

4-4-2019

Dallas Smythe Award Keynote Lecture

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/democratic-communicue>

Recommended Citation

(2019) "Dallas Smythe Award Keynote Lecture," *Democratic Communiqué*: Vol. 28: Iss. 1, Article 1.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7275/democratic-communicue.1684>

Available at: <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/democratic-communicue/vol28/iss1/1>

This Research Article is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Democratic Communiqué* by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact scholarworks@library.umass.edu.

D E M O C R A T I C C O M M U N I Q U É

Dallas Smythe Award Keynote Lecture

Sut Jhally

The following is an edited transcript of Sut Jhally's keynote address at the Union for Democratic Communications Conference, "Media Resistance, and Justice" on May 12, 2018 in Chicago, Illinois. Jhally is the 2018 recipient of the Dallas Smythe Award from the Union for Democratic Communications (UDC) for outstanding and influential scholarship in the critical political economic tradition of Dallas Smythe. Jhally discusses the development of the Media Education Foundation (MEF) and the relatedness of Stuart Hall's work to that of Smythe and UDC.

Keywords: Dallas Smythe, Media Education Foundation (MEF), Stuart Hall, political economy, cultural studies

Jhally, Sut (2019). Dallas Smythe Award Keynote Lecture, *Democratic Communiqué*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 2019 pp. 1–10.

I'm especially happy to get an award in the name of Dallas Smythe. I might be one of the few people who actually knew Dallas while he was alive. When I realized that Dallas was in Vancouver at Simon Fraser University, I thought, "That's where I'll go for my PhD." By the time I got there, Dallas had disappeared to Australia for two years. It worked out in the end, when I was at the University of Victoria and invited him to visit. When he came back from Australia, I was still doing my PhD. My first published work was a contribution to the "blindspot" debate. And I'm actually really happy to be here because this is one of the few conferences where the blindspot debate can be found in the programs still. And I feel very much at home here. But, you know, I actually avoid most academic conferences because they're kind of intellectual dead zones, and they're certainly political dead zones. And I feel it's really great to be surrounded by people you know who share your values and who share the political project and the intellectual project of critical study. So I'm very happy to be among friends and comrades.

Another piece I wrote about the blindspot debate was called "Watching is Working," with Bill Levant. I just want to read you the footnote we wrote about Dallas at that time, because Dallas had passed on by this time. I said, "We wish to express our deep indebtedness to Dallas Smythe. His work is the starting point of our own. However much of our work has traveled from the start, we have never forgotten the insistence on the productive material activity of audiences. Dallas was and is a materialist in the jungle paradise of idealism that passes for most media analysis these days." Even at that time – even though I didn't work with Dallas directly, I was very, deeply influenced by him and my early work was an extension, and actually, I hope, a kind of loving critique of the work, as well.

What I'd like to do today is give a talk about the Media Education Foundation, a project I think Dallas would have liked and would have approved of. I'm actually not quite sure, but I hope he would have liked it and would have approved of it. I'm sure he would have had his own criticisms, as well. So the Media Education Foundation has now been in operation for 28 years. We started in 1991, and what I want to stress is that it didn't start off as some grand design. I didn't wake up one day and say, "We've got to have some organization that does this." It was actually a response to circumstances. I want to stress that plans very rarely work out, because you can't predict everything. And so what we're really stuck with are choices. We have choices to make at particular times, and we hope we make the right choice. We often don't, and especially in the left, I don't think we've made the right choices all the time, but we have choices to make. And the Media Education Foundation actually arose, or was formed, as the result of some of those choices. So let me tell you the story, because I think some of you may know some of the rough outlines of it. I've only told it once before, actually, in a public forum. And it is an interesting story, I think, about how to get independence.

How do you get the fish to pay attention to the water?

My first second job after I got my PhD was at the University of Massachusetts, and I was teaching large lecture undergraduate classes, which all of us have to do when we start off our careers, and some of us like doing it and carry on doing it throughout our entire time. So I was teaching a course on media and culture, and thought, "Okay, how do you get people who are really, essentially engulfed in the water, who are engulfed in this forum, to take it seriously?" So we're all aware of Marshall McLuhan's famous idiom of "how do you get the fish to pay attention to the water?" He said, we're not too sure who discovered water but we're pretty sure it wasn't a fish. How do you get the fish to look at the water? How do you get people to think about this popular culture that surrounds them everywhere, that has just become the air that we breathe?

My initial perspective was a pedagogical perspective. I had 300 people in front of me, 18-year-olds, 19-year-olds who were engulfed in this culture, and I wanted them to take a step back from the

culture -- that analytical step back which is absolutely vital to be able to see the world in a new way. Actually, in my classes these days, I start off the semester with a clip from the film *The Matrix*. It's the famous clip where Morpheus is offering Neo a choice between the red pill and the blue pill. And he says to Neo, "take the blue pill and you go back to sleep and you're in dreamland and you're back in a fantasy. Take the red pill and you're in wonderland and you'll see how the system operates." And that's what the matrix is, when you're in the matrix, how do you get people to look and see the matrix? To do this you've got to this analytical step back, and this analogy is the one thing they remember from the start of the semester to the end. In the evaluations which we all get, they say, "I'm really glad I took the red pill," or sometimes, "I wish I hadn't taken it, our ignorance is bliss." Once you know you cannot un-know, and so that step of getting people to see and to know — you can't predict what they're going to do with it. That's not our job, by the way. Our job is not to tell people what to do. As academics that's not our role. Our role is to get people to see the world as clearly as it can be seen, and for them, then, to make their own ethical and moral choices about how to be in the world based on that. And you can't predict it. I wish you could predict it.

So when I started off it was 1985, and MTV was central to the culture. MTV had started a few years earlier, and this was when MTV still played videos. You can't find a video on MTV these days, but it was the main place that showed videos. And I thought if you can get people to think about this part of popular culture in an analytical way then that's a step forward. And one of the major debates at the start of MTV, was a debate about gender. There was a big debate already going on about the very narrow representations of femininity and female sexuality in music videos. And so I thought, "here's a debate that's going on, can I get people to think about this in a different way?" So I started to bring in pieces of video. This is really — the technological revolution that took place during my time. This was before — I remember the first class I ever taught, there was no VCR, there was no screen. I actually had to bring a screen in. Initially what I did was I started to videotape pieces of MTV. I would put the machine on and then I would take that tape out, I would go into my class and I would play this little clip. And then the next time, if I wanted to show another one, I would take that tape out and I would put another one in. Now, the moment you do that, you've lost the class. Right? The moment you have any hesitation whatsoever, the class is gone. And so that was my first attempt at editing. It was a pedagogical moment. How can I stop losing the class? So I started to say, "Okay, I'm going to edit the clips together." My first experience with editing was this pedagogical moment of just putting two clips together. And then I did that and I realized that I left the music on and people would sing along with the music. And then I stripped the music off and I put my own voiceover on the tape and eventually, over about five years, I produced this standalone piece. But it took a long time. It was a lot of testing. I had audiences of students I tested it with. And eventually I produced this standalone piece -- *Dreamworlds*.

The images that I showed in *Dreamworlds* never made it into *Dreamworlds II*, which happened four years later, or into *Dreamworlds III*, which happened ten years later after that. The escalation in the images and the scale of the images and the intensity of the images is just unbelievable. Not one of the images. But this is what the film was, although it really wasn't a film. I never thought about myself as a filmmaker. I thought about myself as a teacher. I produced this tool that was going to help me in my teaching, and so it was clips of videos strung together, music stripped off and my voiceover over the top trying to tell a narrative about it and trying to draw the themes out. And not just that, but what the connection of these images was to sexual attitudes, gender attitudes, and also to sexual violence. It ended with a scene from the film *The Accused* where it showed a very brutal rape scene that Jodie Foster is in and intercut with music videos to show there was very little difference between them, and to get people into that shock mode, at least making a connection between these images and this thing that's happening. In a way, trying to get that analytical distance.

The battle with MTV and the origins of MEF

With the videotape finished, I thought, “well if it’s useful to me it may be useful to some other people.” MEF did not exist at this time. I was an assistant professor at UMass, and I thought, well, if it’s useful to me it might be useful to some other people, some other teachers. So I sent out a very small mailing to other communication departments and to women’s studies departments. We were selling them for \$50 and the money was coming back and going into the department trust fund to cover expenses, et cetera, so it was very small-scale stuff. That all kind of changed in June of 1991 when I got this letter that was a cease and desist order from MTV Networks. The letter said,

you’re using our copyrighted materials. We demand that you stop. . .
 . We hereby demand that you immediately cease and desist from using in any manner the names MTV or MTV Music Television, or any other mark of MTV and any footage of other matter . . . don’t use, and destroy all tapes, advertising, and other matter in your possession which contain those marks, and recall from distribution all tapes and other matter containing this mark and if you don’t do this, we will consider further action.

What I remember when I got this letter, is that it came both to myself and to the university because I was a university employee. I remember shaking when I got it. I wasn’t sure if I was shaking from fear, or from excitement. I went down the hall to one my colleagues, Justin Lewis, and I said, “I’ve just got this letter. I can’t believe what they’ve done.” I didn’t have any money, so it didn’t really matter being sued at that time. But I said, “they’ve just given me, if I play it right, a million dollars’ worth of publicity.” It was this kind of fear on the one hand and excitement at the same time.

Now, the letter came both to myself and to the president of the university because I was a university employee. So I had to deal with the university about this, and university lawyers, who want to play it safe. What the university lawyers said was, “We think you’re covered by fair use.” What I did then, was write to MTV and said, “thanks very much. By the way, here’s why it’s covered by fair use, and by the way, I notice that you’re running an anti-censorship campaign at this time, ironically.”

The university lawyers didn’t want me to do anything. “It’ll just go away.” And I said, “That’s crazy.” I think I may have actually said that, and not just thought it. I said,

This is a really important moment in which you can make a statement about fair use. You can make a statement about copyright. You can make a statement about academic freedom. You can make a statement about freedom of expression. Why wouldn’t the university make this statement?

Well, I know why, because universities never make those statements. Never. They never make them when they should make them. And the university lawyers said to me, “Okay, if you do anything to publicize this, you will no longer be covered by our legal team. You’re on your own, legally. You’re on your own.” That was the moment in which I had to decide whether I was going to not do anything, or whether I was going to separate myself from the university. And so I decided to separate myself from the university, and that’s why MEF was formed. MEF was formed as a response to the control of the university and to separate myself from that. It was the best decision that I could ever have made.

What happened next is that I sent out a press release saying, “MTV used copyright law to stifle criticism. Free speech at risk.” I was smart enough at that time to know that images of women were not what reporters were concerned about. They were concerned about freedom of speech. So I

framed it as a freedom of speech issue with copyright, and I got a lot of coverage from major outlets, including *The Boston Globe* and *Newsweek*. This might have been my major claim to fame. I got George Will off the back of this last page of *Newsweek* for one week. There was a lot of publicity. There was TV stuff too.

MEF started distributing the tape. Money came in. We started putting it into another project, and that was the way it started. In the early days, it was pretty tough because we were trying to do two things. We were trying to produce material, which is incredibly expensive, and I decided we were going to distribute it ourselves instead of going through a distributor because we wanted to keep 100-percent of the income to support other projects going on.

Looking back on it, it was a choice made out of ignorance. If I'd have known how much money was involved, I'm not too sure I would have done it, but ignorance can sometimes take you into some interesting places. That's what we started to do, and then our big break was a few years later, when I made a connection with Jean Kilbourne who had done *Killing Us Softly* I and II. We did a film with Jean on slimness and advertising. Again, these were materials that were being produced for the classroom. The films we were doing, the tapes we were doing — we'll call them tapes at this time — were being sold to university libraries. University libraries, had a budget that went from year to year, and they had a way of getting this material out to classrooms, because teachers would go to the library to get materials. So that was our mode of distribution. This was really successful. I did *Dreamworlds II* in 1995. And this led to the kind of first stage of expansion of MEF.

So MEF has kind of gone through ups and downs. I know you can't actually see it. You just see the films that come out, but we've had lots of financially precarious moments. In fact, around 2006, I had taken out \$60,000 on my own credit card to lend to MEF. Otherwise, we'd have gone under. I don't know what would have happened at that time. We've all invested in things that we believe in.

Independence and success for MEF

The decision to separate myself from the university gave us independence, gave me independence. And the fact that we were distributing it directly meant that we weren't going to foundation offices. If we sold enough, we could do what we wanted to do based upon what we thought would work in a market. So that independence is absolutely fundamental to us. And it has allowed us to do work that otherwise would not be possible.

The next thing, if you really want to talk about why MEF has been successful is not because of our political films, but because of our gender films. Our gender films account for about 75-percent of our income. And the gender films are political, but not political in the same way. You don't have to be a raving radical to show *Tough Guise*. You just have to be a little bit left. You just have to be a little bit off-center. And so this is a film we did, which I would say is the most important film we did in terms of its impact. This was a film we did based on masculinity and violence around 2000, and this was before there was any talk about masculinity. And we now talk about issues around masculinity in a highly visible way, and I think we were at the start of that movement. Not alone. None of this stuff happens by yourself, of course, but I think the resource was an important one for people who wanted to say, "gender is not just about women. Gender is essentially about masculinity, because that's where the power is." And we now actually talk about that very easily, but we didn't twenty years ago. And this film, which Jackson Katz was part of inaugurating, provided a new way of insisting upon a different way of thinking about gender.

We also did *Killing Us Softly III*. Jean had done two films with Cambridge Documentary Films, *Killing Us Softly I* and *Killing Us Softly II*, and they just weren't very nice to her. And so she wanted to do something with someone else, and so she chose us to do it. A lot of money came in

from *Tough Guise* and *Killing US Softly III* that that allowed other films to be done. It launched us into a new realm. This was in the early 2000s, and allowed us to start doing things. We bought a building. We're based in North Hampton and we bought an old fire station, was in the center of town. I was able to hire new people. At one time we had about 15 people employed at MEF because of that success.

In 2004 or 2003, we produced what I think was our first kind of political film, and we started to branch out beyond the classroom and produce something that we thought would work not just in the classroom, but in the community and in a theater. We produced our first film that could be shown in theaters, called *Hijacking Catastrophe*. And *Hijacking Catastrophe* was about the way in which the Bush administration used the tragedy of 9/11 to launch this illegal, insane war in Iraq. They were hijacking the catastrophe for this neo-liberal agenda of taking over the Middle East.

The film is about how we were lied into war, and about the centrality of propaganda and public relations. Of turning Saddam Hussein, who had nothing to do with 9/11, who hated jihadi terrorism, into being connected to 9/11. You want to bring it up to modern substitute, substitute Assad for Saddam Hussein and gas attacks. This has been going on for a long time. This is not exactly rocket science, trying to figure out how propaganda works, and it just keeps working all the time. And by the time it's actually figured out, it's too late. Everyone now knows there were no weapons of mass destruction, but politically, it makes no difference. That's one of the things that presidents and administrations know. Once you start a war, it's impossible to stop it. It doesn't really matter afterwards. You can lie as much you want. You've just got to get into war somehow, and then the machine, the whole economy is built upon that. The machine just takes over.

At the same time did a film called *Peace Propaganda in the Promised Land*, which was about Israeli propaganda and why Americans know nothing about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and what they do know is all wrong. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a taboo subject in a lot of places — and that's what independence gave us. It gave us the ability to do a film on something like this.

We did a film in 2016 called *The Occupation of the American Mind*, where Roger Waters from Pink Floyd is the narrator. One of the great things about this project is that I get to work with my heroes. Roger Waters is one, and I also get to work with my academic heroes -- the people who have been really influential. I include Bob McChesney in this. He's been incredibly influential on my own work and on MEF. I've also worked with Edward Said and bell hooks. It's been fun because, at heart, I'm kind of a fan, I get to work with my heroes. And so, with *The Occupation of the American Mind*, I got to work with Roger Waters, go to his house and hang out with him, and then to a concert.

The challenge we face with this film, although its one of the best films we've done, is that it has been totally blanked in the U.S. We have not gotten into any mainstream festival in the U.S., which means we've had no media coverage of it. It's been totally blanked by mainstream media. It's gotten into Palestinian film festivals, as we would expect. It's been shown around the world. It's been shown on Scandinavian TV. Al-Jazeera bought and showed it. Russia Today showed it. I did a great screening with Roger in Mexico City, where we had two screenings at their National Theater. So its been around the rest of the world, but not in the U.S. Now what we've decided to do is give the film away for free, we are developing a website where you can watch the film for free in a high-quality mode. You can download it. There's going to be a 20-minute version. There's going to be a 46-minute version of it. And we're just going to try to drive people to the website, so when you hear this, when you get this publicity for this, please share on your social media. We're not selling anything. We just want people to watch it.

Challenges ahead for MEF: Translating knowledge

A new challenge for MEF is technological and cultural. In the move from DVD to streaming in academic budgets, or in university budgets, something has happened to the budgets. No one can figure it out. None of the other people who do distribution of this can figure out what's happening. But essentially, people don't really want to pay for cultural content — this seems to be a cultural thing. Young people especially, they don't want to pay for culture. They think they're entitled to it for free, and they're entitled to it yesterday. And I think one of the biggest things I want to stress is culture takes material resources to produce. And if you get it for free it means cultural producers are not getting paid. They're not going to — you may get this film for free. You're not going to get the next one because the next one is not going to be made. We're involved in this sort of technological and cultural shift, and I'm not quite sure how things are going to work out.

The philosophy that drives MEF is that we are a unique organization, a unique institution. And what makes us unique, as opposed to other film producers and other distributors, is that we are rooted firmly in the academy. We are rooted firmly in the academy. Through me and through the connections that we have and the work that we do, we are firmly rooted in the academy. And our role is one of translation. I see our role as taking the latest, cutting edge research that the university produces, that's what we should do — if the university doesn't do that, I don't know why we exist. Our job is to produce knowledge. That's why we've been given the freedoms that we have. And we do, relatively speaking, we do have freedoms and we do have privileges. They're under attack, yes. But that's our function is to produce new knowledge.

I see MEF's role as translating that knowledge into a form that non-specialists can deal with, and understand. It shouldn't be just six people who read the journal article to be able to understand it. Right, it's how do you translate it in a form that we can get out to students, and the students are the public. And more than that, students are a captive audience. That's the power that we have — to put these issues in front of them. When you do a documentary and it's shown in a theater, the people who come to the theater have already figured it out, right? The reason they're willing to spend their ten bucks or twelve bucks or whatever is because they're kind of on board already. The issue of politics is transformation. Yes, I believe we need to produce things for the choir. It's good to give the choir some resources that they can use in their own work. But we've also got to be involved in process of transformation.

I'm always looking for new ways to translate difficult, abstract material. When I'm watching television and when I'm watching films, in one sense I'm always watching it as a teacher. I'm always thinking, "Can I use this? Can I use this? Can I?" Because someone has spent millions of dollars on this, and can I use it for my own ends?

Dallas Smythe

So let me go back to Dallas Smythe. This is a Dallas Smythe lecture. One of the major things that Dallas insisted on was the material, productive activity of audiences. And trying to explain that to undergraduates is very tough. I actually used the "Watching is Working" stuff to teach Marxist economics to undergraduates without them knowing it was Marxist economics.

I understand this is how television works, and actually I can apply this to the factory. You can apply this to other things, as well. One of the things I wrote with Bill Levant in the "Watching is Working" article that we did about Dallas is the idea that

the modern evolution of mass media under capitalism is governed by
the appropriation of surplus human objective activity. The
development of this appropriation is a higher stage in the development
of mass media under capitalism. Its logic reproduces the logic described by

Marx and for the earlier form, but its concrete form is, in fact, a new stage — the value form of human activity itself. The empirical reflection of this is that the process of consciousness becomes valorized. There is thus a partial truth in the label, which writers such as Smythe have fixed to the modern mass media as consciousness industry, except — and this is what Dallas would not have liked — except that they have so far conceptualized it upside down. It is not characterized primarily by what it puts into you — messages — but by what it takes out: value. Not ideology that it installs in you. That's obviously what it does. But the organization of mass media is around what it takes out of you. That's the same way as in the factory. Value is drawn, and surplus value is drawn, from workers, the same way — how do you explain that?

And, it's not just about what it puts into you but what it takes out. When I was watching the Harry Potter films, there are these monsters in the film called the Dementors. What the Dementors do is they suck your soul from you. That's also what television does. The Dementors are commercial television. They're not trying to put anything into Harry. They're extracting from him his soul. They're extracting something from him, and that's the essence of television. That's the essence of a value form of extraction that television is organized around. So again, when I talk about the process for translation, and pedagogy — this is the project of MEF.

Stuart Hall

I want to finish with the words of someone who I think is probably not that influential or present at UDC, and I wish there was more of him. That's the words of Stuart Hall, the great British cultural theorist. And I know there's this crazy divide between political economy and cultural studies, and it is crazy because there's no reason for the divide to exist. Stuart Hall would have agreed about 99-percent with what Dallas said about the organization of the media. I know he did. I've talked to him about it. His understanding of the political economy of the media is second to none. I wish there was more integration of Stuart's vision of what intellectual life and political life was like. And I think this shares a great deal with UDC and the values that UDC encapsulates.

Stuart talked about the two roles of intellectuals, and I guess that's what I want to highlight now, and the idea of translation, as well. He said there were two roles of the Gramsci, organic intellectual. Hall was a great scholar of Antonio Gramsci, and Gramsci would not be what he is without Stuart's translation of Gramsci's work. Hall said that the organic intellectual must work on two fronts at the same time.

On the one hand, we have to be on the very forefront of intellectual, theoretical work because, as Gramsci says, it is the job of the organic intellectuals to know more than the traditional intellectuals do. . . . Hence, there are no theoretical limits from which cultural studies can turn back. We have to go where reality takes us, as complicated and as contradictory as it may be. And it's always going to be complicated and contradictory. And we will need new theoretical tools, because the world keeps developing. The world is not the world that Marx looked at in the 19th century. We live in a new world that requires new concepts, and we have to do that intellectual work. That's on the one hand. But, the second aspect is just as crucial, that the organic intellectual cannot absolve himself or herself from the responsibility of transmitting those ideas, that knowledge, through the intellectual tradition to those who do not belong professionally in the theoretical

class. And unless those two fronts are operating at the same time, or at least unless those two ambitions are part of the project of cultural studies, you can get enormous theoretical advance without any engagement at the level of the political project.

That notion of translation is about politics and about making knowledge matter, not just producing knowledge for knowledge's sake. Sometimes you need specialized knowledge. Sometimes you need jargon to move knowledge forward. But to get to the next level, you've got to think about how you translate that into a different form so that the knowledge actually matters. And what Stuart makes is a distinction between academic work and intellectual work. One of the major insults you can give to me is when someone says, "Oh, he's an academic. That's just academic, right?" It means that it doesn't matter. It means it's divorced, it's separated. I don't want to be an academic. I am involved not in academia. I am in academia, but it's connected to something else, which is the intellectual function, and the intellectual function is a political function.

Stuart says, and I'm quoting Stuart very broadly here, that I come back to the deadly seriousness of intellectual work. It is a deadly serious matter. I come back to the critical distinction between intellectual work and academic work. They overlap. They abut with one another. They feed off one another. The one provides you with the means to do the other, but they are not the same thing. I come back to the difficulty of instituting a genuine cultural and critical practice, which is intended to produce some kind of organic, intellectual political work which does not try to inscribe itself in the overarching meta-narrative of achieved knowledges within the institution, as a practice, which always thinks about its intervention in a world in which it would make some difference, in which it would have some effect.

You have to go beyond being academics to being intellectuals, to engaging in that public world beyond the six people that read journals. This is what Stuart talks about, and I think this a boundary at which MEF exists. This is the way it's developed over time. It's the way I've learnt from Stuart. I've learnt from cultural studies. I've learnt from political economy. I've learnt from Dallas. I've learnt from Herb Schiller. I've learnt from Bob McChesney. I've learnt from this incredible collection of intellectuals that we have, this incredible work. But we've got to go beyond this intellectual work. It's got to fit in. It's got to be applied to something. And if it isn't, if it isn't about something, why bother? It may make us feel good, but may have zero impact in the world.

One of the other things that Stuart talked about was there's no guarantee that your intervention in the world will have any effect, or will have a positive effect. There's no guarantee. There's no guarantee in politics. If you want a guarantee, speak to yourself. You will have a guaranteed audience. You'll have a guarantee. Or speak only to people you agree with, but if you're involved in the world of politics, which is about transformation, then you are not involved in the world of guarantees anymore. That was Stuart's great phrase: no guarantees. There is only politics. There is only politics, no guarantees. He quoted Edward Said:

This is a way of opening up the question of the worldliness of cultural studies. I'm not dwelling on the secular connotations of the metaphor of worldliness here, but on the worldliness of cultural studies. I'm dwelling on the dirtiness of it. The dirtiness of the semiotic game, if I can put it that way. I'm trying to return the project of cultural studies from the clean air of meaning and textuality and theory to the something nasty down below, the something nasty in reality down below.

generous of people. I asked him about what he thought about where cultural studies was going, and he said, “Oh, it’s not up to me to be the judge of cultural studies and where it’s going.” And near the end of his life, when I did this interview, he said, “Enough of these analyses of *The Sopranos* and these other texts or whatever, right? Something else is going on.” Something else is happening in the world, and unless cultural studies, and our intellectual work, engages with that, then we are not involved in politics. And for me, for MEF — that’s where I am right now. Who knows where I’ll be in five, ten years’ time? But that’s the journey that I think I started off on when I started thinking about how talk to undergraduate students in a way they may understand with the MTV stuff and other things. I think MEF is at the boundary, that intellectual, dirty boundary. If MEF is not there, I don’t know why we exist. If MEF is not at that boundary, I’m not too sure why MEF would exist.