Bruce Robbins: Introduction

Between the appearance of *Orientalism* in 1978 and *Culture and Imperialism* in the spring of 1993, there have been some interesting and paradoxical years. Edward Said has done a great deal of political writing about the Palestinians and American foreign policy, and he has become a public figure in a sense that would apply to very few literary critics, however respected. But he has not had the sort of public influence he desired. American policy toward the Middle East has remained grimly consistent, as has the quality of public discourse about the world of nations. Where Said's influence has been overwhelming, on the other hand, is among academic disciplines—a domain that he has often been tempted to dismiss as specialized, professionalized, politically unpromising. This has invited other paradoxes. How is it that *Orientalism*, which insisted so strongly on the uninterrupted, unrelieved pervasiveness of Orientalist tropes in Western culture, should be so passionately acclaimed and imitated in large sections of the Western academy? How is it that pointing out the complicity of culture with imperialism could also serve to reinvigorate the study of culture and, for that matter, provoke students of culture into a campaign of disciplinary imperialism in which they "colonized" the territory of other disciplines? How is it that this could be, as I think it often is, a "good" imperialism? And how is it, finally, that pointing out the complicities of knowledge with power could serve to demonstrate, as I think it has, the dignity and value of intellectual work, the labor of thought that is absolutely irreducible to any social collectivity to which either its subject or its object might belong?

These questions suggest that Edward Said has in large part created the audience by which he is now enjoyed—which is also the audience that now questions and contests him, the contest being an indispensable part of the enjoyment.

The fifteen years that separate *Culture and Imperialism* from *Orientalism* have perhaps inevitably prompted an orgy of stocktaking about the direction of Said's career and about the direction of colonial and postcolonial studies, fields he did so much to get started and to shape. The contributions gathered here, which were originally presented at the convention of the Modern Language Association in Toronto in December 1993, were an effort to have a share of the fun. That is probably all the introduction they need.

As a member of a generation of scholars whose intellectual trajectory has been fundamentally influenced by the work and the voice of Edward Said, I am pleased to participate in this dialogue about his newest book, *Culture and Imperialism*, and to honor Said himself as an intellectual, scholar, and activist. My remarks here will take the form of something like an oral book review, in which I will discuss *Culture and Imperialism* mainly on its own terms, that is, within the parameters of print culture and written art and thought.

What is the project of *Culture and Imperialism*? As I read it, Said's book seeks to advance or consolidate what Said refers to as "a huge and remarkable adjustment in perspective and understanding" (243)—a paradigm shift, if you like, in which it becomes normative to see the West as fundamentally constituted by its imperial enterprises, as unthinkable apart from them. In the first half of the book, devoted to canonical English and French fiction, the specifically literary project is to show that "imperialism and the novel fortified each other to such a degree that it is impossible to read one without in some way dealing with the other" (71). The assumption, a correct one, is that Western culture and critical theory have exhibited a "massive avoidance" of imperialism as constitutive of metropolitan society, culture, and consciousness. High culture, Said argues, has particularly escaped scrutiny "for its role in shaping the imperial dynamic" and has been "mysteriously exempted from analysis whenever the causes, benefits, and evils of imperialism were discussed" (60). And yet, as Said undertakes to show, the texts of European high culture are consistently and fundamentally engaged with—and on the whole complicit with—the imperial enterprise. Hence, as he puts it, it is "possible [and, one might add, necessary] to reinterpret the western cultural archive as if fractured geographically by the activated imperial divide" (50).

This project of reinterpretation gives us the masterful close readings that for many readers make up the core of *Culture and Imperialism*—how *Mansfield Park* "synchronizes domestic with international authority" (87); *Aida* as a "hybrid radically impure work that belongs equally to the history of culture and the experience of overseas domination" (114); Camus as exhibiting "an extraordinarily belated, in some ways incapacitated colonial sensibility" (176); his Algerian narratives as a "metropolitan transfiguration of the colonial dilemma" in which the "tragic human seriousness of the colonial effort achieves its last great clarification" (184); Yeats associated "both with the poetry of decolonization and resistance, and with the historical alternatives to the nativist impasse" (232). I quote these lines not just for their eloquence, but by way of reminding those of us who have

come to take close reading for granted of the ethical, political, and intellectual force such interpretive statements can have.

Underwriting these readings is, of course, method, and methodological propositions are a major part of the project of *Culture and Imperialism*. The chief methodological proposal is what Said throughout the book refers to as "contrapuntal reading." I understand this term to refer to reading that consciously tacks back and forth across the "activated imperial divide." Where there is domination, it seeks also the expressions of resistance; it discovers, by crossing the divide, both the presence of the imperial referent in the denying metropolitan text and the historical processes that text has excluded (66–67). To read a text contrapuntally, Said puts it, is to read "with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that it narrates and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts" (51). The point of reference in this quotation is still the metropolis—the traditional others are still others. It does not seem that this perspective is prescribed by the method, however.

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One important principle that *is* prescribed by the method is achronology. Part of the richness of Said's contrapuntality lies in reading the past through the present—reading "retrospectively and heterophonically" (161). Read in the light of subsequent decolonization, the texts of imperialism can be seen in the fullness of "their affiliations, the facts of power which informed and enabled them" (161) without thereby being "stripped of their aesthetic power." I underscore Said's insistence on achronology as fundamental to contrapuntal reading because it has some concrete implications for scholarly and pedagogical practice. It calls upon us, for example, not to "respect the integrity" of the English nineteenth century at the expense of understanding it more fully. It implies, for instance, including twentieth-century texts of decolonization or anti-imperialist thought or revisionist history on the syllabus and in the argument, to create the counterpoint to the otherwise unrelenting—and, for many of us, intolerably alienating—imperial/ethnocentric vision. The argument is less ethical than intellectual: you'll understand the nineteenth century better that way.

In addition to readings and method, *Culture and Imperialism* leaves us with a wealth of aphorisms, the powerful phrases that suggest and evoke, and that represent Said at his best. Phrases like "the cultural argument for empire" (187); the "microphysics of imperialism" (109); the "distancing and aestheticizing cultural practices that split, then anesthetize the metropolitan consciousness" (13); the "interacting experience that links imperializer with imperialized" (194); the "inability of the western humanistic conscience to confront the political challenge of the imperial domains" (208); the decolonizer's "voyage in" as "an especially interesting variety of hybrid cultural work" (244); and (my personal favorite) resistance as "an alternative way of conceiving human history" (216).

I propose to devote the last section of these remarks to the section of Said's book which seeks to map out the history of anti-imperial resistance and decolonization. Before doing so, however, I propose to offer a contribution to the historical argument the book lays out. Toward the end of *Culture and Imperialism*, Said observes, "If these ideas of counterpoint, intertwining, and integration have anything more to them than a blandly uplifting suggestion for catholicity of vision, it is that they reaffirm the historical experience of imperialism as a matter first of interdependent histories, overlapping domains, second of something requiring intellectual and political choices. If, for example, French and Algerian or Vietnamese history, Caribbean or African or Indian and British history are studied separately rather than together, then the experience of domination and being dominated remain artificially, and falsely, separated" (257). Since individuals cannot be expected to master all these histories, nothing can be more certain than the *collective* nature of this process of decolonizing knowledge. As someone who studies the cultural histories of Latin America, I have found it fruitful and interesting to bring the Americas into Said's mapping of imperialism and culture, which, following his own expertise, centers on nineteenth-century British and French imperialism in Africa, India, and the Caribbean and the decolonization movements of the 1950s and 1960s in these regions. When the Americas are brought into the mapping of the nineteenth century, alongside colonialism and imperialism, a third category of analysis surges into view: neocolonialism. For of course in the Americas, the nineteenth century begins not with colonialism but with independence, the breakup of the empires established during the first wave of European imperialism in the sixteenth century.

This difference in chronology with respect to colonization and decolonization seems to be one of the main reasons the Americas have remained almost entirely off the map of the colonial discourse movement and colonial studies in general. (Though in less charitable moments, one suspects that the main barrier has been the need to learn so unprestigious a language as Spanish.) In any case, when the Americas are factored in, neocolonialism comes into view as one of the major strategies of nineteenth-century British and French imperialism. Spanish-American independence was won only with the crucial support of British and French troops, both hired mercenaries and state-sponsored emissaries. From a north European point of view, "independence" and "decolonization" in Spanish America meant nothing more or less than access for French and British capital, commodities, and technology to Spanish-American markets, raw materials, and financial collaborators. That is, the *same* process of breathlessly expanding productivity and capital accumulation that drove the colonialist scramble for Africa drove independence struggles

and nonterritorial neocolonialism in the Americas. Indeed the two intersected constantly. The famed *Description de l'Egypte*, whose importance Said often underscores, coincides exactly with Alexander von Humboldt and Aimé Bonpland's thirty-volume description of South America. The co-incidence is not a coincidence. Humboldt and Bonpland's original plan had been to travel to Egypt, and they were poised to leave Marseilles when they were turned back by Napoleon's invasion—the invasion that produced the *Description*. They made a right-hand turn and carried their torch to the Americas instead. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, as the partition of African territory got under way, Peru's economy was turned over to Lloyd's Bank of London, who administered it for nearly a decade. This occurred as a result of a disastrous war which Chile and Peru fought over possession of the guano coast—Conrad's Costaguana—that is, over the *neo*colonial exchange of raw materials for cash and commodities. Peru lost the war and Chile won, but England won on both fronts—it got the guano *and* the Peruvian national treasury.

Though *Nostromo* is often read in colonial studies through the discourses on African colonialism, the real link between *Heart of Darkness* and *Nostromo* is surely the link between British colonialism in Africa and British neocolonialism in Spanish America. The common denominator is imperialism and its motor, capitalist expansion. Said correctly sees Conrad as prophetic when he says in 1902 that governing Spanish-American republics is like plowing the sea (xvii), yet, as Said also observes, Conrad here is quoting Simón Bolívar, who made the observation some eighty years before. Why then is Conrad the prophet? And why is Bolívar absent from the genealogy of anti-imperialist thought?

To take an example from the more recent past, a reading of Aimé Césaire's rewrite of *The Tempest* is enriched a great deal if it is referred not just back to Shakespeare but also to Césaire's expressed aim of relating to the black power movements exploding in the U.S. in the 1960s. According to Césaire's own account, his Prospero and Caliban were intended to articulate the paradigmatic tensions between the two models of emancipation incarnated by Malcolm X and Martin Luther King. Their attempt and failure to ally with each other at the end of the play represents Césaire's conclusion on a matter about which United Statesians have been reflecting ever since.

Obviously as the cultural history of imperialism proceeds, it will be valuable to recover such American and Americanist genealogies, as well as the category of the neocolonial, which Said seems to reject even in reference to the twentieth century. The dynamics of independence–nation-building neocolonialism that shaped Spanish-American reality in the nineteenth century were clear, if often depressing, antecedents for the same processes

Said's fascinating treatment of Fanon, James, Rodney, and Césaire vis-à-vis the Europe-Africa axis must be complemented by an analysis that links them to the prior history of colonialism, resistance, and independence in the Americas, and to the contemporary movements for national liberation that continue to operate in the hemisphere.

in the 1950s and 1960s, whose outcomes they partly predict. The Americas were the crucible for the ideologies of progress that underwrote, and underwrite, twentieth-century neocolonialism, for experiments in nationalism, and for nonnational continentalist visions like Bolívar's dream of a united Gran Colombia. Said's fascinating treatment of Fanon, James, Rodney, and Césaire vis-à-vis the Europe-Africa axis must be complemented by an analysis that links them to the prior history of colonialism, resistance, and independence in the Americas, and to the contemporary movements for national liberation that continue to operate in the hemisphere. (Even as I write, the FSLN in Nicaragua, the FMLN in El Salvador, and the M-19 in Colombia appear on electoral ballots in their respective countries as political parties attempting a transition from military to political opposition.)

The argument applies in the cultural and strictly literary sphere as well. For instance, the decolonizing project of rewriting the metropolitan canon is a familiar one in nineteenth-century Latin American literature as well as twentieth-century "postcolonial" writing. One thinks of the gaucho version of *Faust* produced in Argentina in the mid-1800s, or of several Mexican takeoffs on *Don Quixote*. Of course, in the Americas one can go back further, say, to the rewriting of the biblical creation myth by a late sixteenth-century Andean intellectual—without even raising the immense history of nonprint resistance culture.

On the other hand, distinctions are also in order, notably between the settler colonies of the Americas and the administrative colonialism in India and most of Africa. The former, as Anne McClintock so astutely points out, do not automatically undergo decolonization when they become independent. The new nation-states that emerge are founded on white supremacy and dependent cultural affiliations. As we see in the contemporary U.S., Canada, South Africa, and elsewhere, decolonization continues in the struggles on the part of still-subordinated native and ex-slave populations. Since Said does not theorize imperialism in this book, such distinctions do not come up systematically (I return to this question below).

For this reader, chapter 3 of the book, "Resistance and Opposition," was particularly fascinating. Here Said sets out to map the terrain of anti-imperial, anticolonial thought and expression in the twentieth century. He starts (typically, infuriatingly) in the canon, with Forster's attempt in *Passage to India* to portray the coexistence and incompatibility of native and European anticolonialism. He goes on to sketch out a set of "themes of resistance culture," identifying some of the main cultural instruments of decolonization: the reinscription of metropolitan sacred texts (Fanon rewriting Hegel); restoration of community; repossession of culture and the means of self-representation; taking consciousness of

oneself as a member of a subject people; reimagining the past in the context of resistance; reclaiming and renaming the landscape; and reinhabiting it through stories, often in noncanonical and nonliterary genres narrated from subordination.

Yeats, in a section doubtless intended to shock the English department, is inserted into a narrative of decolonization alongside C. L. R. James, Fanon, and Wole Soyinka. A fascinating section called "The Voyage In" analyzes the emergence of Third World anti-imperial intellectuality through a discussion of four key books, two from before the decolonization movements of the 1950s and two from after. Here, with evident longing, Said notes that in the earlier texts—C. L. R. James's *Black Jacobins* and George Antonius's *Arab Awakening*, both from around 1938—the authors saw themselves as working clearly within the Western tradition as well as within "native" cultural traditions, and experienced no conflict between them. Both wrote, moreover, as public intellectuals vitally and polemically engaged with the political debates of their time. In what for Said is clearly the fallen world of the 1960s and 1970s, Third World intellectuals—the examples are Ranajit Guha (India) and S. H. Alatas (Malaysia)—see their thought as "radically antithetical" to the Western tradition. Apparently, Said concludes, decolonization requires a "hermeneutic of suspicion." The more contemporary intellectuals, he observes, also work in scholarly domains separated from public debate, and within national academies. While in no way faulting these scholars, Said states in this chapter more strongly than anywhere else his call for a "pull away from separatist nationalism [and high academies] toward a more integrative view of human community and human liberation" (268). He finds above all in Fanon the "immense cultural shift" from a confining, ultimately nonemancipatory nationalism to the "theoretical domain of liberation" (268)—a new humanism. This for Said is the crucial move. "The real potential of post-colonial liberation," he says, "is the liberation of all mankind from imperialism" (274) and the "reconceiving of human experience in non-imperialist terms" (276). What would be the terms of such a reconceiving? Said does not elaborate, but surely they would have to be radically different from the rhetorics of humanism that have been and remain perfectly compatible with the most ruthless forms of exploitation and inequality, and so rarely effective against torture and mass murder.

It is at this point perhaps that one feels most acutely the lack of the counterpoint of gender analysis. For feminist thought has taught us many times over that these rhetorics of humankind tend to be held together by androcentrism or the supposition of a normative male citizen-subject. While Said's analysis and critique of nationalism would have been strengthened immeasurably by including the feminist accounts of it, I fear that a gendered analysis might have badly complicated this "reconceiving

of human experience in non-imperialist terms" that Said sees as shared by Fanon, Ngugi, Achebe, Saleh—his good guys. One thinks, for example, of Assia Djebar's novel *L'amour, la fantaisie*, in which the historical narrative of the French military conquest of Algiers in 1830 is interspersed with her childhood narrative of life in the patriarchally enclosed space of the house—a space that turns out to be highly porous, where Algerian and French women and children are in intricate daily contact, while outside the walls the men police the cultural and sexual divide.

Said ends this rich and challenging chapter on decolonizing thought with the grim question: "Why hasn't it worked?" "There can be little doubt," he affirms, that were they alive today, Fanon and Cabral would be "hugely disappointed at the results of their efforts" (276). This is where I would reintroduce the term *neocolonialism*, but where Said leaves political economy entirely behind and turns toward the academy. Part of the problem, he suggests (and I agree), is that metropolitan culture pays no attention to Third World thinkers because it cannot see or hear them speaking with the "universal authority" that counts as real theory. This deafness or dismissal happens across the political and ideological spectrum—which is to say that the problem continues to be imperialism itself, that the decolonizing of knowledge and academic thought which Fanon undertook has not been completed. It is interesting that this crucial chapter ends at this particular juncture, for it is also where the chapter begins. At its outset, in one of the few self-referential statements in the book, Said locates himself in the impasse left by Fanon: "Today," we read, "post-imperialism has permitted mainly a cultural discourse of suspicion on the part of formerly colonized peoples, and of theoretical avoidance on the part of metropolitan intellectuals" (194). Said finds an antithesis between involvement and theory and identifies his contrapuntal method as a "homemade resolution" to it.

Indeed, *Culture and Imperialism* is a decidedly untheorized book. In fact, the contrapuntal method is not readily compatible with normative theorizing, which calls for a fixed subject position. But there is another dimension to the problem, one that is implied but not made explicit in Said's discussion. In metropolitan theory, an unconscious identification typically takes place between the theorizer and the party in power in the situation being theorized, even when the project is a critique of domination. It has been observed that the colonial discourse movement constructed its theorizing around relational terms that leave the epistemological center of gravity with the colonizer: self/other; colonizer/colonized; First World/Third World. The term *postcolonial*, as Anne McClintock, Ella Shohat, and others observe, continues to locate the whole planet with respect to a European-based historical narrative. Afro-British cultural

critic Paul Gilroy recently observed that critiques of slavery are often articulated from the perspective of the master.

The crucial point, however, is that this is also the way metropolitan society has theorized itself. Western state theory, for instance, maps society from the point of view of those it privileges—in Aristotelian tradition, the citizens. To take Catharine MacKinnon's example, the doctrine of equality before the law reproduces gender and class privilege by denying that inequality exists. The normalized Western gesture is not just universalizing, then, but the universalizing of dominance. Critical theorizing thus often reproduces at the level of presupposition some of the hierarchies and structures of authority it is demystifying at the level of argument. The theorizer's identification with the party in power readily becomes the figure for academic or intellectual authority itself. This unconscious identification, I suggest, underwrites the claim for theory as "higher knowledge." In its very unconsciousness it creates the theorizer's complicity with the hierarchies she or he seeks to describe or question. Probably this complicity has a good deal to do with the resistance to theory in fields like ethnic and gender studies whose project is to construct contestatory knowledges from a position of subordination and resistance.

This thing I've come to refer to as the "point-of-view problem" in theory has important consequences for the theorizing of resistance. From the vantage point of dominance, the study of resistance encounters a basic epistemological limit: apart from recorded accounts, and militant or public acts, resistance can only rarely be detected or assessed directly. In the history of domination, to ask, "Was there resistance? Was it effective?" is often to ask, "How much worse would it have been if the resistance that must have happened had not happened?" At the same time, theorized from the standpoint of dominance, subordinated subjects tend to appear as wholly defined by their subordination, as monopolized by their relation to the dominant. As I said already, given the point-of-view problem, this reduction occurs as readily in critiques of domination as in accounts that normalize established hierarchies. Neither can give rise to adequate accounts of the knowledges, realities, and epistemologies of nondominant social formations. Said diagnoses this as the "tragedy of resistance," but I think it is more likely a "tragedy of knowledge."

I'd like to end my remarks with a question: How much explanatory power does the term *imperialism* have today? Or rather, what are the limits of its explanatory power as we approach the year 2000? I ask the question because I share the sense of bewilderment—and rage—that permeates the passionate last chapter of Said's book. While the term *imperialism* readily diagnoses and characterizes Operation Desert Storm, or what is going on today in Haiti and Cuba, it does not suffice to diagnose, say, the

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global-scale upward transfer of wealth that occurred in the 1980s, or the international (not Western) sex tourism industry that has brought the AIDS virus to between 10 and 20 percent of the youth of Thailand, a country that has never been colonized by anyone. Should we just be talking now about capitalism and its irrational expansionism? Is it possible that capitalism doesn't need imperialism now the way it once did? Or that imperialism has merely enriched its repertoire? Is our collective bewilderment and paralysis the sign of a failure of will or understanding, or the sign of a disempowerment we have yet to reflect on?

Jonathan Arac

Over some thirty years as a critical writer, Edward Said has scrutinized narrative as one among a diverse repertory of means by which texts may be constructed. Since texts for Said are "worldly" and "secular" constructions, this means that they arise from human interests and exert power. From his practice, we might surmise a definition of *cultural studies* (not his own favored term): it is the critical labor that enables "us" (his readers) to "see" the density, complexity, and particularity of what is usually taken for granted. As he wrote long ago, for instance, "If we suspend for a moment our lifelong familiarity with fiction and try not to take the existence of novels for granted, we will see that the seminal beginning conception of narrative fiction depends simultaneously upon three special conditions" (*Beginnings*, 88), which he then sketches. Only a few years later, he continued this inquiry more interrogatively. Why, he asked, do "so few 'great' novelists deal directly with the major social and economic outside facts of their existence—colonization and imperialism," and further, why have "critics of the novel . . . continued to honor this remarkable silence" (*The World, the Text, and the Critic*, 177)? Such a line of questioning seems to imply what is often called "demystification"; fair enough, but Said does not believe that revelation will luminously erase what has been revealed. The constraints we discover are not illusions, or symptoms, that go away once we have seen through them; they are historical, that is, produced through human activity. As Said continued this sequence of questions about novels and their critics, he asked, "How is the cultural edifice constructed so as to limit the imagination in some ways, enlarge it in others?"

Culture and Imperialism is Said's fullest answer to these questions. In a word, "the power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them" (xiii). This term *connection* is not at all incidental; connection is the prime gesture of the crit-

icism that Said calls "contrapuntal" and that he uses in this book to construe the very large, but by no means all-comprehending, cultural edifice of imperialism. Contrapuntal criticism is not itself narrative, but rather, as suggested by its musical meaning, a technique of theme and variations. Yet counterpoint may be established between different narratives, and if the book as a whole does not make a narrative, it makes a pattern of Western narrative challenged by the resistances of "counter-narrative" (272).

Said on narrative exemplifies a criticism that has realized the complexity of power—the way, in a mantra more repeated than worked through in cultural studies, power both enables and constrains. And when I say that Said has "realized" this complexity, I mean that he has made it real through the elaboration by which he has composed his understanding. This means, I think, that Said does not have a "position" on narrative, except that it is "very important"; nor does he, finally, have a narrative of narrative. Rather, his treatment is an open set of variations on a theme. That is, as I read Said, narrative is a human *possibility* at any time for a very great range of purposes, which does not mean that it can always be achieved, or that we should always be on its side.

Having sketched this formulation of how narrative may be placed in *Culture and Imperialism*, I want now to think back through Said's body of critical work, touching on key places that may illuminate or pressure this perspective on narrative. This is a little bit a narrative of Said's relation to narrative, and it is also a little bit of contrapuntal criticism, for it makes connections that I think are not familiar. If I am largely limiting the connections to those within the work of an author, I may cite the analogy of Said's challenging avowal of aesthetic pleasure in *Culture and Imperialism*: none of the bogeys of recent oppositional critical thought need be taken as inviolable limits.

Joseph Conrad, whose "Fiction of Autobiography" was the focus of Said's first book (1966), was born almost exactly in the middle of the extended century in which Poles were a nation without a state. Conrad explained the "unconventionality" and "impropriety" of his own life-writing in *A Personal Record* by regretting that he could not "begin with the sacramental words, 'I was born on such a date in such a place,'" since the "remoteness of the locality," the unfamiliarity of that place to his readership, would destroy the sacrament of narrative community. In the most literal sense, that is, displacement tampers with narrative, and human secularity challenges our inventiveness. Conrad is still a fundamental point of reference for Said in *Culture and Imperialism*, and the effects of Conrad's extreme and bizarre narrative constructions are still highlighted. Said is still concerned with the power of narrative to define effective social and cultural groupings, and with the relations between narrative and geography.

This critical scrutiny of narrative bears not only on the materials of Said's books but on the forms of his books. Consider the titles of the first four chapters of Said's second book, *Beginnings* (1975): "Beginning Ideas," "A Meditation on Beginnings," "The Novel as Beginning Intention," and "Beginning with a Text." As Said understands Vico's conception of *ricorsi*, this book of beginnings is a series of beginnings-again. So, too, *Culture and Imperialism* refuses "linear and subsuming" narrative for a historiography that is "contrapuntal and often nomadic" (xxv).

Yet it would be very wrong, as I have already argued, simply to understand Said as one of the many powerful antinarrative thinkers of our time. In *Orientalism* (1978), Said's third book and the one many readers begin with and use to define him, narrative is accorded an important potential for resistance. A typical strategy for Orientalists has been "to survey . . . the Orient from above," to "get hold of the whole sprawling panorama" (239); by this means they have produced a "comprehensive vision" that is "static" and therefore "conservative." Against this static vision of "synchronic essentialism," however, "there is a constant pressure," and the "source of pressure is narrative" (240). For "narrative is the specific form taken by written history to counter the permanence of vision." By introducing all the modalities of "change," narrative brings "an opposing point of view, perspective, and consciousness to the unitary web of vision" (240).

In the terms of a key essay collected in Said's sixth book, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983), if Orientalism is thus a form of "system," narrative is closely tied to "culture," as one of the modes of "affiliation" by which the human order is represented as if it were a natural chain of filiation, growth, and development. "Criticism," for Said here, must negotiate between culture and system, and that may mean invoking the powers of narrative in surprising ways. Derrida's critique of representation, Said observes, is limited by Derrida's "avoidance of narrative" (193) as a major subject for his analyses. Said argues, however, that even in the "realistic novel" (193) there emerges an issue with which "deconstruction . . . cannot deal," namely, writing that is "differentiated from other activities" as "the *consequence* of a historical evolution unique, and yet absolutely crucial, to the narrative form itself" (194). So the novelist is the better deconstructor.

If narrative may be deployed as a power of resistance, whether to the "vision" of Orientalism or to the "theory" of logocentrism, then its emergence is dangerous, and those whose power it would challenge will seek to control it. *The Question of Palestine* has made this struggle for control of narrative especially complex and painful. In his fourth book (1979), Said explained that "a small non-European people," such as the Palestinians, "is not wealthy in documents, nor in histories, autobiographies, chroni-

cles"; thus the "lack of a major authoritative text on Palestinian history" (xiii). In the aftermath of Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon and the massacres of Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatila camps, Said wrote an essay, now collected in *The Politics of Dispossession* (1994), that I find one of his most moving and challenging. Entitled "Permission to Narrate," this essay asks a "political question" (248): "why, rather than fundamentally altering the Western view of Israel, the events of the summer of 1982 have been accommodated in all but a few places in the public realm to the view that prevailed before these events." And the answer is that what is at stake is "the inadmissible existence of the Palestinian people whose history, actuality, and aspirations, as possessed of a coherent narrative direction pointed towards self-determination, were the object of this violence" (249). That is, he summarizes, "facts do not at all speak for themselves, but require a socially acceptable narrative to absorb, sustain, and circulate them" (254). In denying Palestinians their narrative as a people with a "real history," the Western media turned instead to the image of "Terrorism," which is "anti-narrative" (257) in its discontinuity and inexplicability, as Said argues in detail in his fifth book, *Covering Islam* (1981).

Yet even on so compelling an issue as the question of Palestine, even within the space of a few years, there is no dogmatic system in Said's relation to narrative. Within two years of "Permission to Narrate," which seemed so strongly to opt for narrative, Said reflects in his seventh book, *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* (1986), on the possibility of entrapment by narrative. He explains that there is active debate among Palestinians "whether a clear, direct line can be drawn from our misfortunes in 1948 to our misfortunes in the present" (5), and he raises his voice to respond, "I don't think that such a line can be drawn; no clear and simple narrative is adequate to the complexity of our experience." Consequently, the form that Said has chosen for this collaboration between his words and Jean Mohr's photographs "do[es] not tell a consecutive story," but neither does it "constitute a political essay" (6); its form is "unconventional, hybrid, and fragmentary" and has "quite consciously [been] designed" as an "alternative mode of expression to the one usually encountered in the media, in works of social science, in popular fiction."

This concern with the power of narrative to limit horizons of possibility seems to account for Said's reconsideration of Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus*, which he had discussed in *Beginnings* and in *The World, the Text, and the Critic.* In these earlier treatments, Mann is understood to have constructed his text through the nonnarrative techniques of "montage and . . . echo," "parallel and parody" (*The World, the Text, and the Critic*, 136), but in *Musical Elaborations* (1991), the book most immediately preceding *Culture and Imperialism*, Said argues that Mann took the

The book's practice of "connection" rejoins the realm of pain (empire, slavery, war, etc.) to the realm of pleasure (the separated aesthetic sphere). Once the connection is reestablished, what can assure that the pain does not overwhelm the pleasure?

"scattered philosophical ideas" of Adorno and transmuted them into "a consistent fable with an inexorably unchanging narrative direction" (48). Just as Said has come to criticize the work of Foucault, to which he also acknowledged a great debt, so he finds in Mann and Adorno too a powerfully limiting "combination of extreme detailed articulation, of self-reflective self-centeredness, of inevitabilism, and aesthetic pessimism" that arises from taking "discernible patterns in Western society during the modern period" and raising them "to the level of the essential and the universal" (51). By the logic of such analysis, any position that was straightforwardly "pro" or "anti" narrative would be suspect. Yet in a Western culture that has overwhelmingly honored the "disciplinary essentialization of coercive development," the "authoritative control" (100) in sonata form, or in fictional and historiographic narratives, it is important to notice what Said calls, in terms taken from Raymond Williams, the "alternative and emergent formations" (99). In this context, such formations will be "nonlinear, nondevelopmental" and best understood as "contrapuntal" (102).

Rather than return to my beginning, I would like to open a ragged ending by extending the contrapuntal thought of *Culture and Imperialism*, to connect it with my own current work on *Huckleberry Finn*. Thinking with Said's resources, I believe I have found a fascinating geographical basis that links Twain's book rather more closely with the Civil War than we are accustomed to. Time does not permit me to detail my point, only to go on to the next issue. For the hermeneutic approach of *Culture and Imperialism* differs from much recent criticism. It would not take this tiny *mise-en-abîme* of the Civil War as proving Twain's subversive social commentary. Rather, it allows me to reflect on what Said calls the "structure of attitude and reference," by which free movement on the Mississippi is understood as an essential part of American identity, without any special thought to the recent purchase of the river valley from France (the French appear only as cued by the "King" as "dauphin") or to the Civil War that actually obstructed traffic for several years and threatened to impose on the river all the complexities of international travel.

The question that remains to be worked out, I think, is this. *Culture and Imperialism* magnanimously refuses the "rhetoric of blame" that has marked so much recent socially and politically concerned criticism, and I find great resources in this capacity, which by no means diminishes the book's power to make critical political judgments. Yet the book's practice of "connection" rejoins the realm of pain (empire, slavery, war, etc.) to the realm of pleasure (the separated aesthetic sphere). Once the connection is reestablished, what can assure that the pain does not overwhelm the pleasure?

Greetings! I am not Christopher Hitchens [the scheduled speaker]. I'm not sure who I am, but that shouldn't prevent me from speaking. I would like to thank Edward Said for all the work he has done to open up areas for us to think about and work in, and Bruce Robbins for requesting me to pinch-vocalize for Hitchens.

Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* is profoundly conjunctural in nature. The work is situated virtually on the border: between several discourses, several issues and agendas. It is not reducible to a single temporality or a single epistemic space. The burden of the book comes through not as a discrete theme but as a problematic, a form of a complex and uneven combinatorics. The insistence here is on the relationality among the many ingredients, trajectories, and flows that constitute the problematic. It is inevitable therefore that the work is the constitutive expression of harmonies and congruencies as well as of contradictions, asymmetries, and incommensurabilities. The contradictions and incommensurabilities in Said's work are not a form of corrigible error, to be rectified by a methodology or system that is somehow more pure or less contaminated than Said's own cultural imaginary. On the contrary, these contradictions and incommensurabilities are deeply symptomatic of the divided times we live in, and I take it that Said's intellectual labor is both a vivid symptom of a whole range of contemporary crises, cultural and ethico-political, and an attempt to theorize that very symptom. What is particularly compelling is the fact that the theory does not attempt to exorcise the symptom through bad faith, but rather lives and works in the contradictions.

If I can attempt a hasty sketch of the kind of figure that we are dealing with, then here is how it might read: a critic who is open-ended in some ways but didactic in others; identitarian in certain contexts but differential-heterogeneous for other reasons; one whose knowledge production seeks legitimation and hegemonic closure on one level but deploys itself counterhegemonically on another. A thinker who travels through methodologies and is therefore nonexemplary. In short, a liminal and not a proper critic, whose lucidity is most convincing only if you concede that there is a fraught space between representation and postrepresentation. To signpost a few of the challenges that *Culture and Imperialism* takes on: postcoloniality and its many contradictory valences; the politics of the "post" in general; representation and the critique of representation; center/periphery relationships, nationalism, and diasporas; the politics of location and the travails of traveling theory.

What follows is a brief, appreciative critique of Said's work. My purpose is to pressure Said's critical agenda at a few strategic places. Before I

do this, I'd like to recommend strongly that there are two critical attitudes to his work that I think would be quite counterproductive. The first attitude results in the attempt to gerrymander his critical agency into two discrete areas and disallow any kind of dialogue between the two: one, the Palestinian activist, and the other, the literary theorist interpellated by Western humanism. Such a division would only serve to (1) ghettoize Said's work as a Palestinian activist; (2) depoliticize the realms of professional literary criticism; (3) monumentalize the division between real political activities and professional performances; and (4) associate solidarity absolutely and exclusively with "real" politics and mercenary opportunism and a lack of worldliness with professional projects. The other kind of temptation is to want to nail him down taxonomically to one school of thought or methodology, and that again would be a poor way to understand the complexities of Said's various agendas. I would argue that in situating and evaluating the work of a critic, it is important to consider it both in its systemic, formal aspect and in its historical, existential dimensions. The question is not merely whether Said is a Foucauldian or not, or if he got Foucault right, but also why and how, in a certain historical, existential conjuncture, Said begins to use Foucault in a certain way. The reasons why Said finds Gramsci resonant with meaning at a certain stage of his own development or finds in Gramsci a way of settling a dispute with Foucault are interesting issues in themselves. In disregarding this aspect of theory as strategic, situated, and nontotalizable practice, there is a danger that we may dehistoricize or decontextualize the nature of Said's engagement with figures such as Gramsci, Foucault, and many others.

Said is a cosmopolitan critic through and through, and his objective is to enable a universalist imagination travel across the asymmetry of divided histories and spaces.

Said is a cosmopolitan critic through and through, and his objective is to enable a universalist imagination travel across the asymmetry of divided histories and spaces. His avowed purpose is to make bold generalizations in precisely those places and areas where similarities and common ground seem most unlikely. Rather than focus on deeply entrenched and viciously ideologized "us and them" differences, Said would use the geographical imaginary of space to acknowledge overlaps among histories that are different and often antagonistic. This solicitude for coevalness, in other words, is the very basis of Said's universalist imagination. It has become all too formulaic and felicitous within the realm of radical poststructuralist theory to take on a tone of annoyed superiority whenever universality is invoked. As a reluctant inheritor as well as beneficiary of a Eurocentrism that has masqueraded so long as universalism—that is, a dominant universalism without hegemony—poststructuralist theories of difference and heterogeneity tend to shy away from a global imagination of connections and negotiable common grounds. And the pernicious result has been the epistemology of relativism and its corollary, the privileging of localism and

regionality. We are then left with the inflation of alterity as a category and no way to approach the other historically and relationally. By this logic, the other is *there*, irreducibly, historically there, while at the same time the other is not knowable to us and by us. It is almost as if unknowability to the self is a prerequisite for the ontological and historical reality of the other. What then does the West do with the rest except negate it through knowledge? It is in such a context of West-rest relations that Said's ongoing work of mediation, translation, and representation takes its significant place. And this task is a border task that is neither all metropolitan nor all peripheral. It is in this spirit of initiating dialogue across an asymmetrical divide that Said perhaps privileges the metropolitan location. His reading of Ranajit Guha, C. L. R. James, George Antonius, and Alatas in a metropolitan context is a way of peripheralizing the center and not an act of capitulation to the metropolitan center. True, Said is partial to those theorists who use the master's tools to deconstruct the master's house, but this strategy is but one among many strategies, and Said is not claiming total value for it. Said is profoundly involved in the task of articulating coalitions between *differences within the First World* and *the Third World as difference*. In other words, when postcoloniality moves to the center, the center itself is not and cannot be the same anymore. Business as usual in the center cannot be continued anymore in the same old way.

Let us take a look at the politics of representation as it is acted out in Said's work. How can one write *Orientalism* and yet be deconstructive of insider-outsider oppositions? How can Said indignantly accuse the West of misrepresenting the East and yet hold on to the thesis that there is nothing like an authentic or correct representation? On another, related plane, how can a critic of nationalism also be an advocate of Palestinian nation-statehood? The purpose of *Orientalism*, it seems to me, was not to suggest that there is a perfect insider's point of view that can tell *the* correct story of the Orient. The intention was to show the complicity of a certain kind of knowledge with imperialist, colonialist interests. Orientalist knowledges are dominant—not hegemonic: exploitative, colonizing, and invasive. How then do we distinguish between good and bad, just and unjust representations? What is the relationship between who is making the representation and what is being said? Does it matter who is speaking? In the case of Orientalist scholarship, (1) the articulation of knowledge comes from without and not within the area under investigation, and (2) the form of knowledge is underwritten by the need for domination and control. This mode of scholarship is flawed and objectionable not merely because it is external but also because it is based on dominance: an unequally structured relationship that prevented the East from speaking for itself and denied reciprocity of influence. But the reality of this horrendous history does not preclude possibilities of knowledge as an equal

and dialogic process where there is a place both for insiders and for outsiders. Nor is it ludicrous to dream of a utopian scenario where truth will be delinked from structures of dominant power.

To make this discussion more concrete, let us take a closer look at Said's sense of location as a distinguished Palestinian activist living in the First World. Let us also keep in mind the reality that the inalienable legitimacy of the Palestinian demand for nation status is simultaneous with the global disarray and the ethico-political bankruptcy of nationalism. It would be altogether too easy to abandon the Palestinian cause in the name of a radical critique of nationalism as such, or to be so monomaniacal in the Palestinian cause as to lose sight of nationalism as a problem. There is a contradiction here, and Said's theory lives in the contradiction. Unlike totalizing theories that seek perfection and orchestral synchronicity among their constitutive parts, Said's critical theory remains candidly strategic, contradictory, and vulnerable precisely because it is not a total system. If all theories of knowledge are situated, ideologically specific, and polemically entrenched, how can knowledge then be cultivated as a bridge among different interests and locations? How is a genuine universalism to be realized on the basis of knowledges that are no one's monopoly? How should epistemology acknowledge the situatedness of its own production without allowing the situatedness to harden into a nonnegotiable relativism? These questions point to the dire need for knowledge as a form of persuasion. Said and others like him can only hope that through information and persuasion, the Palestinian cause may be generalized and taken up by groups that are not Palestinian. A righteous and pure form of advocacy that commits the Palestinian cause exclusively to Palestinian voices is a luxury that Said cannot afford. Advocacy by definition begins with insider-outsider distinctions, but the objective of advocacy can only be the building of cognitive and ethico-political bridges—a task that is both representational and postrepresentational.

Now, about secularism and the connections between narrativity, secularism, and representation. What are the implications of secularism for the power of narrative? The secular is historical, humanly produced, open to change, and profoundly anti-essentialist. To Said the realm of the secular is where critical consciousness is not doomed to a teleology of uncritical situations and affiliations. Responding to a situation, for example, as an Indian or as a Hindu is a form of moral behavior that is double-edged. Necessarily, a given sense of identity precedes the actual instance of behavior, and as such there is a semantic and nonarbitrary relationship between the given identity and its manifestation in and through behavior. This relationship is in fact ideologically interpellated. Take, for instance, the Gulf War, when so many people felt that they had to be pro-war because they were Americans. The behavior announces, exemplifies, and

protects the identity that it derives from. But this neat representational solidarity has another side to it. Indianness, Hinduness as a pregiven essence could begin to operate as a mandate with an ontological claim over behavior as though behavior were transhistorically mandated and not produced historically. This results in an ideological fixing of the terms *Indian*, *Hindu*, *Jewish*, and so on. Said's reliance on secular narrative is one attempt to counter essentializing histories that deny the claims of other histories and conceptualize "identity" in opposition to change and negotiation.

Here one could perhaps pressure Said's passionate advocacy of secularism to engage with a number of criticisms of secularism that have been emerging recently in the Third World. The problem in India, for example, is how to differentiate right-wing attacks on secularism that are based on hatred and the notion of fundamentalist oppositions between peoples and religions, and left-wing critiques of secularisms that project a very different agenda. It seems to me that Said concedes all too easily that the secular imagination is the only way perhaps to do and live history, and in doing so, he overlooks the epistemological agenda of secularism: an agenda that has unfailingly trivialized native, indigenous, and traditional ways of doing and living knowledge. Secularism, in other words, is as much a matter of knowledge as it is of political and historical governance. Partha Chatterjee's critique of secularism may be contrasted with Said's advocacy of secularism. Chatterjee's thesis, in the context of his spirited reading of the Gandhi-Nehru connection within the narrative of Indian nationalism, is that secularism as a Western formation continues and perpetuates the dominance of Western reason over other epistemologies. Secularism is effective precisely because it functions as a preemptive epistemological coup. In the domain of knowledge, the West leaves its inviolable signature, and the devastating result is that non-Western cultures are forced into this unreal choice, that is, be yourself or choose knowledge. It is this schizoid division between one's own political agency, on the one hand, and one's subject formation through an alien epistemology, on the other, that has perpetuated the rest's dependency on the West, especially in matters intellectual and epistemological. And no amount of political flag-waving has been able to compensate for this epistemological surrender. All I am saying is that it would be exciting to see Said pay more attention to the contradictory effects of secularism among non-Western knowledge systems. What I am looking for within this advocacy of secular thinking and reason is some room for a position which is decidedly pro-secular, politically speaking, and is yet a critique of secularism, epistemologically speaking.

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It is not clear whether secularism by itself can help us to make sense of a global situation in which some narratives are headed in the direction

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of the *post-* and the *trans-*, while others are interested in the motifs of return and revisionism. I will conclude by suggesting that the word *cosmopolitan* itself has no meaning except as a form of relational accountability to the many knowledges, histories, and constituencies the world over that are in search of an open space of negotiation. The narratives have to come from all over the world so that cosmopolitan space may not reify into metropolitan space and the sensitive task of negotiating among diverse histories degenerate into the survival of the dominant.

Edward Said: Response

First of all, I'd like to express my gratitude to Bruce Robbins for arranging this panel, which obviously flatters but also deeply embarrasses me. I am not good at this sort of thing. Also, I am sorry that Hitchens could not come.

From the wonderful observations made by Mary Louise Pratt, Jonathan Arac, and Radhakrishnan, I would like to just pick out three (one from each) that struck me as exceptionally fruitful and taught me a great deal, but I think also meshed with things that I am trying to deal with in *Culture and Imperialism*. One, of course, is Pratt's references to and explication of the Latin American experience, which obviously works on a different agenda than the ones I was dealing with in the French and British empires. Neocolonialism as a category is, of course, especially important. Here one can make a link to twentieth-century Africa and also parts of Asia, where the return of another form of colonialism parallels the rise of neocolonialism in nineteenth-century Latin America. Second, there is Jonathan Arac's summary of what certainly are unfamiliar to me, although I seem to have expressed them, that is, changing attitudes to narrative. To say the least, it has troubled me greatly, improvising as I go along in these various discussions. Narrative obviously compels and fascinates me in ways that I scarcely comprehend. These comments are not meant to be flippant. Finally, there is Radhakrishnan's point, expressed in both the form and the content of his paper, that this is extremely uneven, unsettled terrain. I wouldn't necessarily want to call myself "interstitial," but only to suggest that one doesn't, couldn't have a complete vision. To go back to something Jonathan quoted, this business is contradictory and problematic in ways one cannot expect to avoid. I found these points all tremendously illuminating.

So, I am just going to make half a dozen more points, partly in response, partly to raise things that were implied in what was said and give them my own twist.

First, the notion of the contrapuntal. It is tremendously satisfying to me that we are talking about it now, partly because the person who exemplified contrapuntal performance, Glenn Gould, is a native of this city—that we are talking about it in Toronto strikes me as satisfying and quite marvelous. But the main point I wanted to make, both in *Culture and Imperialism* and here, is that what I find myself doing is really, in a certain sense, rethinking geography. The emphasis on geography in *Culture and Imperialism* and in *Orientalism* is extremely important. A kind of paradigm shift is occurring; we are perhaps now acceding to a new, invigorated sense of looking at the struggle over geography in interesting and imaginative ways. This is continuing, for example, in the work of Field Day in Ireland, now, alas, temporarily disbanded, and it is to be found in the recent work of several young scholars that I ought to mention. One, Amiel Alcalai, in a book called *After Jews and Arabs: Rethinking Levantine Culture*, which is really about the Mediterranean, and rethinking the Mediterranean. And then Paul Gilroy's recently published book, *The Black Atlantic*, not just rethinking Atlantic experiences from the point of view of Britain and France, NATO or NATO-allied countries, but looking at the back-and-forth across the Atlantic of African American and British experiences, which have hitherto been unlooked at, although each is so bound up in the other. Finally, there is the remarkable work of somebody who may not be so familiar to you, Bernard Smith, an Australian, in his book *Imagining the Pacific* (which talks about geography and in particular the role of water in the geographical imagination). All these represent a way of conceiving the study of human history, you might say, (1) in geographical terms and (2) looking not just at geography (and here I go to the point Mary Louise made) but at the struggle over it. The core experience—I have tried to keep this out of my book, because it is so personal to me—is the experience of settler colonialism, which is the case in some countries of Latin America, South Africa, Algeria to a certain degree, not the great colonies of Asia like India and Indonesia, but which is also of course the Palestinian experience, based largely on dispossession by incoming settler colonialism. This is a core experience, but I was also interested in other forms of control which do not depend so much on the holding of territory by settlers, but rather on the transformation of territories in the metropolitan imagination as somehow necessary to the cultural existence of the metropole.

The second major point—there's no developmental order in these—has to do with something Mary Louise said about the word *untheorized.* I decided, for reasons that have to do with the surfeit of theory, that it would be better to try to put down the "presentation" (the word *presentation* is important to Mary Louise) of a vision. Or rather, if you like, not a vision

but a recapitulation of a historical experience without system or the armature of theory in order to provoke discussion, not about theory but about the actual experience of peoples undergoing the amazing, globalized phenomenon I call imperialism. Central to it is, of course, a question about postmodernism. (People still associate me in the oddest way with postmodernism, which I do not understand completely.) There is a postmodern rule, apparently invented by somebody called Lyotard, that narratives of emancipation and enlightenment are supposed to be over. This seems very troubling to me not only in the postmodernized West but also in the modernizing Third World. For example, Chomsky was telling me a story about his trip to Egypt last year. Here is this country literally falling apart, he said—increasing population, a million more people every year, dwindling resources, and so on. And intellectuals are doing one of two things: they are either talking about Islam—I'll come back to religion in a minute—or going on about postmodernism. It's incomprehensible. They are much more interested in the latest twists in Derrida. There's an extraordinary lack of grasp of the fantastic experience of global capitalism that people are undergoing. But I wanted to argue, and I still believe this very strongly, that given an opportunity, people do still think in terms of such categories as enlightenment and liberation, and that it is of fundamental importance to the humanities and to intellectuals to reinsert them as agendas that in fact did move large populations of people in the great countries of capitalism, beginning at the end of the nineteenth century—in British imperialism—to quite dramatic and brilliant action, on the one hand, and to great production of knowledge and literature, on the other.

The third point—and I have talked about this since *Culture and Imperialism*, at some lectures given at Stanford last year—is that I wanted to reinsert or reconsider or refurbish the category of historical experience, bring it back to the study of literature and human history. Given the extraordinary inroads made on the very notion of experience, in our field, by various kinds of formalism, I wanted to connect this notion with what I have tried to describe (in the Reith lectures) as the role of the intellectual, or the secular intellectual vocation. These struck me as fundamental categories to be struggled over and articulated and re-presented as often as possible.

Fourth, one of the things that didn't come out today was the chapter of the book that deals with the United States as an important power. Not only that, the reformulation of the old imperial and (in the case of the U.S.) Cold War ideologies, the current reformulation of the eminent notion of the West as somehow dealing with the rest of the world. Notably, I recommend to your attention an absolutely fatuous essay by Samuel Huntington, he of the strategic hamlets project. Huntington has now come back as a major heavyweight thinker in foreign affairs, in an article entitled

"The Clash of Civilizations" about which many words have been written. The essay argues that the new struggle is between the West in all its wonderful capacities (of course he means the United States) and the snarling, ideologically closed, little bad guys out there. For example, he speaks ominously of an alliance between Islamic and Confucian civilizations. Central to the whole thing is the continued place of the United States, to which many of us belong—this gets us back to Mary Louise's idea of the theorizer occupying dominant positions—and the special claim asserted by the United States as it seeks to reinvigorate its imperial mission with failing economic resources, a sense of global mission, the demise of the public intellectual and public discourse. Perhaps the United States is now carrying the narrative of imperialism in many different forms into the twenty-first century.

The fifth point—and I would like to underline this—is the changing status of literary study. We are all, I think, part of an immense shift, from subdivisions that used to be called seventeenth-century literature, eighteenth-century literature, English, German, French, or whatever, into something resembling a new synthesizing category, whether we call it *narrative*, or *transnational*, or *postmodern*, or *postimperial*, or whatever. But it does seem to be arguing for a different ethic of intellectual study. An ethic not based on separatism, not based on professionalization and specialization, but having to do—this is really important to me and important to *Culture and Imperialism*—with the problem of connecting things to each other, particularly connecting to the problem of the new, that is to say, to the changes that are upon us now socioeconomically, politically, and imaginatively through such things as television, migrations, demographic shifts, refugees, transnational finance, and so on. All these raise new questions in the study of culture and even literature that challenge us to make connections that are neither parochial nor trivial.

Finally, it's very interesting that the question of universals keeps coming up. How does one talk about local experiences, in as much concrete detail as possible, and how does one rise—if that's the correct verb—or move from the local to questions of the universal? That, it seems to me, is the central issue. Is there any way of taking quite anguished, acute, concrete, local, and, in the end, ever so plain experiences in the here and now and relating them to something larger? I think there is, and I try in some way to talk about this. The major problem facing us as humanists is the problem of the amazing transformation of imperialism—which Mary Louise again touches on at the end of her talk—and the extent to which capitalism requires imperialism. If you lived in the Arab world today, let's say, or in other parts of Asia and Africa, you wouldn't have any trouble in saying yes, as Mary Louise did, it is neo-imperialism, it is imperialism. There is an identification; we understand what power from the outside is.

How does one move from the local to questions of the universal? Is there any way of taking quite anguished, acute, concrete, local, and, in the end, ever so plain experiences in the here and now and relating them to something larger?

The great corporate and military power unleashed during the Gulf War—the military budget of the United States, $250 billion, is more than the combined military budgets of the rest of the world—suggests that we are indeed talking about a transformed version of imperialism. But there is also the problem of globalism, the transnational capitalism of global finance, which is relatively irrational and very difficult to comprehend. There is a global pattern: declining economic productivity, the repauperization of what was called the Third World or colonized world, the competition of capitalist power, and so on. The question is, how does one amalgamate all of these things to a vision of, let's say, humanism? This brings one, finally, to the question asked by Jonathan Arac. If one takes pleasure in the reading of books and in the small emancipations of learning, how does one keep that up in the face of what is obviously the pain and anguish of so many other experiences which leave the disadvantaged more disadvantaged, the dispossessed more dispossessed? I don't profess to have *the* answer to that question. But one answer is, of course, to try conceiving of oneself as endlessly learning, trying always to keep one's mind open to more and more, to work on that learning, and finally to *present* it in some way. What I was trying to do in *Culture and Imperialism* was not to *narrate*; it's impossible to narrate so many narratives, even contrapuntally—even Glenn Gould couldn't do it. You are not talking about five voices, but eight hundred voices. You talk about Africa, and then there is a question about Latin America, in addition to Australia, New Zealand, and other parts of the world. So learning is endless. And beyond all this is the idea that there's so little time. So the important thing is to put it down, to present it so the information is at least in some manageable form, with some end in mind. Again: emancipation, enlightenment. I mean that I have come to that conclusion because there's no acceptable substitute for that process of doing it, rather than theorizing about it or saying that some day I'll do it. I find that this is now the most important role of the secular intellectual.

I want to underline *secular*. I can't get into the conflict between secularism and religion here, but the point about secularism is that it *does* leave open the space for discussion, whereas this is not true of the return to religion, the return to "the basics," as it's called in this country, to primitivism of one sort or another, essentialism, nativism, and so on. The secular at least gives one the opportunity to present, to talk, to discuss, and to change, which is the most important thing. Without that, I'm afraid, we are doomed to a very, very long night.