An Interview with Edward W. Said

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ABSTRACT

In this interview conducted by the Chinese translator of *Representations of the Intellectual*, Said talks about the role of the intellectual, his long-term concern with the issue of representation, the four periods of his own intellectual career, his disagreement with mainstream European critics such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Raymond Williams, his relationship to post-colonial critics and writers, the two main strands of his key ideas, and the paradoxical role of being an influential critic inside and out of the academy on the one hand and an exile and cultural outsider on the other.

KEY WORDS

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Shan: First of all, what would you say to the Chinese readers of *Representations of the Intellectual* who have a very long intellectual tradition over the millennia?

Said: I feel very humble. But I also come from a very old tradition—we have a long tradition of intellectuals and scribes. I think there are many similarities, but, of course, the Chinese tradition is quite different from ours, from the Arabic-Islamic tradition. Though I don't know as much about it as I should, I think it's probably true that in all these traditions there is the tradition of the court intellectual, the intellectual who speaks to the authority, and it is the intellectual of authority. We have it very much in our tradition as well. And I've always reacted against that. I've always felt that the role of the intellectual ought to be a questioning one, rather than a counseling one—one in which the authority and tradition are looked at with skepticism, and even with suspicision. That's what I would say in particular.

Shan: Has this book been translated into other languages?

Said: Yes, many. It has been translated into French, Japanese, German, Swedish, Spanish, Italian, Arabic, Turkish, Portuguese, Greek, and maybe one or two others.

Shan: How is its reception in the Arabic world?

Said: Well, there is a big debate, because obviously the relationship between the intellectual and political responsibilities is very important. And I've been criticized in France and in Arabic countries for not paying enough attention to the role of the responsible intellectual, in other words, where calculations have to be made. My stress is on not making calculations. I think the intellectual should speak what he can despite the difficulty. Of course the other big thing in the Arabic world is that we have a great deal of censorship. It is very difficult for the intellectuals to speak the truth without restraint, but at least to stir the debate. Since a year after this book appeared, two of my political

books were banned on the West Bank by Yasir Arafat. So it raises the question once again whether it's important for the intellectual to support the national cause in a time of difficulty, or whether criticism is more important. And I take the position that criticism is more important. I think the young people respond better to that. It's the old people who have the idea that you could be an intellectual who is responsible and has connections with power, which I deny. I don't at all believe that you could be an intellectual in my sense of the word and hold offices and positions. So that is the big cause of debate in the Arabic countries.

Shan: How would you view this phenomenon in what you once named as "traveling theory"?

Said: Well, I'll tell you that in all my books this is the one to which the responses are the most uniform. It doesn't matter whether it's France or Spain or Germany or Sweden. There's always a debate about what the intellectual should do and about the responsibility of the intellectual. I cannot read all these languages and I don't follow everything they said. But to the extent that I have been on the radio and television and have done some interviews—whether I was in France, Lebanon, Egypt or Japan—I have been struck by the fact that the reaction of this traveling book, or, the reaction *to* this traveling book, is more or less the same. People say that I touch upon the situation that is true in their societies, even though I don't know those societies at all. I think the main question is the question of freedom of speech over and over again—a society where somebody sets the limits on the freedom of speech, and I am against that. I think there should be unlimited freedom of speech for the intellectual.

Shan: Looking back, how would you periodize or categorize your own intellectual career, if such a periodization or categorization is possible at all? Which book characterizes each of these periods or categories?

Said: Yes, it *is*, it *is* possible. My background in the Middle East when I was growing up was relatively unpolitical. Even though I lived through the last of Palestine in 1948, the Egyptian revolution of 1952, and the Lebanese civil war of 1958—all these were part of my background—neither my family nor I was involved in politics. And my education in the USA was an establishment education. I mean, I was an undergraduate at Princeton, I got my Ph.D. at Harvard, I was a literary scholar, I came to New York and got a job at Columbia to be an assistant professor of literature. But the turning point came for me in 1967, you know, the Arabic-Israeli war when I realized that the world I had known had disappeared. And many of the reasons for that disappearance were that this country, that is the USA, is the superpower and the principal outside influence on the Middle East. So beginning with my book on *Beginnings*, which was really the first book I wrote after 1967, I try to reformulate my sense of intellectual mission. My books after 1967—after *Beginnings* really—have political as well as intellectual dynamism. So *Orientalism* was the first one that combines the political and the intellectual and scholarly. That went along with the fact that after the 1970s, I became politically involved in the Palestinian movement. Even though I lived here, my family was over there, so I would go to Jordan, Lebanon, and various places.

I think the periodization is that first there has been an interest in existential problems of literary production. Then there's a theoretical period, *Beginnings*, where the whole question of project was formulated. And third, there's a political period which includes *Orientalism*, *Covering Islam*, *The Question of Palestine*, and continues for several years. And in the last period, the one I am in right now, I am going back toward the aesthetic more. I'm writing memoirs, and I'm also writing a book on what I call the "late style"—that is to say, the style of artists in the final phase of their career. Plus, I am now doing more work on music. I have written a book on opera which Cambridge will publish. So it's the return to the aesthetic. But of course, my political concern continues, because I also write for journalism. Two or three times a month I write regular articles for the Arabic on the events there.

Shan: I notice that at the end of *Beginnings* you mention the importance of the intellectual. You have been interested in the question of the intellectual for more than two decades. Why is this long-term "obsession"?

Said: Well, I suppose, it's the obsession with what one does, because the question that has been with me really for at least 25 years is the question of direct political intervention. And I always chose the intellectual project because I felt for *myself* that it was more important and that it was something I could do better than getting directly involved in politics because (a) I am an exile, you see, I think exile is very important here; (b) I think by temperament and capacity, I'm much of a solitary person—I'm sociable, but not gregarious—and the idea of constantly getting involved with people is something that I don't think I can do; and (c) a political career involves too many compromises, the kind of things that I'm not capable of doing.

I must say, though, that in the last three or four years, I've gotten much closer to politics, given the situation of the Palestinian community, because I think I have now become Arafat's principal opponent. If my health were better, I would certainly enter politics in a more serious way. As it is, I can only do it through writing or speaking, this sort of things. But if my health allowed me to do it, I would certainly do it at this point, because I think it is the most critical period of the modern history. And I think Arafat and the current leadership are quite bankrupt. And you know, to say it with modesty, my writing and my work have attracted a great deal of attention and support in the Arab world. So to me it's an important constituency and I would like to spend more time with it, but I can't.

Shan: You are best known in the Chinese-speaking world as the author of *Orientalism*. You also mentioned that *Orientalism*, *Covering Islam*, and *The Question of Palestine* are a trilogy. Can you say something about this?

Said: Yes, of course. In all three of them, I focus on the question of representation and how representation is an object of study not independent of, but somehow autonomous from, the study of political and economic institutions. For me, the study of representation is the great cultural issue. What I was dealing with in those three books was the power of representation to determine by coercion and by intellectual power the fates of the so-called non-European peoples, so that the way the West portrayed the Islamic world is connected with the way the Zionists portrayed and represented Palestine as an empty place in which the native was unimportant. And it's also connected with the way in which the media—this is the subject of *Covering Islam*—the contemporary media represented the Islamic world as the world of terror and irrationality and so on. But I think the use of the three books is that they can be extended into other cultural contexts over representations, meanings and formulations of representation, and can go as far as the current issue, which is the conflict of civilizations that Samuel P. Huntington has been talking about. I think that is a natural progression. So what I try to do is to talk about the liberating effects of these works and also to suggest that a more careful analysis of culture will get us beyond the "'us' vs. 'them'" paradigm.

Shan: Let's talk about an alternative concept of "the Orient." You set the Arab world as the "Orient" in contrast to the West, but seldom talk about the Asian countries. However, the Chinese-speaking world, or the so-called Far East, is geographically more oriental than the Middle East. Francis Hsu, the author of *Americans and Chinese*, once juxtaposed the Orient with the Occident and excluded India and Middle East from his definition of the Orient. To him, "'Orient' refers to China, Japan, and Korea as the center, and Burma, Thailand, Indo-China, and Indonesia, as the periphery. It excludes India, 'Occident' refers to Europe and all other culture areas occupied by Europeans, and Arab, and Africa, north of the Sahara." How would you respond to this definition of the Orient and the Occident?

Said: Look, the concept of the Orient is extremely flexible. I mean that is one of the points I'm trying to suggest. It can be used in an infinite variety of ways to suggest that which is different from us. You know I focused on Islam. It's just a matter of analytical convenience, because this was *an Orient* which was for a long time *the Orient*. One of the things I talked about in the book is to the extent *that Orient*, that is to say, the Islam or Middle East, gradually came to be superseded by a more distant Orient, which is China, Japan, and Far East. But I would also like to say that there are connections between the different Orients, because they all stood for the opposite of the Occident and they are traveling terms that can be used. For example, you find it's quite common today that an Arab who in the West is called an Oriental would refer to a Chinese as an Oriental and he is something different. So, you see, it is one of these very tricky words that can be used. And I think it always contains a little bit of xenophobia and a little bit of hostility and suspicion. So I think one should be very careful about the situation.

The second large point is that for every Orient there is always an Occident or an opposite. So you can have Orientalism and Occidentalism too, which is the mythification of the West. Here at Columbia an interesting thing in the last few years which I have experienced is that the students have developed the notion of "the Asian American" which usually means Chinese and Japanese. When I ask what about Indians and Arabs, they say that they are not Asians. And I say of course Arabs are Asians and so are Indians. So it becomes a proprietary term—"*We* are the Orientals, you are not." I find that kind of things very comic, the way the term undergoes the metamorphoses where in the beginning it's a term of distance and alienation and has become a term of appropriation—"*We* are the Orientals, not you."

Shan: Last year, "After *Orientalism*: A Conference on the Work of Edward Said" was held here. It's been nearly two decades since the publication of the book. But even today at Broadway, we can still see such Orientalist representations as *The King and I* and *Miss Saigon*.

Said: Listen, it's much worse, I think, it is much much worse. I just read an article today about the Egyptian playboy "Dodi" al Fayed who is going out with Princess Di. If you read the stuff, what the English is saying is something straight out of the late 19th century racist and imperialist writing. Here is an Oriental he. All of the suggestions that because this Egyptian playboy is an Oriental, he is more sexually potent—and, of course, sex is very important here. And if you look at Broadway and the movies, the villains have become Asians now. It used to be Russians. And now it has become Kazakstans, Palestinians. Have you see the film *Air Force One*?

Shan: Not yet.

Said: Then see it. Regularly in the James Bond films, the villains are always Chinese or Japanese. Now I think the situation is getting worse. There is a sense in which these figures of the past have been revived and recycled, filling the fantasy of the white middle class in the metropolitan world.

Shan: What would you suggest to cope with this kind of cultural production or misrepresentation?

Said: Well, there's a lot of work to be done. First of all, it has to be analyzed, it has to be looked at critically so that people can actually see what's going on. For me, the most important thing is to connect it to a history of a racialist thought. Since so many young people—and that is why the young play an exceptionally important role—so many young people are now bi-cultural, I think one must appeal to the need not to think in exclusive terms, not to think in such big and monolithic terms as the Oriental, the Asian, the Chinese, or the Japanese, but to deconstruct them, to show that every culture is mixed and hybrid and that to try to isolate a pure essence of some cultural identity is extremely dangerous and false. And here we can talk about true and false. Cultural studies have become this kind of science, investigating the way cultures work, the way the traditions

are invented, the way representations and stereotypes become reality, this sort of things. And that is also connected to the power of media. I think what needs to be done is to integrate all these phenomena in a wide intellectual, cultural, and ideological field and to show how they operate and how they do no one any good.

Shan: So this has to do with your critique of "the end of the history school" on the one hand and "the end of the ideology school" on the other.

Said: Yes. I think both of them are false. Ideology continues and *Air Force One* is the most ideological film I've seen in my life. It's unbelievable, because the symbols of America are constantly being reinforced in the film.

And of course "the end of history" is a nonsensical phrase, because history continues to surprise us. There are so many upheavals in contemporary history that to think that the end of history is the bourgeois democratic state is a kind of ludicrous concept which can only have been invented in America. But it has been discredited and nobody talks about it anymore. It was a concept that had a brief moment and now disappeared.

Shan: And "the end of ideology"?

Said: I think "the end of ideology" is still considered in the world we live. The man who formulated the phrase, Daniel Bell, was a colleague of mine. I knew him quite well at Columbia. Of course, with the end of the Cold War, as the Americans say, when "we won the Cold War," ideology was supposed to have died. But I think there are now many critiques being advanced inside the US and in other parts of the non-European world of capitalism and capitalist ideology, so it hasn't solved all the economic problems. There are still many ideological, economical, political problems which the so-called free-market economy hasn't addressed or dealt with. I think soon the appeal of "the end of ideology" will pass and we will be back in the

great ideological context which is there—capitalism—and examine it critically. That is where it is now.

Shan: You seldom mentioned Jacques Derrida in *Beginnings*. It seems to me that your concept of "beginnings" has something to do with his concept of "différance."

Said: Yes, something to do with it, I suppose, or, his concept of "différance" has something to do with my concept of "beginnings." Don't forget that the main essay of *Beginnings*, "A Meditation on Beginnings," appeared before "différance." I met Derrida in the fall of 1966 and we followed each others' work for a while, but then I separated. It became obvious that what's missing in his work was the social, political, and historical context. And the notion of indeterminacy to me is unsatisfying, because I'm very interested in determination of history, not indeterminacy of meaning. So in the end his work has become, to me, less interesting. Although we are friends and I admire him, but not his work. Is he well-known in China? Yes, I'm sure he is.

Shan: Yes, he is known as a deconstructionist. And Foucault's concept of knowledge and power is obvious in *Orientalism*. But you are also somewhat dissatisfied with his idea, especially the concept of resistance.

Said: Yes. In my short essay "Foucault and the Imagination of Power," which appeared after his death, I talked about the rather striking pattern in his books about power, in which power is always compelling and subduing resistance. And if you try to derive from his books some ideas about the possible modes of resistance, you won't find any. I think he was obsessed with the working of power and not enough concern with the process of resistance. That's partly due to the fact that he theorized around, or, his theories derived from, observations about the French state. He didn't understand the colonial dynamic at all. And he didn't seem to be interested in the patterns of liberation emerging in other parts of the world which are different

from what he knew. For example, the last time I met him was in 1979. He just came back from Iran and had written a series of articles for an Italian newspaper on the Iranian revolution. He was very disappointed, because the Iranian revolution didn't seem to be like the pattern he had expected. So there was an ambivalence—he was not at home with the non-Europeans. So all these things, I felt, but especially the consideration of resistance, were serious flaws in his argument.

Shan: You once mentioned Raymond Williams as a good friend and a great critic and praised "the idea and human example of Raymond Willliams." But to some extent you are also not satisfied with the scope of his concern.

Said: [Laughter.] You pick up . . . I mean it's true. You know, I'm a critic, you know. It's difficult to completely admire everybody and everything, and people attack me all the time. His work is, to me, very invigorating and very powerful. What is lacking in his work was some adequate comprehension of the British imperial system. It's quite striking. Except for a moment in the last part of *The Country and the City*, he never really discussed empire, which is for me the greatest form of domination, which is the most important. So in that respect, I felt the scope was somehow too limited.

Shan: You are one of the earliest scholars in the USA who introduce the mainstream European Continental theories. Yet on the other hand, you also make use of the ideas developed by Antonio Gramsci, Frantz Fanon, C. L. R. James, and Aime Cesaire.

Said: You see, what I'm interested in is people who are unsystematic. You cannot derive a systematic theory from Gramsci, nor can you take out of Fanon, nor can you take out of James, and certainly you cannot take out of Cesaire. These are people who were involved in culture, in political struggle, in the eccentric forms of the aesthetic—James is interested in the cricket, for example—and in the adaptation of conventional disciplines, like philosophy and psychol-

ogy, to political science. And their forms of writing were also highly eccentric. Gramsci produced notes. He never wrote anything completely. They were just fragments. Fanon's books were written not as books, but as pamphlets in a continuing struggle. James wrote history and plays. I mean he was a kind of polymath. And the figure who interests me as much is the German philosopher Theodore Adorno. I have been spending a lot of time on his work because his style, his interest in music and philosophy are ones that I would like to adopt.

Shan: You seem to keep coming back to some canonical texts and authors such as Joseph Conrad, Jane Austen, and so on. And on several occasions you also describe yourself as "culturally conservative."

Said: That's true.

Shan: In addition, in *Musical Elaborations*, you discuss mainly Western classical music. On the other hand, you have also been viewed as one the founders of Post-Colonialism or something like that.

Said: Against myself. [Laughter.] No. You know it's very interesting. I'm interested in lots of literature and lots of different kinds of aesthetic forms. I grew up and was nourished on what you call the canonical and the classical. But I was nourished on them not as a native, because to me they are foreign books. I mean to read Jane Austen as a boy in Egypt is not the same thing as reading Jane Austen in rural England.

The second thing is: they are works that seem to me—I follow Lucien Goldmann on this—to determine the limits of aesthetic experience. I mean, the great works set some kind of standard. I also believe that some works are better than others.

The third point to be made is that I've also been very close to much of the work which is produced in the post-colonial period, such as the work of Salman Rushdie and Chinua Achebe. I was one of the

first people to talk about these. They were friends of mine, they were part of the experiences that I came to. And I was also trying to add to that the experience of the Arabic, because that has been banned in the West and people don't talk about Naguib Mahfouz and so forth. I try to introduce them all to the common sphere of experience that I call post-colonial. So I don't think it is "either/or." I think it is "and/and." In other words, I like the classical and canonical texts, but I also like the new. One of the things I try to talk about in America today is that two colleagues of mine keep saying that we should return to the classical and not to be bothered with sex, sexuality, gender, and race and all these things. I say, no, we have to establish relationships to the contemporary, to the contemporary issues. And if they involve re-reading the classical, canonical work, which is what I'm trying to do, in a new and sometimes shocking way, I think that's good.

Shan: Your theoretical formulations are grounded in or derived from very careful readings or re-readings of certain texts. Can you say something about the interaction between textual readings and theoretical formulations.

Said: Yes. I have a great . . . not suspicision, I have a great impatience with the theoretical writing in the 80's and 90's, that is to say, theoretical writing which has no particular object. I'm an empiricist in many ways, you know. I think the experience of reading, the experience of the text, is for me, the first point. And it's very difficult for me to make theoretical statements without reference to what I would call historical experience. So I always insist on the priority of historical and concrete experience. At the same time, I deny the possibility of naive reading. I don't ever say that you can read these books as if for the first time, because we don't read them for the first time. We are reading for the tenth time and we have read a lot of other books, and we know theory, and we know Marx, and we know Freud and so on and so forth. So what I'm trying to do is to make an attempt to bring together the dynamics of reading with constantly moving and evolving theoretical structure.

Shan: Reading your works over various stages, I find words such as "representation," "secularity," "worldliness," "resistance," "alternative," "nomadic," "hybrid," "contrapuntal," "critical consciousness," and so on appearing over and over again. Can you find a common thread to piece them together?

Said: Yes. One would be complexity and simultaneity, which is very important for me. That is, when you hear one thing, you also hear the other. "Contrapuntal," "alternative" and "resistant"—that is one main strand. The second is a very powerful historical consciousness. I go back to Vico in this respect, for human beings make their own history. So the secular is that which has been made and been made conscious of human effort—made *by* human effort and conscious *of* human effort. That would account for "critical consciousness," "secularism," and words of that sort. Those are the two main things, I think. That is, the idea of the alternative, the resistance, the other which includes "exile," "contrapuntal," "alternative," "resistant"; and second, the historical domain which is created by the human beings, not by the sacred, not by the divine, in which coming to consciousness is part of the process of the historical emergence. These are the ways I would connect those words.

Shan: Can we go one step further and say that the concept of the intellectual or your own role as an intellectual brings all of them together?

Said: You are very clever. You are trying to nail me down. [Laughter.] Yes, to a certain degree, yes. I think so. And yet of course the intellectual for me is somebody who does this in the public domain. What I am talking about is the intervention. Very often my works are very very reflective and not designed to make public statements. My terms are always very simple. I once gave a lecture at Columbia in 1988 in which I talked about "slow politics" which is re-

flective and meditative work and "direct politics" which is the work of intervention of the pamphlets of the intellectual.

Shan: You often talk about yourself as an exile and cultural outsider. But you are also such an influential critic. Can you say something about this paradoxical role?

Said: Well, I must tell you—I'm absolutely honest—I must confess that I have no . . . no real . . . consciousness of my influence. It's quite serious. It's not something I ever think about. Most of the time I'm much more conscious of being unsettled, exiled, marginal, outside. So the notion of influence, the fact that I'm cited by a lot of people and that people read my books . . . is a constant surprise to me. I mean, it's really something that I don't have any abiding faith in. It's not something I can keep coming back and say I've done this. I throw all my books in the background as if they were written by somebody else. I'm really serious. It's a very strange feeling I have had. One of the reasons that I'm writing this memoirs is to find out why I feel this kind of disengagement from my own work.

Shan: You wrote a book on music and are now writing another one. Can you say something about this—especially its relationship to your study. For instance, the word "contrapuntal" is derived from music.

Said: Yes, for me it's a constant flirtation between two realms of the aesthetic—the verbal and the non-verbal. It is this constant approach and distance they expect toward each other. And they are the two fields that I've lived most of my life—in music which is essentially a silent art and in language which is of course the art of speech and articulation. But there are common elements, though they never touch each other in a way and are quite distinct from each other. So I've felt in a very systematic way that the principal dynamic for me is the dynamic between silence and sound, between speech and music—opposites that reflect each other and are also quite distinct

from each other. To me, it's endlessly fascinating, because you can never penetrate the secret of music. So to me, the challenge is to try to describe music in language, to approximate to it, but not to substitute for it.

Shan: *After the Last Sky* is unique in your writings as a collaboration between you and the photographer Jean Mohr. How does your verbal text interact with Mohr's photographic text?

Said: Well, I was just asked that question by somebody who wants to do an interview or to discuss with me the whole question of the visible. For me, it's intermittent. I mean, I was struck by this photographer because what he's done in photographing Palestinians who were essentially unseen and invisible had a political meaning for me. But I must say I have never developed in a very systematic way the relationship to the visible. I tend to use my ears more and to read more. I'm not a museum-goer and my tastes in the visual arts are very eccentric and usually based on other considerations. I haven't really given much time to try to formulate a systematic visual theorization . . .

Shan: You once described it in . . .

Said: . . . partly because . . . I will give you the reasons. Sorry, but it's a very interesting thing. Partly because I grew up in a culture where the visible was incomprehensible, as it were. Someone asked me what was the first museum I went to. The first museum I went to was an Egyptian museum and it was all ancient Egyptian art in symbols that were incomprehensible to me. So there's always been a kind of basic identification of the visible and the incomprehensible. And of course, in the Islamic world the visual arts are the least developed, except for abstract patterns, like this, [walking to the other side of the room and pointing to a painting on the wall], rather than representative of objects. So we have the arabesque, you see, the pattern in the middle, or these which are repetitious, but they are not representative

of anything. I mean they are not figurative in the sense which a picture of a horse or a man or a woman would be. This is the tradition in which I grew up. So the visual tradition is much more specialized and limited thing for me than it is for people in the West or in your country.

Shan: Then, how did you write the text for that book?

Said: [Sitting back at the desk.] Very difficult, very difficult. I allowed myself, successfully or not I don't know, but I allowed myself to be guided by instinct, by memory, by association, rather than by the abstract power of images and forms. So for me, each of those images connoted something in my memory, some experience.

Shan: In your first book *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* you described Conrad as "a self-conscious foreigner writing of obscure experiences in an alien language." Does this description explain your interest in Conrad?

Said: Yes, absolutely. I am stable most of my life. I mean, the writer I keep coming back to more than anyone else is Conrad, because what I notice in Conrad is an experience very similar to what I think mine is. It may not be the most important thing about Conrad, but it is the most interesting to me. That is, there is always a disparity between experience and language, and the two can never come together.

Shan: How is your health now?

Said: It's from moderate to poor. I go through bad periods that are . . . but OK. Because I have a chronic disease, I always have small problems, infections that start and cause pain and discomfort. But I've learned how to live with it and I've learned not to think about it all the time. That is the great lesson: to be able to just focus on what one is doing and to live in a day, rather than to worry about tomorrow and

say "How will I be tomorrow? Can I do this tomorrow?" that kind of things. I've learned a new kind of discipline, which is necessary. So I feel optimistic most of the time. I don't feel depressed. I mean I'm going to die, but of course everyone dies. And to be able to face it provides a certain kind of calm.

Shan: You have been interviewed quite a lot. What do you think about the nature and function of an interview?

Said: Very often what I find interesting about an interveiw is that I learn things which I haven't thought about before. In your case, for example, some of the questions you asked, like the relationship between the terms I used or the question of the visual, stimulate me to the ideas I haven't had before and force me to articulate and learn things that I am very grateful for. The interviews I don't like are the interviews that have to do with my personal life, my feelings about one or the other person, that sort of anecdotal things, or where I went to school, what my family did, those kinds of things. I think those are properly dealt with by someone who writes a memoirs or autobiography. But a challenging, intellectual interview such as this one is, to me, a learning experience and allows me to clarify some of my own ideas and to see some new ones.

Shan: Do you have anything specific to say to the Chinese readers of this interview?

Said: Yes, one of the things I am very conscious of as I grow older is the extent to which my thought is dominated by the desire to have different experiences and experience different cultures in different parts of the world than the one in which I grew. One of the things I constantly tell Arabs is: Why are we always so concerned with the West? Why don't we look to the East? Look at India, look at China, look at Japan—these are great civilizations. And I'm certainly desperately anxious to learn more about them and even to travel there. I've been to Japan. But between the Arab world and Japan, I've been

to nowhere. So to me, it is meeting new cultures about which I read, but it is also the privilege of being able to speak to another culture in my language and perhaps to get some feedback.