Crisis*. They started off somewhere small and they ended up with a crisis of the whole society. That is the best kind of sociological work, empirically grounded and theoretically important. I think the best work

has to be empirically grounded. We need theory, yes, but theory by itself is not enough. For me (and I might be unusual in this) theory only helps make sense of the world, helps make sense of something we could call reality. And for that you need to have other ways of linking theory up with the world: *evidence*.

In my own work, and in my teaching, its always about evidence. I start off telling my students that they shouldn't believe me, that I am just spinning them a story about the world and how it works. So how do we decide what is useful for explaining the world? How do we decide between different "theories"? Well, that requires intellectual work. That requires research. That requires proof. I think that's what C. Wright Mills called 'the sociological imagination'. You need the sociological imagination. Otherwise, you're just in religion, you're just in faith—"I think this is correct this because I believe it."

This is really relevant within the United States right now because there are actually questions about how best to understand the world: by a kind of rational, scientific view of the world, or a view of the world that just refuses that and is based on faith. It's really a very, very worrying sign right now that the next President of the United States, if he's one of the Republican frontrunners, may not believe in science, won't believe in evolution, doesn't believe the science around climate change.

JP: I don't think the last one did, either.

SJ: Well, the view on Bush was that he was just a front, and that the people running behind him were much more rational. But there wasn't this anti-scientific view that is really now so powerful within the mainstream of the Republican Party. And again, I don't think that's just an accident. It's being created and spun through public relations and through ideological work. The fact that 40 percent of the population in the United States doesn't believe that climate change is connected to human activity isn't just because Americans are stupid. It's because there has been an immense amount of ideological work that has gone into constructing that as an opinion.

JP: So thinking about teaching again, do you see the role of teaching in part to inoculate students against this kind of, what shall we call it, faith-based storytelling?

SJ: I think it actually is much more to do with an old-fashioned sense of what "liberal education" is, what learning is, and figuring out exactly how the world works in some kind of rational way. It is a commitment to a rational view of the world, it is a commitment to

the Enlightenment view of the world that for a long time we didn't even question. What's happening right now is that that view of the world is being questioned from both the right (who see the truth in faith) and the postmodernists who don't see truth anywhere. At the very moment when we need scientific clarity to deal with the collapse of our physical and financial environment is the very moment when a commitment to that view of the world is eroding.

JP: Speaking of collapse, you argued in "Advertising and the End of the World" that advertising would be responsible for destroying the world as we knew it in about ten years. It's now more than a decade later, and the world seems to sputter on in some recognizable form.

SJ: What I think I said was that the environmental catastrophe would hit some 70 or 80 years down the road, but to avert it, we have to take action now, so that we have very little time left to deal with it. Actually, given where we are in terms of climate change and the collapse of the oceans and fishing, 70 years may have optimistic! And while it is impossible to predict with any certainty *when* things will happen, I don't think there is any doubt that they *will* happen. The actual crisis when we won't be able to continue might be a long time coming, and will certainly happen after I am dead and my ashes scattered in the ocean. And yet to stop that crisis occurring *then*, we have to take action *now*. Which is why I always use the metaphor (which I got from my doctoral advisor Bill Leiss) of the oil tanker, which because of its size and momentum has to start turning well before there seems to be any visible danger, heading towards the shore. And that's where we are right now. We have to make that change right now, even though the effects of it may not be felt for quite a while.

I think that's what some people call the "sunny day syndrome". Things seem to be fine, the sun is shining, the weather isn't *that* extreme, you turn on your tap and water comes out of it, and right now we're saying, "Where's the crisis?" And so you've got to have this long-term view of the world. Which is very difficult to do. I mean, from an evolutionary perspective, we have never had to think about our actions that far into the future. Most of the time through human history we've been, "Okay, how do we survive until tomorrow? How do we get enough food now, and perhaps last us through the winter?" And so we're actually, in one sense, going against eons of evolution, in terms of having to think that far into the future. And I think that's the function of knowledge, and we have to evolve, or at least develop, a new way of thinking about ourselves.

I think actually everything I said in “Advertising and the End of the World” is quite accurate. The crises have just gotten worse and worse, our environmental crisis, our ecological crisis, just the resource crisis around oil. I mean when I first wrote “Advertising at the Edge of the Apocalypse” peak oil wasn’t really a thing at that time. Now we know we are in trouble around resources. We know that our oceans are in trouble, through acidification. We’re over-fishing and fish are being made extinct by the day. Our financial systems are collapsing.

And I don’t think there’s any guarantee that the collapse of capitalism will lead to socialism. As Marx said, “the future could be either socialism or barbarism.” And I think there’s very strong evidence, and especially if this kind of the anti-scientific, faith-based view of the world is going to continue—I’m not sure it’s going to predominate, but it’s going to stop the political system from functioning properly—that our future may be barbarism.

Again in the article and film, I talked about how the cultural and intellectual ground on which we operate will determine how far into the future we can see and what we regard as important issues. To the extent that advertising remains the ground, it remains the environment within which we think about these things, all these questions, these long-term questions, they’re beyond the horizon, they’re beyond our capability to think about. And it’s partly also that advertising and marketing, to the extent that they are so fundamental to promoting expanding consumption, are pushing the environmental and resource collapse even faster.

Actually in the film I pointed to the depletion of the ozone layer as an indication of the coming catastrophe. But I think we can actually point to that as a way of showing what a possible solution may be, because the depletion of the ozone layer has partly been dealt with by taking collective action. By nations coming together and deciding to take collective action, and that’s exactly what we need.

I think we’re at a time in the world where urgent action is needed. And one piece of advice I give to graduate students in particular is to concentrate your intellectual work on something that’s important, research something that’s connected to the world out there. Don’t just do research on things that you find interesting in and of themselves. Your work is part of this movement that needs to change how we look at things, and we all play small parts in that. What role are you going to play? For example, within communication, are you going

to study (and I don't mean to insult people) the ironic dimensions of *The Simpsons* and the contradictions of postmodern ideology, or are you going to look at really something much more fundamental? Are you going to look at, for example, how the *Simpsons* and irony are used to paralyze people from actually taking action? Because they think they are taking action by watching the *Simpsons*, by laughing along at the irony.

JP: Before we wrap up, I'd like to ask you a bit about how you view your work with the Media Education Foundation. With the rise of so much social media, is there a continued role for documentary films, the kinds of things that the Media Education Foundation produces? Is that going to have to change at some point, or will there still be a role for 'old-fashioned' films in the classroom?

SJ: Well I hope there's a role for it, because that's how the Media Education Foundation is going to survive, and I think there will be a role for it, but you have to watch things as they progress. Classroom technology is changing, and it's much easier now for people to be directly connected to the web when they are teaching. It's easier for students to be connected too, and it's one of the most maddening things teachers face these days—students who are on their cell phones and on laptops checking their Facebook pages when they're in class. But instructors also have access to this, and I think that will change things. You can go straight to a YouTube clip to show something. And I think that's a positive move forward. There's more access to immediate knowledge, there are more possibilities for people to use things that are going to engage students.

But I think we will continue to do serious documentaries, because at some point, you can't just communicate through three-minute clips. At some point you need sustained intellectual attention to something to really understand it. And that's actually one of the things I worry about most, is what is happening to our ability to engage in this sustained intellectual effort. Can young people who have grown up in an internet age where everything is short, read a book of theory? Can they read a book of research? Do they have the ability to focus for how long it takes to read a book? Can they sit in a lecture for an hour and a quarter, without being disrupted by having to check their email or Twitter account? I know I sound like an old grump, and it is not because I am a reflexive Luddite. But environment and context is everything in my book, and intellectual work requires sustained focus on one thing. But at the same time, I am not

going to fight some defensive battle around this. If the new context requires shorter, snappier pieces, then that's the language and form we will have to use.

JP: Would the shorter pieces be teasers for longer documentary films?

SJ: I don't think so. I'm not sure if you've seen this animated piece that was produced in conjunction with a David Harvey lecture called "The Crisis of Capitalism." It is really quite wonderful and a great way to communicate complex ideas. You look at YouTube, and the Harvey lecture got a million and a half hits! And so I'm actually really interested in that as a model, experimenting with those kinds of techniques and those kinds of animation strategies to get people to think about—in two or three minute pieces—something like the healthcare system in the U.S. in a new way. Can you get them to think about welfare in a new way? Can you get them to think about immigration? I don't know that it's going to transform how people are thinking, but these are small ideas that will be seeds, I hope, to something else.

You know I don't really consider myself a film maker per se, even though that's what I do these days. I've always considered myself an educator, and educators have to go wherever the action is. You have to go where the attention is. If the attention now is through Facebook and social media sites and YouTube etc. then I think we have to have a strategy for getting into that space. So I'm thinking, okay, how does MEF really evolve beyond just making films for the classroom, which I want to keep doing, but also making things that will engage people where they are.

And again, I think that's the same question for progressive intellectuals about engaging in a public discourse, and the question of how you translate the work that you do into a form whereby a lay person, or a non specialist, could understand it. How do you translate high theoretical work into a form of exposition that can be comprehended by a smart and eager non-specialist? I think a lot of academics actually are very very bad at that, they haven't really thought about how you speak to the public.

There's a lot of critique about the monopolization of the media and culture by the right and there is no doubt that those are vital questions. But I often wonder, if we had access to the mass of the people, what would we say that would engage them and move them to take action? Would we be able to get them to pay attention, to engage with, interact with our ideas and our values?

And I'm not too sure we would, because I don't think we as academics have really thought about it a great deal. You go to an academic conference and you see the papers people present—a lot of them are unlistenable. I mean people literally read papers and sometimes say "Oh I've got a 20 page paper I'll just read until I run out of time!" They talk in really heavy theoretical ways, and you look around the room and most people are dozing off because they have no idea what people are talking about. For me, that's just being lazy.

I have to say that one of the things I do is to take every opportunity to speak really seriously. I always ask, "who's my audience", and then how do you communicate with that audience. If I'm talking to a group of heavy Marxist theorists I'll have one way of speaking, but if I'm talking to a group of 18 year old students who are interested in coming to the university you have to talk in a different way. If you talk to communication students who already are interested in these issues, and you've had them in a class before, you talk to them in a different way. That requires thought, it requires really thinking through, it actually requires having the viewpoint of an advertiser.

Advertisers are always interested in communication, they're never interested in just exposure, they're interested in communicating an idea. I wish more intellectuals were interested in the idea of communication, and of how you translate your work into a form where someone can actually understand it and can actually engage in it. They may not agree with it—that's the nature of politics, there is no guarantee in politics—but engaging people is the goal.

Stuart Hall argues that progressive intellectuals, organic intellectuals in Gramsci's language, have two responsibilities. The first is to understand the world better than anyone else. There's no room for dogma in understanding the world. You have to understand it the best way you can. That may require specialist language, that may require high theory, that may require jargon. That's the work of knowledge *production*. And then second, you have to think about how you translate that into a form where someone else can understand it? And although Hall articulated this for me in a formal way, I think I already understood it instinctively right back at the beginning of my career when I was working on that *Alternate Routes* article, because I was reading Marx's *Grundrisse*, his notebooks. And the *Grundrisse* is literally unreadable and it's unreadable because this is Marx's mind in operation, he is trying to work things out.

JP: There's a reason he didn't publish the notebooks.

SJ: Yes, absolutely. They are works in progress, where he was developing his analysis. Some people have actually called them the *mode of analysis*. By contrast *Capital* is the *mode of exposition* and it is beautifully written. It is a rhetorical *tour de force*. Marx spent a long time writing *Capital* (especially Volume One) in a way that workers would be able to understand. And those are two different moments. I wish more intellectuals understood that the work of analysis is *not* the work of exposition, and that exposition takes time and effort. You have to really think about translation.

Again, I think that's one of things that I did very early on, partly because I took teaching seriously. For me, teaching wasn't just part of what I had to do, it was this opportunity to get in front of people who otherwise wouldn't be exposed to these ideas. So once you've got that chance, how do you go about it? For me, the teaching, the research, the politics, is all very closely connected. That's why I always say, the most important part of Media Education Foundation is the "education" part: it's *Media Education* Foundation. What we're trying to do is to take the best work that's been done in the academy, and in line with what Hall argues, in line with Marx's intellectual practice, to take the ivory tower of the intellectual mind into different places, to take it into hallways, into classrooms. Take it into church basements, to community centres, take it into other places where people actually gather and where this vital debate has to take place.