

*There are many different kinds of Palestinian experience, which cannot all be assembled into one. One would therefore have to write parallel histories of the communities in Lebanon, the occupied territories, and so on. That is the central problem. It is almost impossible to imagine a single narrative: it would have to be the kind of crazy history that comes out in *Midnight's Children*, with all those little strands coming in and out.*

—EDWARD SAID, "ON PALESTINIAN IDENTITY,  
A CONVERSATION WITH SALMAN RUSHDIE"

## 11. On *Orientalism*

IN 1939 Aimé Césaire published his searing long poem "Cahier d'un retour au pays natal." In it he wrote of his native Martinique, of colonial oppression, of rediscovered African sources; he coined the term *négritude*. His poem was written in the language of Lautréamont and Rimbaud, but it was a French spattered with neologisms, punctuated by new rhythms. For Césaire a "native land" was something complex and hybrid, salvaged from a lost origin, constructed out of a squalid present, articulated within and against a colonial tongue.

By the early 1950s the *négritude* movement was in full swing, thrusting an alternative humanism back at Europe; and in this new context it became possible to question European ideological practices in radical ways. Michel Leiris, who was a friend and collaborator of Césaire's, composed the first extended analysis of the relationship between anthropological knowledge and colonialism (Leiris 1950). His discourse opened a debate that has continued, with varying degrees of intensity, during the subsequent decades. How has European knowledge about the rest of the planet been shaped by a Western will to power? How have Western writers, both imaginative and scientific, been enmeshed in co-

lonial and neocolonial situations? How, concretely, have they ignored, resisted, and acquiesced in these enduring conditions of inequality? Leiris pointed to a basic imbalance. Westerners had for centuries studied and spoken for the rest of the world; the reverse had not been the case. He announced a new situation, one in which the "objects" of observation would begin to write back. The Western gaze would be met and scattered. Since 1950 Asians, Africans, Arab orientals, Pacific islanders, and Native Americans have in a variety of ways asserted their independence from Western cultural and political hegemony and established a new multivocal field of intercultural discourse. What will be the long-term consequences of such a situation—if it endures? How has it already altered what one can know about others, the ways such knowledge may be formulated? It is still early to judge the depth and extent of the epistemological changes that may be under way. (The literature on anthropology and colonialism is quite large. A few important works are Maquet 1964; Hymes 1969; Asad 1973; Firth 1977; Copans 1974, 1975; Leclerc 1972; and Nash 1975. In the field of Oriental and Islamic studies see Tibawi 1963; Abdel-Malek 1963; Hourani 1967; and Khatibi 1976.)



Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978a), a critical study of Western knowledge about the exotic, occupies this indeterminate historical context. If it presents itself as part of the general "writing back" against the West that Leiris announced, *Orientalism's* predicament is an ambiguous one that should be seen not in terms of a simple anti-imperialism but rather as a symptom of the uncertainties generated by the new global situation. It is important to situate Said's book within this wide perspective, for it would be all too easy to dismiss *Orientalism* as a narrow polemic dominated by immediate ideological goals in the Middle East struggle. It could be seen too as merely the personal protest of a Palestinian deprived of his homeland by a "uniquely punishing destiny," suffering from his externally imposed, abstract identity as "an Oriental," oppressed by "an almost unanimous consensus that politically he does not exist" (pp. 26–27). Indeed Said writes forthrightly and eloquently of this, his own predicament; and he writes also from a conviction that "pure" scholarship does not exist. Knowledge in his view is inextricably tied to power. When it becomes institutionalized, culturally accumulated, overly restrictive in its definitions, it must be actively opposed by a counterknowledge. *Orientalism* is polemical, its analysis corrosive; but Said's book operates in a number

of registers, and it would be wrong to restrict its significance unduly. *Orientalism* is at once a serious exercise in textual criticism and, most fundamentally, a series of important if tentative epistemological reflections on general styles and procedures of cultural discourse.

Said's topic is usually thought of as a rather old-fashioned scholarly discipline allied with nineteenth-century philology and concerned with the collection and analysis of texts in Eastern languages. Raymond Schwab's encyclopedic *Renaissance orientale* (1950) is of course the classic history of this ensemble, which included Sinologists, Islamicists, Indo-Europeanists, literati, travelers, and an eclectic host of aficionados. Said does not attempt to revise or extend Schwab's work, for his approach is not historicist or empirical but deductive and constructivist. His study undertakes a simultaneous expansion and formalization of the field, transforming Orientalism into a synecdoche for a much more complex and ramified totality. Said calls this totality a "discourse," following Foucault. I shall discuss Said's adoption of a Foucauldian methodology and its hazards. For the moment, though, it is enough to say that the Orientalist "discourse" is characterized by an oppressive systematicity, a "sheer knitted-together strength" (p. 6) that Said sets out to reveal through a reading of representative texts and experiences.

Although Said discovers "Orientalism" in Homer, Aeschylus, the *Chanson de Roland*, and Dante, he situates its modern origins in Barthélemy d'Herblot's *Bibliothèque orientale*. This compendium of oriental knowledge is criticized by Said for its cosmological scope and for its construction as a "systematic" and "rational" oriental panorama. It is significant that Said's reading of Herblot's seventeenth-century work makes no attempt to analyze it as Foucault would in *Les mots et les choses*—that is, "archaeologically"—in relation to a synchronic epistemological field. The approach of *Orientalism* is thus clearly indicated as genealogical. Its central task is to describe retrospectively and continuously the structures of an Orientalism that achieved its classical form in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Said's two criticisms of Herblot are constitutive of his object: Orientalism is always too broadly and abstractly pitched, and it is always overly systematic.

Said proceeds to apply these reproaches, with varying degrees of plausibility, to a diverse range of authors, institutions, and typical experiences. There are analyses of Sylvestre de Sacy, Ernest Renan and the Napoleonic expedition to Egypt's scholarly product, the massive *Description de l'Égypte*. The speeches of politicians such as Balfour and

Cromer (juxtaposed with Henry Kissinger); the Indian journalism of Marx; the oriental voyages of Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Nerval, and Flaubert; the adventures of Burton and Lawrence; the scholarship of H. A. R. Gibb and Louis Massignon are all woven into an intertextual unity. This ensemble—though it leaves some room for historical mutation, different national traditions, personal idiosyncrasies, and the genius of “great” writers—is designed to emphasize the systematic and invariant nature of the Orientalist discourse. There is no way to summarize the complex interweavings of Said’s critical method—associative, sometimes brilliant, sometimes forced, and in the end numbingly repetitive. It succeeds at least in isolating and discrediting an array of “oriental” stereotypes: the eternal and unchanging East, the sexually insatiable Arab, the “feminine” exotic, the teeming marketplace, corrupt despotism, mystical religiosity. Said is particularly effective in his critical analysis of Orientalist “authority”—the paternalist privileges unhesitatingly assumed by Western writers who “speak for” a mute Orient or reconstitute its decayed or dismembered “truth,” who lament the passing of its authenticity, and who know more than its mere natives ever can. This methodical suspicion of the reconstitutive procedures of writing about others could be usefully extended beyond Orientalism to anthropological practice generally.

If Orientalism, as Said describes it, has a structure, this resides in its tendency to *dichotomize* the human continuum into we-they contrasts and to *essentialize* the resultant “other”—to speak of the oriental mind, for example, or even to generalize about “Islam” or “the Arabs.” All of these Orientalist “visions” and “textualizations,” as Said terms them, function to suppress an authentic “human” reality. This reality, he implies, is rooted in oral encounter and reciprocal speech, as opposed to the processes of writing or of the visual imagination. Said’s limited polemical goal is well served by such an analysis. “Authentic” human encounter can be portrayed as subjugated to the dead book. (Flaubert does not, for example, really experience Egypt as much as he recopies a passage from earlier “voyages to the East.”) The theoretical issues raised by *Orientalism* as a case study of a cultural discourse cannot be disposed of, however, by means of any simple contrast between experience and textuality.

Said is not a simple polemicist. His critical approach is restless and mordant, repeatedly pushing its analyses to epistemological limits. Behind the immediate influence of Foucault lies an ambivalent admiration

for Nietzsche. At various moments in his book Said is led to argue that all cultural definitions must be restrictive, that all knowledge is both powerful and fictional, that all language distorts. He suggests that "authenticity," "experience," "reality," "presence" are mere rhetorical conventions. The general influence of the French theory that Said has done so much to interpret for American readers is here most apparent (see particularly his "Abcdarium Culturae" in Said 1975:277–344). While he cites Lévi-Strauss and Barthes as well as Foucault, at the same time Said makes frequent appeals to an old-fashioned existential realism. In the multivocal world situation I have outlined this sort of uncertainty is crucial. Should criticism work to counter sets of culturally produced images such as those of Orientalism with more "authentic" or more "human" representations? Or if criticism must struggle against the procedures of representation itself, how is it to begin? How, for example, is an oppositional critique of Orientalism to avoid falling into "Occidentalism"? These are fundamental issues—inseparably political and epistemological—raised by Said's work.



Said never defines Orientalism but rather qualifies and designates it from a variety of distinct and not always compatible standpoints. The book begins by postulating three loose "meanings" of Orientalism, "historical generalizations" that comprise the "backbone" of his subsequent analyses. First, Orientalism is what Orientalists do and have done. An Orientalist is "anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient . . . either in its specific or its general aspects." Included in this group are academics and government experts: philologists, sociologists, historians, and anthropologists. Second, Orientalism is a "style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'" (p. 2). Any writing, Said goes on to suggest, at any period in the history of the Occident that accepts as its starting point a basic dichotomy between East and West and that makes essentialist statements about "the Orient, its people, customs, 'mind,' destiny, and so on" is Orientalist. Finally, Orientalism is a "corporate institution for dealing with the Orient," which, during the colonial period following roughly the late eighteenth century wields the power of "dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (p. 3). This third designation, unlike the other two, is pitched at a rigorously transindividual, cultural level and suggests "an enormously systematic"

mechanism capable of organizing and largely determining whatever may be said or written about the Orient.

One notices immediately that in the first and third of Said's "meanings" Orientalism is concerned with something called the Orient, while in the second the Orient exists merely as the construct of a questionable mental operation. This ambivalence, which sometimes becomes a confusion, informs much of Said's argument. Frequently he suggests that a text or tradition distorts, dominates, or ignores some real or authentic feature of the Orient. Elsewhere, however, he denies the existence of any "real Orient," and in this he is more rigorously faithful to Foucault and the other radical critics of representation whom he cites. Indeed the absence of anything more than a brief allusion to the "brute reality" of the "cultures and nations whose location is in the East . . . their lives, histories and customs" represents a significant methodological choice on his part. Orientalist inauthenticity is not answered by any authenticity. Yet Said's concept of a "discourse" still vacillates between, on the one hand, the status of an ideological distortion of lives and cultures that are never concretized and, on the other, the condition of a persistent structure of signifiers that, like some extreme example of experimental writing, refers solely and endlessly to itself. Said is thus forced to rely on nearly tautological statements, such as his frequent comment that Orientalist discourse "orientalizes the Orient," or on rather unhelpful specifications such as: "Orientalism can thus be regarded as a manner of regularized (or Orientalized) writing, vision, and study, dominated by imperatives, perspectives, and ideological biases ostensibly suited to the Orient" (p. 202).

If redundancy haunts Said's account, this is not, I think, merely the result of a hermeneutical short circuit in which the critic discovers in his topic what he has already put there. Nor is it simply an effect of his insistence on the sheer knitted-togetherness of a textual unity that is constantly in danger of decomposing into its discontinuous functions, authors, institutions, histories, and epistemologically distinct epochs. Beyond these problems (faced by any interpreter of constructed, complex cultural ensembles) lies a substantial and disquieting set of questions about the ways in which distinct groups of humanity (however defined) imagine, describe, and comprehend each other. Are such discourses ultimately condemned to redundancy, the prisoners of their own authoritative images and linguistic protocols? Orientalism—"enormously systematic," cosmological in scope, incestuously self-referential—emerges

as much more than a mere intellectual or even ideological tradition. Said at one point calls it "a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture." As such it "has less to do with the Orient than it does with 'our' world" (p. 12).

The quotation marks placed by Said around *our* may be understood to have generated his entire study. The reasons for this are not simply personal but lead us to what Said rightly identifies as "the main intellectual issue raised by Orientalism. Can one divide human reality, as indeed human reality seems to be genuinely divided, into clearly different cultures, histories, traditions, societies, even races, and survive the consequences humanly?" (p. 45). The result of such distinctions, he argues, is to create invidious and imperially useful oppositions that serve to "limit the human encounter between different cultures, traditions, and societies" (p. 46). (It is worth noting in passing that we-they distinctions of the kind Said condemns are also useful to anti-imperialism and national liberation movements.) The key theoretical issue raised by *Orientalism* concerns the status of *all* forms of thought and representation for dealing with the alien. Can one ultimately escape procedures of dichotomizing, restructuring, and textualizing in the making of interpretive statements about foreign cultures and traditions? If so, how? Said frankly admits that alternatives to orientalism are not his subject. He merely attacks the discourse from a variety of positions, and as a result his own standpoint is not sharply defined or logically grounded. Sometimes his analysis flirts with a critique of representation as such; but the most constant position from which it attacks Orientalism is a familiar set of values associated with the Western anthropological human sciences—existential standards of "human encounter" and vague recommendations of "personal, authentic, sympathetic, humanistic knowledge" (p. 197).

In Said's discussion of the Orientalist as humanist these assumptions are thrown into sharp relief. There has, of course, been a sympathetic, nonreductive Orientalist tradition, a strand that Said downplays. He does, however, on one occasion grapple with this "good" Orientalism in the person of its most representative figure, Louis Massignon. Massignon must stand for those Orientalists—one thinks of scholars such as Sylvain Lévi, Marcel Mauss, Henry Corbin—whose involvement with the foreign traditions they studied evolved into a deep personal and dialogical quest for comprehension. Such writers have characteristically presented themselves as spokesmen for oriental or primitive "wisdom" and also as democratic reformers and humanist critics of imperialism.

Said's discussion of Massignon, the most interesting in his book, is a crucial test case for the theory of Orientalism as a pervasive and coercive cultural discourse. Here Said can no longer generalize sweepingly and categorically about "the Orientalist" and "Orientalism." (Indeed his critical manner sometimes appears to mimic the essentializing discourse it attacks.) Said gives full and generous recognition to Massignon's profound empathy with Islamic mysticism, to his subtlety and range of expression, and to his political commitment on behalf of exploited orientals; but he argues that the great scholar's work is still finally defined within a restricted "discursive consistency." He deploys his most Nietzschean arguments to the effect that any representation must be "implicated, intertwined, embedded, interwoven with a great many other things besides the 'truth,' which is itself a representation" (p. 272).

Said shows rather effectively the limits of Massignon's intellectual world. The most important of these is the scholar's tendency to perceive present Middle Eastern realities with reference to traditionally defined cultural or spiritual values. Massignon saw the earthbound experiences of colonialism, economic oppression, love, death, and so on through the "dehumanized lens" of a quasi-metaphysical conception of Semitic essence. He perceived the Palestinian conflict, for example, in terms of the quarrel between Isaac and Ishmael. Here as elsewhere Said makes short work of appeals beyond a corrupt present to an authentic tradition. Such appeals, however sympathetic, are always suspect in their disparagement of current processes of cultural and political invention. Ultimately Massignon could not avoid participation in a "will to knowledge over the Orient and on its behalf" (p. 272).

If even a "genius" such as Massignon can be so restricted, it becomes difficult to escape the bleak though rigorous conclusion that all human expression is ultimately determined by cultural "archives," and that global truth must be the result of a battle of "discursive formations" in which the strongest prevails. Said is uneasy with so Foucauldian a conclusion. He goes on to reassert a transcendent humanist standard, rescuing Massignon, who is after all "a very human being" from an institutional determination now qualified as only a "dimension" of his "productive capacity." Massignon does in the end rise above his culture into a "broader history and anthropology." Massignon's statement "*nous sommes tous des Sémites*" shows, according to Said, "the extent to which his ideas about the Orient could transcend the local anecdotal circumstances of a Frenchman and of French society" (p. 274). A very human



being becomes a humanist. But the privilege of standing above cultural particularism, of aspiring to the universalist power that speaks for humanity, for the universal experiences of love, work, death, and so on, is a privilege invented by a totalizing Western liberalism. This benevolent comprehension of the visions produced by mere "local anecdotal circumstances" is an authority that escapes Said's criticism.

Said sometimes presents his critical posture as "oppositional" (p. 326), a stance of open attack on imperial power and knowledge (see Said 1976, 1979). More frequently, though, he qualifies himself positively as a humanist. This stance seems to presuppose a particularist, even individualist attitude combined with cosmopolitanism and a general valorization of creative process. For example T. E. Lawrence is taken to task for writing (in a rather admirably self-conscious passage) of "Arabs" rather than of "individual Arabs with narratable life histories" (p. 229). Such general statements, Said argues, "necessarily subordinate" an Arab's specific feeling of joy, of sadness, of injustice in the face of tyranny, and so on. Said castigates Orientalism for its construction of static images rather than historical or personal "narratives." The "human experience," whether that of the individual Orientalist or of his or her objects of study, is flattened into an asserted authority on one side and a generalization on the other. Said characterizes the human realities thus elided with quotations from Yeats—"the uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor," in which all humans live," and "the foul rag and bone shop of the heart" (pp. 230, 110).

It is still an open question, of course, whether an African pastoralist shares the same existential "bestial floor" with an Irish poet and his readers. And it is a general feature of humanist common denominators that they are meaningless, since they bypass the local cultural codes that make personal experience articulate. Said's resort to such notions underlines the absence in his book of any developed theory of culture as a differentiating and expressive ensemble rather than as simply hegemonic and disciplinary. His basic values are cosmopolitan. He approves as an alternative to Orientalism the cultural hermeneutics of Erich Auerbach, Ernst Robert Curtius, and Clifford Geertz. He appears to endorse the anthropological commonplace that "the more one is able to leave one's cultural home, the more easily is one able to judge it, and the whole world as well, with the spiritual detachment and generosity necessary for true vision" (p. 259). The anthropologist as outsider and participant-observer (existential shorthand for the hermeneutical circle) is a familiar

modern *topos*. Its wisdom—and authority—is expressed with a disturbing beauty by Hugh of St. Victor (quoted by Said from Auerbach): “The man who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign land” (p. 259).



Said’s humanist perspectives do not harmonize with his use of methods derived from Foucault, who is of course a radical critic of humanism. But however wary and inconsistent its appeals, *Orientalism* is a pioneering attempt to use Foucault systematically in an extended cultural analysis. Its difficulties and successes should thus be of interest to historians, critics, and anthropologists.

We have already encountered the central notion of discourse. For Said a discourse is the cultural-political configuration of “the textual attitude” (pp. 92–94). The most extreme example of this attitude is *Don Quixote*; its condensed modern formulation is Flaubert’s *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*. People prefer order to disorder; they grasp at formulas rather than actuality; they prefer the guidebook to the confusion before them. “It seems a common human failing,” Said writes, using the word *human* with significant ambivalence, “to prefer the schematic authority of a text to the disorientations of direct encounters with the human” (p. 93). In certain conditions this textual attitude hardens into a body of rigid cultural definitions that determine what any individual can express about a certain actuality. This “reality” coalesces as a field of representations produced by the discourse. The conditions for discursive hardening are not clearly defined by Said, but they appear to be related to an ongoing imbalance of power that permits—perhaps obliges—a politically and technologically stronger culture or group to define weaker groups. Thus in Said’s analysis occidental culture through the discourse of Orientalism “suffused” the activity of orientals with “meaning, intelligibility, and reality.” The Orientalist discourse, which, according to Said, did not significantly change after the late eighteenth century, generated a dumb show of oriental images. “Actual human interchange between Oriental and Westerner” (p. 95) was systematically repressed. Orientals had no voice on the “Orientalist Stage.”

Said’s general attempt to extend Foucault’s conception of a discourse into the area of cultural constructions of the exotic is a promising one. Foucault’s overall undertaking has of course been scrupulously ethno-

centric. In attempting to isolate the epistemological strata of European thought he has avoided all comparative appeals to other worlds of meaning. There are no evocations of *pensée sauvage*, of Hopi linguistic categories, and the like. Foucault probably believes such appeals to be methodologically dubious, and he contrasts Western civilization only whimsically to Borges' "Chinese encyclopedia" at the outset of *Les mots et les choses*. Foucault is interested in the ways in which a given cultural order constitutes itself by means of discursive definitions: sane-mad, healthy-sick, legal-criminal, normal-perverse. The illicit categories for Foucault exist not as areas of an outlaw freedom but as culturally produced, arranged experiences.

Said extends Foucault's analysis to include ways in which a cultural order is defined externally, with respect to exotic "others." In an imperialist context definitions, representations, and textualizations of subject peoples and places play the same constitutive role as "internal" representations (for example of the criminal classes in nineteenth-century Europe) and have the same consequences—discipline and confinement, both physical and ideological. Therefore "the Orient," in Said's analysis, exists uniquely for the Occident. His task in *Orientalism* is to dismantle the discourse, to expose its oppressive system, to "clear the archive" of its received ideas and static images.

Foucault is not easily imitated. His writing has been a series of experiments and tactical interventions rather than a methodical program. Said's appropriation of Foucault strikes a committed, moral note. Contrasting (and preferring) Foucault to Derrida, Said notes that the latter's "endless worrying of representation" from "within" canonical Western texts does not permit critical attention to move beyond the written (however "indecidable") to the social and political, to the *institutions* underlying an imperial and hegemonic "Western thought." Foucault's brand of criticism, unlike Derrida's, "reads" a prison or a hospital, a legal system, or—as Said does in *Orientalism*—a geopolitical artifact such as De Lesseps' canal (seen as an Orientalist inscription). "By virtue of Foucault's criticism we are able to understand culture as a body of disciplines having the effective force of knowledge linked systematically, but by no means immediately, to power." Culture as Said conceives it is little more than "a massive body of self-congratulating ideas" and of "disciplines" that the critic must unmask and oppose without claiming—by virtue of a system or sovereign method—to stand outside of "history, subjectivity, or circumstance." "The critical consciousness . . . having initially detached

itself from the dominant culture" thereafter adopts "a situated and responsible adversary position" (Said 1978b:709, 690, 713).

It is rather difficult, however, to qualify Foucault's restless guerrilla activity on behalf of the excluded, against *all* totalizing, defining, essentializing alliances of knowledge and power as "situated and responsible." Said himself deploys a rather loose collection of "adversary theoretical models" derived from Foucault, Gramsci, Lukács, Fanon, and others (1979:16). A key political term for Said is *oppositional*, and it is fairly clear what this means in the limited context of a book such as *Orientalism*, which "writes back" at an imperial discourse from the position of an oriental whose actuality has been distorted and denied. More generally, however, it is apparent that a wide range of Western humanist assumptions escape Said's oppositional analysis, as do the discursive alliances of knowledge and power produced by anticolonial and particularly nationalist movements.



Beyond his overall stance as "oppositional" cultural critic Said makes use of other Foucauldian approaches that should be discussed briefly. Most significant is his adoption of the posture of critical retrospection that Nietzsche called genealogy. In this Said is true to Foucault's later evolution away from the methodology of layered "archaeological" discontinuity exemplified in *The Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and towards a presentation of the lineages of the present, as exemplified in *Discipline and Punish* and especially *The History of Sexuality*, volume 1.

The field of Orientalism is genealogically distributed in two ways: synchronically (constituting in a unified system all Western textual versions of the Orient) and diachronically (plotting a single lineage of statements about the East, running from Aeschylus to Renan to modern political sociology and "area studies"). Like all genealogies Said's grows more specific as it approaches the present it has been constructed to explain and affect. Thus the bulk of his account describes the heyday of Orientalism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This is followed by an attempt to generate meanings in the current Middle East situation with reference to this classical tradition. The aim here is not, of course, the one most usual in genealogies—a new legitimation of the present—but rather, as in Foucault's *History of Sexuality* and *Madness and Civilization*, radical *de*-legitimation. A certain degree of anachronism is

openly embraced.<sup>1</sup> Genealogy, like all historical description and analysis, is constructive. It makes sense in the present by making sense selectively *out of* the past. Its inclusions and exclusions, its narrative continuities, its judgments of core and periphery are finally legitimated either by convention or by the authority granted to or arrogated by the genealogist. Genealogy is perhaps the most political of historical modes; but to be effective it cannot appear too openly tendentious, and Said's genealogy suffers on this score. To his credit he makes no secret of the restrictive choices involved.

First, Said limits his attention almost exclusively to statements about the Arab Middle East—omitting, regretfully but firmly, the Far East, India, the Pacific, and North Africa. The omission of the Maghreb is crucial, for it ensures that Said will not have to discuss modern French Orientalist currents. In a French context the kinds of critical questions posed by Said have been familiar since the Algerian war and may be found strongly expressed well before 1950. It would simply not be possible to castigate recent French "Orientalism" in the way that he does the discourse of the modern American Middle East "experts," which is still shaped by Cold War patterns and by the polarized Arab-Israeli conflict.

Said's second genealogical limitation restricts the national traditions under consideration to the British and French strands, with the addition of a recent American offspring. He is obliged to rule out Italian, Spanish, Russian, and especially German Orientalisms. The highly developed nineteenth-century German tradition is cast as peripheral to French and English pioneers but, more important, as not constituted like these two in a close relationship with colonial occupation and domination of the Orient (pp. 16–19). In effect, German Orientalism is too disinterested and thus atypical of a genealogy that *defines* the discourse as essentially colonialist. If Said's primary aim were to write an intellectual history of Orientalism or a history of Western ideas of the Orient, his narrowing and rather obviously tendentious shaping of the field could be taken as a

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1. In *Discipline and Punish* (1975:35) Foucault writes of his intention to produce a history of the prison: "Par un pur anachronisme? Non, si on entend par là faire l'histoire du passé dans les termes du présent. Oui, si on entend par là faire l'histoire du présent" (p. 35). His fullest statement on genealogy is "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (1977). This chapter discusses only those works by Foucault that were available at the time of publication of *Orientalism*. I do not consider his refinements and transgressions of historical method following the first volume of *History of Sexuality*.

fatal flaw. But his undertaking is conceived otherwise and is openly an oppositional genealogy. If Said's genealogy sometimes appears clumsily rigged (the final all-too-predictable zeroing in on the Middle East and abrupt jump from Continental to American "Orientalism" is the least convincing of its "continuities"), one need not reject the entire critical paradigm.

Said is perfectly correct to identify retrospectively a "discourse" that dichotomizes and essentializes in its portrayal of others and that functions in a complex but systematic way as an element of colonial domination. It is important that this discourse be recognized wherever it exists; but the discourse should not be closely identified with the specific tradition of Orientalism. Its field of application has been far more general. The problem with the book, at least from a theoretical standpoint, is its title. In attempting to derive a "discourse" directly from a "tradition," Said abandons the level of cultural criticism proposed by Foucault and relapses into traditional intellectual history. Moreover, in portraying the discourse as based on essentially nineteenth-century modes of thought, Said gives himself too easy a target. He does not question anthropological orthodoxies based on a mythology of fieldwork encounter and a hermeneutically minded cultural theory—orthodoxies he often appears to share.

It is apparent that "discourse" analysis cannot safely be founded on redefined "traditions." Nor can it be derived from a study of "authors." The general tendency in modern textual studies has been to reduce the occasion of a text's creation by an individual subject to merely one of its generative or potentially meaningful contexts. While recognizing the importance of this separation of the text from the work (Barthes: "The work is held in the hand, the text in language"), Said has resisted radical structuralist attacks on phenomenology and on the essential (beginning and continuing) function of an authorial intention. *Beginnings* (1975), which preceded *Orientalism*, is a detailed and perspicuous meditation on this set of issues. It is concerned precisely with the problem, experienced by a wide range of modernist writers, of being an "author." Steering a complex course between individualist conceptions of creativity on the one hand and on the other reductions of "the moving force of life and behaviour, the *forma informans*, intention" (p. 319) to an external system, whether cultural or critical, Said suggests an intermediate analytical *topos* that he calls a "career." The modern author's intention is not so much to produce works as it is to begin (and to continue beginning) to write. A

career is the ensemble of these complex historically and culturally situated intentions. It is always in process, always being begun in specific situations, and never possessing either a stable essence or a shaped biographical finality. The author is reconceived, and in the face of structuralist dissolution rescued.

It is not surprising, then, that Said, in discussing Orientalism as a discourse and a tradition, adopts what he calls a "hybrid perspective." "Foucault believes that in general the individual text or author counts for very little; empirically, in the case of Orientalism (and perhaps nowhere else) I find this not to be so" (1978a:23). This doggedly empirical and curiously qualified assertion separates Said sharply from Foucault. What is important theoretically is not that Foucault's author counts for very little but rather that a "discursive formation"—as opposed to ideas, citations, influences, references, conventions, and the like—is not produced by authorial subjects or even by a group of authors arranged as a "tradition." This methodological (not empirical) point is important for anyone involved in the kind of task Said is attempting. One cannot combine within the same analytic totality both personal statements and discursive statements, even though they may be lexically identical. Said's experiment seems to show that when the analysis of authors and traditions is intermixed with the analysis of discursive formations, the effect is a mutual weakening.

None of the authors discussed in *Orientalism* is accorded a "career" in the complex sense posited by *Beginnings*, but all are portrayed as instances of Orientalist discourse. Unlike Foucault, however, for whom authorial names function as mere labels for discursive statements, Said's authors may be accorded psychohistorical typicality and are often made through their texts to have representative Orientalist experiences. One example among many, chosen for the familiarity of its subject, is Said's reading of a passage from Marx—the end of his article "The British Rule in India" (Said 1978a:153–157).

Marx denounces an affront to "human feeling"—the spectacle of Indian social life brutally disrupted, "thrown into a sea of woes" by imperialism; but he quickly reminds his readers that "these idyllic village communities" have always been the foundation of "Oriental despotism." They have "restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath the traditional rules, depriving it of all its grandeur and historical energies." England, Marx goes on to say, is history's agent; its task is to "lay

the material foundations of Western Society in Asia." Said scents Orientalism in the reference to despotism and in a later citation of Goethe's *Westöstlicher Diwan*. He identifies a "romantic redemptive project," which assumes the general Western privilege of putting the Orient—stagnant, dismembered, corrupt—back together. Marx is also convicted of subsuming "individuals" and "existential human identities" under "artificial entities" such as "Oriental," "Asiatic," "Semitic," or within collectives such as "race," "mentality," and "nation."

Here an effective reading begins to get out of hand. It is unclear why Said does not also convict Marx of subsuming individuals under the "artificial entities" "class" and "history." Furthermore, if Marx's participation in Orientalism derives from his inattention to existential, individual cases, one wonders how social or cultural theory is ever to be "humanly" built. In addition, it is well known that Marx heaped "Orientalist" scorn and condescension upon the "idiocy of rural life" wherever he found it, believing that such stagnant, repressive situations had to be violently transformed before they could improve. Here Said skirts "unfairness" to Marx. While legitimately isolating Orientalist aspects of the text, he too quickly skims over its rhetorical intentions. Moreover, Said soon abandons any discussion of Orientalist *statements* and goes on to uncover in the text a typical Orientalist *experience*. Marx, we are told, at first expressed "a natural human repugnance" toward the suffering of orientals; he felt a "human sympathy," a "fellow feeling." This "personal human experience" was then "censored" by a process of Orientalist labeling and abstraction, "a wash of sentiment" was repressed by "unshakable definitions." (Said writes in the past tense, as if this is what really happened in Marx's mind.) "The vocabulary of emotion dissipated as it submitted to the lexicographical police action of Orientalist science and even Orientalist art. An experience was dislodged by a dictionary definition" (p. 155). By now Said could not be farther from Foucault's austere pages, where all psychologizing is forbidden and where authors escape at least having to go through such instructive "experiences." Said's descriptions of Orientalist discourse are frequently sidetracked by humanist fables of suppressed authenticity.

Discourse analysis is always in a sense unfair to authors. It is not interested in what *they* have to say or feel as subjects but is concerned merely with statements as related to other statements in a field.<sup>2</sup> Escaping

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2. On the initial definition of this field, which he calls a "discursive formation," see Foucault's strictures in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969: chap.



an impression of unfairness and reductionism in this kind of analysis is a matter of methodological rigor and stylistic tact. Foucault, at least, does not appear unfair to authors because he seldom appeals to any individual intentionality or subjectivity. "Hybrid perspectives" such as Said's have considerably more difficulty escaping reductionism.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed Said's methodological catholicity repeatedly blurs his analysis. If he is advancing anthropological arguments, Orientalism appears as the cultural quest for order. When he adopts the stance of a literary critic, it emerges as the processes of writing, textualizing, and interpreting. As an intellectual historian Said portrays Orientalism as a specific series of influences and schools of thought. For the psychohistorian Orientalist discourse becomes a representative series of personal-historical experiences. For the Marxist critic of ideology and culture it is the expression of definite political and economic power interests. Orientalism is also at times conflated with Western positivism, with general definitions of the primitive, with evolutionism, with racism. One could continue the list. Said's discourse analysis does not itself escape the all-inclusive "Occidentalism" he specifically rejects as an alternative to Orientalism (p. 328).



Though Said's work frequently relapses into the essentializing modes it attacks and is ambivalently enmeshed in the totalizing habits of Western humanism, it still succeeds in questioning a number of important anthropological categories, most important, perhaps, the concept of culture. In this final section I shall sketch out some of these issues, the most far-reaching questions raised by *Orientalism*.

The effect of Said's general argument is not so much to undermine

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2). Foucault's method ignores "influences" and "traditions," demotes "authors," and holds in suspense any criteria of discursive unity based on the persistence or commonality of "objects," "styles," "concepts," or "themes." It may be noted that Said makes use of all these familiar elements from the history of ideas.

3. Said's critical approach can in fact be quite disturbing, especially when he is uncovering Orientalism in lesser-known figures than Marx, among whom the disjuncture between discursive statements and personal expressions is less immediately apparent. A particularly blatant example may be seen in his use of the great Sanskrit scholar and humanist Sylvain Lévi in order to show the connection of Orientalism with imperial politics (Said 1978:249–250). The misleading image of someone intensely concerned with European "interests" in the Orient (the word *interest* is inserted into Lévi's discourse) is nowhere qualified. For an affirmation that modern Orientalists have been far less reductive than Said portrays them to be see Hourani 1979.

the notion of a substantial Orient as it is to make problematic "the Occident." It is less common today than it once was to speak of "the East," but we still make casual reference to "the West," "Western culture," and so on. Even theorists of discontinuity and deconstruction such as Foucault and Derrida continue to set their analyses within and against a Western totality. Said shares their assumptions inasmuch as he portrays the Western culture of which Orientalism is an exemplar as a discrete entity capable of generating knowledge and institutional power over the rest of the planet. Western order, seen this way, is imperial, unreciprocal, aggressive, and potentially hegemonic. At times, though, Said permits us to see the functioning of a more complex dialectic by means of which a modern culture continuously constitutes itself through its ideological constructs of the exotic. Seen in this way "the West" itself becomes a play of projections, doublings, idealizations, and rejections of a complex, shifting otherness. "The Orient" always plays the role of origin or alter ego. For example Renan working in his "philological laboratory" does not simply concoct the scholarly *topos* of the Semitic Orient but in the same process produces a conception of what it means to be European and modern (pp. 132, 146).

Here Said's argument reinforces Stanley Diamond's (1974) contentions that Western culture can conceive of itself critically only with reference to fictions of the primitive. To this dialectical view we may usefully add the overall perspective of Marshall Hodgson's historical work, which portrays "Europe" as, until the late eighteenth century, merely "a fringe area of the Afro-Euroasian zone of agrarianate citted life" (see particularly Hodgson 1974, 1963, and Burke 1979, an excellent survey of Hodgson's complex work). If we adopt along with these perspectives a generally structuralist suspicion of all quests for origins (the origins of the West in Greece or in Christianity), we are left with a totality in process, composed and recomposed in changing external relations.

When we speak today of the West, we are usually referring to a force—technological, economic, political—no longer radiating in any simple way from a discrete geographical or cultural center. This force, if it may be spoken of in the singular, is disseminated in a diversity of forms from multiple centers—now including Japan, Australia, the Soviet Union, and China—and is articulated in a variety of "micro-sociological" contexts (see Duvignaud 1973). It is too early to say whether these processes of change will result in global cultural homogenization or in a new order of diversity. The new may always look mono-

lithic to the old. For the moment, in any event, all dichotomizing concepts should probably be held in suspicion, whether they be the West-rest ("Third World") split or developed-underdeveloped, modern-premodern, and so on. It is at this level that Said's critique of the discourse he calls Orientalism becomes most significant. Moreover, if all essentializing modes of thought must also be held in suspense, then we should attempt to think of cultures not as organically unified or traditionally continuous but rather as negotiated, present processes. From this standpoint Said's refusal to appeal to any authentic and especially traditional oriental realities against the false stereotypes of Orientalism is exemplary. His main concern is not with what was or even what is but with what is becoming. Although of this process he tells us very little, the fundamental question is posed: on what basis may human groups accurately (and we must also add morally) be distinguished?

The concept of culture used by anthropologists was, of course, invented by European theorists to account for the collective articulations of human diversity. Rejecting both evolutionism and the overly broad entities of race and civilization, the idea of culture posited the existence of local, functionally integrated units. For all its supposed relativism, though, the concept's model of totality, basically organic in structure, was not different from the nineteenth-century concepts it replaced. Only its plurality was new (see Chapter 10, section 2). Despite many subsequent redefinitions the notion's organicist assumptions have persisted. Cultural systems hold together; and they change more or less continuously, anchored primarily by language and place. Recent semiotic or symbolic models that conceive of culture as communication are also functionalist in this sense (see Leach 1976:1, Geertz 1973, Schneider 1968).<sup>4</sup>

A submerged but crucial emphasis of Said's study is his restless suspicion of totality. His critique of Orientalist procedures for enclosing and characterizing "the Orient" may be applied to the presumably more precise and even "natural" entity of culture. I have already noted with the example of Massignon Said's distaste for the most sympathetic appeals to

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4. Geertz offers a striking and problematical image of cultural organization not as a spider or a pile of sand but as an octopus "whose tentacles are in a large part separately integrated, neurally quite poorly connected with one another and with what in the octopus passes for a brain, and yet who nonetheless manages to get around and to preserve himself, for a while anyway, as a viable, if somewhat ungainly entity" (1973:407-408). Culture remains, barely, an organism.

tradition. Having stressed so thoroughly that the Orient is a constituted entity, he goes on to suggest "that the notion that there are geographical spaces with indigenous, radically 'different' inhabitants who can be defined on the basis of some religion, culture or racial essence proper to that geographical space is equally a highly debatable idea" (1978a:332). In his final pages he asks the most important theoretical questions of his study. "How does one *represent* other cultures? Is the notion of a distinct culture (or race, or religion, or civilization) a useful one?" (p. 325).

Such questions need to be posed and need to be allowed to stand in sharp relief. Having asked them, one does well to avoid quick recourses to alternate totalities. (As we have seen, Said himself has recourse to humanist cosmopolitanism and conceptions of personal integrity as well as to a notion of authentic development alternately glossed as "narrative" or as a vaguely Marxist "history.") It is high time that cultural and social totalities are subjected to the kind of radical questioning that textual ensembles have undergone in recent critical practice (for example Derrida 1970; Barthes 1977; Said 1978b and 1975). Said's attack on essences and oppositional distinctions is here very much to the point; but collectively constituted *difference* is not necessarily static or positionally dichotomous in the manner of Orientalism as Said describes it. There is no need to discard theoretically all conceptions of "cultural" difference, especially once this is seen as not simply received from tradition, language, or environment but also as *made* in new political-cultural conditions of global relationality.

How are these new conditions to be conceived now that the "silence" of the Orient is broken; now that ethnography, as Leiris suggested, can be multidirectional; now that authenticity, both personal and cultural, is seen as something constructed *vis-à-vis* others? In these circumstances should our ideas of relationality be drawn from the metaphors of conversation, hospitality, and exchange, as humanists such as Massignon, Sylvain Lévi, and Mauss have urged? Or must we prefer the figures of military maneuver sometimes invoked by Foucault. It may be true that the culture concept has served its time. Perhaps, following Foucault, it should be replaced by a vision of powerful discursive formations globally and strategically deployed. Such entities would at least no longer be closely tied to notions of organic unity, traditional continuity, and the enduring grounds of language and locale. But however the culture concept is finally transcended, it should, I think, be replaced by some set of relations that preserves the concept's differential and relativist functions

and that avoids the positing of cosmopolitan essences and human common denominators.

It should be pointed out that these prescriptions are in the nature of what Conrad urged in *Heart of Darkness*—a “deliberate belief.” The planet’s cultural future may indeed reside in the entropy Lévi-Strauss laments in *Tristes tropiques* or in the ideological hegemony Said portrays in his bleaker passages (1978a:323–325). Like Said’s commitment to the human, any residual faith in culture—that is, in the continuing ability of groups to make a real difference—is essentially an idealistic choice, a political response to the present age in which, as Conrad wrote, “we are camped like bewildered travellers in a garish, unrestful hotel” (19:11:1). It is the virtue of *Orientalism* that it obliges its readers to confront such issues at once personally, theoretically, and politically. For its author, as for Conrad, there can be no natural solutions. Palestine is perhaps the twentieth century’s Poland, a dismembered nation to be reinvented. Said, like the Polish-English writer whom he admires and frequently quotes, recognizes that personal and cultural identities are never given but must be negotiated. This is an important emphasis of Said’s first book, a penetrating study of Conrad (1966). It would be wrong to dismiss this kind of situation as aberrant, as the condition of exiles. The unrestful predicament of *Orientalism*, its methodological ambivalences, are characteristic of an increasingly general global experience.

Its author’s complex critical posture may in this sense be taken as representative. A Palestinian nationalist educated in Egypt and the United States, a scholar deeply imbued with the European humanities and now professor of English and comparative literature at Columbia, Said writes as an “oriental,” but only to dissolve the category. He writes as a Palestinian but takes no support from a specifically Palestinian culture or identity, turning to European poets for his expression of essential values and to French philosophy for his analytical tools. A radical critic of a major component of the Western cultural tradition, Said derives most of his standards from that tradition. The point in saying this is to suggest something of the situation within which books such as *Orientalism* must inevitably be written. It is a context that Said has elsewhere (in discussing George Eliot and the roots of Zionism) called “a generalized condition of homelessness” (1979:18). Such a situation generates difficult questions.

What does it mean, at the end of the twentieth century, to speak like Aimé Césaire of a “native land”? What processes rather than essences are involved in present experiences of cultural identity? What does it mean

to write as a Palestinian? As an American? As a Papua–New Guinean? As a European? From what discrete sets of cultural resources does any modern writer construct his or her discourse? To what world audience (and in what language) are these discourses most generally addressed? Must the intellectual at least, in a literate global situation, construct a native land by writing like Césaire the notebook of a return?