Said, Lukács, and Gramsci: Beginnings, Geography, and Insurrection

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This essay advances two agendas simultaneously. The first is to intervene in the developing debates about the relationship between Edward Said's work and various strands of Marxism. The second is to examine the dialectics of historical and geographical thinking in his work. These two vectors within Said's work meet in the ways in whichhe deployed ideas taken from the last great Western Marxist revolutionaries, Georg Lukács and Antonio Gramsci.

It is worth saying that Said's readings of Lukács, Gramsci, and indeed other Western Marxist writers in whom he expressed interest, such as Raymond Williams, Fredric Jameson, and most prominently Theodor Adorno, are not beyond debate or question. My primary approach here will be to see what Said *does* with the two Marxist writers he cites most often: to offer an account of the work *he accomplishes with them*, not to check if he is consistently or correctly "Lukácsian" or "Gramscian." By way of a start, it is worth noting again Said's best-known declaration of his relationship to critical Marxism as he set it out in the early 1980s. In "Secular Criticism," the opening essay of *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, he writes that "right now in American cultural history, 'Marxism' is principally an academic, not a political, commitment. It risks becoming an academic subspeciality." In the absence of substantial left-wing movements organized on a national scale in America, there is not the wider public culture or alternative public sphere to which a Marxist criticism could properly affiliate itself. Rather, Said declares, he has been "more influenced by Marxists than by Marxism or any other *ism*" (1983, 28–29). What we take from this is that while Said reads Marxist critics keenly, he is more interested in their individuality than

in their place within or contribution to Marxism as a body of doctrine that is deeper or wider than its adherents, and that his readings and appropriations of Marxist writers are and will be openly heterodox.

Said was mostly explicit about his interest in Lukács and Gramsci. In the last pages of his memoir, *Out of Place*, he refers to his encounters at Harvard with Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* and Giambattista Vico's *New Science* (alongside his immersion in the work of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre) as having been for him "momentous events" (Said 1999, 290). Lukács is also cited in Said's first book, *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* (1966), while the presence of Gramsci in Said's work becomes explicit in the middle to late 1970s, most obviously in *Orientalism* (1979). Most Said commentary notes this. What is more rarely alluded to is the interplay and movement between these two writers in Said's work, and it is this pattern that I will concentrate on here.

The conjuncture of Lukács, Vico, and such writers as Merleau-Ponty in Said's early career can be seen retrospectively as putting in place some of the coordinates within which the eventual interplay of Lukács and Gramsci would occur. If later in his career, as we shall see, Said was keen to point out the spatial or geographical character of Gramsci's thought, then we can identify a certain predisposition toward such thinking in his interest in the spiral historicism of Vico, with its ascription of a looping recursive pattern to the historical process and its concept of the individual *corsi* taken by nations in their movement from primitivism to civilization. We must also note here, if only briefly, that one of Said's most famous qualifications for criticism—its "worldliness" or its presence in "the world"—emerges at least partly from his interest not only in the Geneva School of phenomenological criticism, but also in Merleau-Ponty himself. In a very early essay, "Labyrinth of Incarnations," Said reviews Merleau-Ponty's *The Primacy of Perception*, and establishes as fundamental the French philosopher's conception of "the world":

> Merleau-Ponty's central philosophic position, insofar as one can be articulated for him, is that we are in and of the world before we can think about it. Perception, to which he devoted his major philosophic labors, is a crucial but complex process that reasserts our connection with the world and thereby provides the basis for all our thought and meaning-giving activity. (Said 2000, 4)

If Sartre had declared that human beings were condemned to freedom, then Merleau-Ponty, Said notes, argues that we are condemned to the *production of meaning*. When Merleau-Ponty coins the term "the world's prose," he means that human interaction with the world is an inherently interpretative process: we express or give expression to the world, endlessly, productively. Yet this is also something to which we are *condemned*: interacting with the world, there is no final or single or definitive meaning to be ascertained, only further perception. Merleau-Ponty, contrary to appearances, does not represent an exorbitance of subjectivity, but neither is he willing to concede the determination of mind by material structures and circumstances in the manner that Marxist thought might suggest. In pointing to Merleau-Ponty's rejection of Herbert Marcuse's diagnosis

of "one-dimensional man"—the reification and hollowing-out of subjectivity and individuality—Said hints at the torsions and ambiguities of his relationship with Marxism to come (Marcuse 1991). Finally, Said quotes Merleau-Ponty in terms that can be read as a description of his own later critical self:

> Every historical undertaking is something of an adventure since it is never guaranteed by any absolutely rational structure of things. . . . Our only recourse is a reading of the present which is as full and as fruitful as possible, which does not prejudice its meaning, which even recognizes chaos and non-sense where they exist, but which does not refuse to discern a direction and an idea in events where they appear. (Quoted in Said 2000, 10)

We can then turn to later, mature work and find the same or similar motifs reappearing, like the watermark on a banknote. In his essay "The World, the Text, and the Critic," originally published in 1975, we find Said declaring that "rather than being defined by the silent past, commanded by it to speak in the present, criticism . . . is the present in the course of its articulation" (Said 1983, 51). And then in "Traveling Theory," originally published in 1982, we see that criticism is most of all "an unstoppable predilection for alternatives" (1983, 247). In other words—and this theme would appear in and be reinforced by Said's appropriation of Lukács—criticism helps a society and a culture to renew itself, to break with its pasts, to project and anticipate futures.

Said's first book, on Conrad, was the only conventional single-author study he wrote. In it he mines Conrad's letters and short fiction to examine from a phenomenological perspective the aesthetic strategies the Polish exile devised in his writing to deal with his own profound alienation and self-division. Unquestionably, Conrad's life and his ways of dealing with it in writing spoke to Said's own. The singular status of this book, at the start of Said's oeuvre, may be because a repeated theme of his work thereafter would be the devising of *theoretical*—as against aesthetic—strategies for dealing with the conditions of self-division, alienation, and deracination which Conrad describes so well. This is worked out in important ways in Said's major books: *Beginnings*, *Orientalism*, *The Question of Palestine*, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, and *Culture and Imperialism*. I will consider those books now.

Just a year after the publication of *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* ([1966] 2008), the June War (or 1967 Arab-Israeli War) radically redrew the map of the Middle East. Most importantly for Said, Israel now gained control of the remainder of historical Palestine: in a strong sense, "Palestine" had finally disappeared. Not only that, but Israel had wrested significant territory from both Syria and Egypt (the Golan Heights and the Sinai), and dealt those two major Arab powers a severe defeat. With their defeat came also the defeat of the pan-Arabism represented by Gamal Abdel Nasser, with all of the hopes and aspirations for both the Palestinians and for the Arab peoples generally that were contained within it. Any hope of a "return" to natal Palestinian origins was now impossible for Said, literally and also philosophically. The Conradian dilemmas

of alienation and exile were formidably reinforced. To think around or beyond them became the crucial project.

Therefore, the book Said started work on in the late 1960s was always likely to have a political valence. Furthermore, he had started work on the great Irish poet and polemicist Jonathan Swift before he moved on to what would become *Beginnings* (1985). In that book, Said discusses at considerable length the matter of critical as well as fictional beginnings, one of his primary resources being Georg Lukács. We'll find here that the point is less that Said practiced a Lukácsian literary criticism but that in his ways of preparing for criticism he became (arguably) a Lukácsian *revolutionary critical intellectual*. What is interesting for our purposes here is how the ideas taken from Lukács are then reinflected by way of the work of Gramsci.

Said's appropriation of Lukács in *Beginnings* works in at least two ways. These are marked by two crucial books in Lukács's oeuvre, *Theory of the Novel* (1971b) and *History and Class Consciousness* (1971a) respectively. What is striking in regard to Lukács's career is that these books bridge his movement from neo-Kantianism to an immersion in Marxism, and from a relatively contemplative intellectual stance to communist revolutionism. In *Theory of the Novel*, Lukács famously characterizes the novel as the epic of a world abandoned by God and as a form marked by "transcendental homelessness" (1971b, 88, 41). But Said compares the situation of the critic to that of the novelist:

> So the critic faces irregularity on all sides. Because he cannot have direct recourse to tradition in solving the problems of writers like Joyce, and because his (and Joyce's) references are to *other* makeshift formalities of knowledge, the critic is aptly characterized in Lukács's epithet for the novel as being transcendentally homeless. He begins each work as if it were a new occasion. His beginning, as much as any modern writer's beginning, takes up a subject in order to begin it, keep it going, create it. As the beginning is related to what immediately follows it, so too are the parts of his writing to one another—irregularly, assertively, eccentrically. (Said 1985, 11)

Here Said is using Lukács's insight about the novel to make a point about his idea of criticism. Just as the modernist novelist seeks to assert a break or rupture between her work and what has come before, so Said's critic adopts an anti-dynastic position or attitude vis-à-vis the critical tradition: she seeks neither to place herself in an illustrious lineage of scholarship nor to set up a new orthodoxy that will persist in her wake. In the manner of a Vichian autodidact, she realizes that every new project she undertakes will be, and will necessitate, a new *beginning*. Just as Lukács sees the novel as the epic of the modern age, so Said sees criticism as a fundamentally modern and modernist activity: it is a nonlinear, decentered process. It is, to return to the Lukácsian metaphor, "homeless"—not necessarily in the sense that criticism must have a literal empirical or physical home, but rather it is "homeless" in the world of language and writing, restless, perpetually reinventing itself, perpetually starting anew, perpetually re-examining and

reinstating its own conditions of possibility. For Said at this point, this is a both an alienating and an enabling condition.

In the "Meditation on Beginnings," Said discusses "beginning" through a number of sources: Auerbach, Marx, Freud, Vico, and Lukács. "Beginnings" are explored in philosophical, literary, and linguistic terms. Said notes first that merely to think of beginnings is to retroject oneself in order to examine the conditions of such thought. His first example is Swift, of whom he suggests:

> In his political writings, who more than Swift the hard-nosed pamphleteer wanted readers to see things clearly from the beginning—meaning that he wanted to reverse the ruinous trend of European war policy and the cancerous growth in the English language of cant and neologism? (Said 1985, 30)

Noting Swift's blistering attacks on political language, Said shows that for him the classically simple is eminent because it is what came first, and so beginning has eminence: "The beginning as first point in a given continuity has exemplary strength equally in history, in politics and in intellectual discipline" (1985, 32). The point is that Swift is as interested in beginnings in language as in politics, and sees the two as related. Simplicity is related to anteriority, which is in turn related to authority.

Said then suggests that to identify a *beginning* is to make an act of historical understanding. Further, he writes: "Let us then formulate this general definition for any beginning that involves reversal, change of direction, the institution of a durable movement that increasingly engages our interest; such a beginning *authorizes*: it constitutes an authorization for what comes after it" (1985, 34). Beginnings are "worldly" events, whether in politics or discourse: one beginning forecloses on another. For the writer or historian or theorist, beginnings emerge "reflectively" and "unhappily," already engaging the writer in a sense of their "difficulty" (35).

Said then moves on to a consideration of language in relation to beginnings, and he does this with the assistance of Saussure and Nietzsche. With Saussure he notes that language will be both the object and the medium of the investigation into beginnings. With Nietzsche, more polemically, he accepts that concepts are "anthropomorphisms" (quoted in Said 1985, 39): projections of the human mind, which enable the production of knowledge. Language is principally a means of differentiation—it helps us to distinguish objects, though also to establish continuity—but it also projects human needs onto knowledge, which then acts back on human beings. Said then quotes a famous passage from Nietzsche's early essay "Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense":

> What then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short a sum of human relations which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins. (Quoted in Said 1985, 39)

If this sounds like so much nihilistic relativism, Said defends Nietzsche from the reflex or glib application of such a charge. Nietzsche, he says in a memorable phrase, helps us investigate "the charlatanry of reason," a necessary element in the investigation, and positing, of beginnings (1985, 39).

However, Said is not interested in abandoning reason: rather, he is pursuing a radicalized, border version of it. He cites Gaston Bachelard's *L'engagement rationaliste* approvingly: "One must return to human rationality its function as a force for turbulence and aggression" (quoted in Said 1985, 40). Therefore, his wish is to "use reason as a means of setting tasks, to generate thought in order to activate itself beyond the bounds and limits set by the mere historical conventions of reason." The duty of such reason is to "regain hold of those forms, altogether purified and made economically functional by logicians, and fill them psychologically, put them back into life and motion." Most daring of all, if "*during an experiment, one does not risk one's reason, then that experiment is not worth the attempt*" (quoted in Said 1985, 40; emphasis in original).

How should we gloss these ideas? "Beginning" is an issue in any intellectual project—be that writing a novel, or engaging in philosophical critique or political insurrection, whether we like it or not. The point is to engage with this issue reflexively, folding it back into the project itself. Because it involves a recursive leap backward in thinking of one's work, it involves historical interpretation and reversal. It serves both to create difference (the difference of *this* project or action as against *that* one) and continuity—a beginning authorizes that which comes after it. In that sense, beginning is an act of power: it is a matter of authorizing *that* move and not *this* one. The medium of beginning is language—a medium in which the intellectual is both subject to determination and in which, or on which, he can seek to impose his own will. That willed act of linguistic intervention is always interested. To that extent, though it may be rationally undertaken, it also skirts the boundaries of reason. Hence the quotation from Bachelard, which suggests that reason is always most itself just at the point of its greatest danger.

Said is aligning himself with the "great modern rethinkers": Marx, Lukács, Nietzsche, Vico (1985, 41). It is at this point that we encounter the second way Said appropriates Lukács, and this time it is the Marxist Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness*. Famously, in this book Lukács extended Marx's ideas about the commodity fetish from the early chapters of *Capital* and combined them with ideas drawn from Max Weber on rationalization. Under conditions of monopoly capitalism, commodification has become a totalizing condition: all objects, all products, even people and their ideas and feelings become objectified and ossified and also rationally and positivistically quantifiable and standardized, reduced to the logic of the cash nexus and the balance sheet. Along with this goes the reification of consciousness: social atomization and individual alienation, where human beings lose a sense of an organic or coherent community or fellowship and the world appears as fragmentary and incoherent. Reification results in the inability of human beings to see or understand the historicity and totality of social relations, and therefore their passivity in the face of what seems

like an unchangeable and inexplicable world. Capitalism isolates commodity and consciousness, subject and object, from each other, so that their mutual interrelationship in the overall ensemble of human relations is hidden. However, if this interrelationship can be brought out into the open once again, then the exploitation and alienation of capitalism is revealed and can be contested. For Lukács, this exposure can be brought about by the revolutionary consciousness of the working classes, which can produce knowledge of the capitalist system as a *totality*. Said declared himself on numerous occasions to be opposed to totalizing modes of thought, be they conservative, Marxist, or Foucauldian. It is noteworthy that in his account of Lukács in *Beginnings* the emphasis is chiefly on reification, and on consciousness becoming self-consciousness and thereby critical consciousness. The term "totality" barely appears. But the fact is that the beginning manoeuvre of totalization was crucial for him, and it appears repeatedly in his major texts. His appropriation of Lukács in *Beginnings* is predicated on a vision of totality, even if it is provisional, always to be remade. *Beginnings* is, of course, about "beginnings": in Said's later work we see the critical self-conceptualization that is worked out in this book most overtly deployed and put into action.

The idea of totality was not original to Lukács: it can be traced back to Spinoza, and to Vico—an important thinker for Marx, for Lukács himself, and a crucial thinker for Gramsci and Said. But in the first half of the twentieth century, totality became an important theme for many of the major figures of the Western Marxist tradition, even for those such as Theodor Adorno who were deeply skeptical about the concept. A crucial part of my argument here is that totality remained a theme and concern running right through Said's work and career, notwithstanding his qualifications and caution. It is important therefore to look in detail at Lukacs's development of the concept.

The invocation of totality was part of Lukács's wider renewal of Marxist dialectics, which in the 1920s set itself against the grim positivism which characterized much European thought, on the left as much as on the right. Believing that the rejuvenation of practice presupposed the renewal of theory, Lukács issued a radically Hegelian critique of Engels's *Anti-Duhring*, accusing the Marxist orthodoxy of the day of a narrow economism and of scanting the roles of human consciousness and decision, distorting Marx's original insights into the unity of theory and practice. In the manner of Lenin and Luxemburg, Lukács suggested that any revolution necessitated a *theory* of revolution—the aim of dialectical materialism being to make theory into a vehicle of revolution. Putting matters bluntly, Lukács was arguing that insofar as Marxist orthodoxy fetishized facticity and failed to understand facts as historical, it was as much a block to revolutionary change as bourgeois thought. For Lukács, of course, the "facts" of a given situation, a historical conjuncture, a cultural tradition, cannot simply be understood as themselves: they must be understood in terms of the *totality*. This comes within the context of the wider argument that it is not "the primacy of economic motives in historical explanation that constitutes the

decisive difference between Marxism and bourgeois thought, but the point of view of totality":

> The fetishistic character of economic forms, the reification of all human relations, the constant expansion and extension of the division of labour which subjects the process of production to an abstract, rational analysis, without regard to the human potentialities and abilities of the immediate producers, all these things transform the phenomena of society and with them the way in which they are perceived. (Lukács 1971a, 27)

It is from this reification and division of labor that the positivist conception of the "fact"—an isolated, contextless atom—has arisen, but "dialectics insists on the concrete unity of the whole" (Lukács 1971a, 6).

Lukács's radical manoeuvre with the concept of totality was the linkage with the class consciousness of the proletariat. Following Marx's early insight in the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* that "when the proletariat proclaims the *dissolution of the existing world order*, it is only declaring the secret of its own existence" (Marx 1975, 256, emphasis in original), Lukács argues in *History and Class Consciousness* that the "totality of the *object* can be posited only when the positing *subject* is itself a totality." Further, "if the subject wishes to understand itself, then it must conceive of the object as a totality" (Lukács 1971a, 28). Accordingly, the individual can never be the main measure for a properly dialectical philosophy or for revolutionary theory:

> For when the individual confronts objective reality he is faced by a complex of ready-made and unalterable objects which allow him only the subjective responses of recognition or rejection. Only the class can relate to the whole of reality in a practical revolutionary way. (Lukács 1971a, 193)

For Lukács, of course, the revolutionary class is the proletariat. Only the proletariat is capable of achieving the standpoint of totality. In achieving this position, the proletariat is able to break free of or to pierce the reified objectivity that is the "reality" recognized by bourgeois thought. But this revolutionary epistemology had also to be instantiated in a morally appropriate political form. Lukács characterizes the revolutionary class subject in the terms of an "imputed" consciousness, as contrasted to the "psychological" consciousness of the actually existing working class (51). Furthermore, class consciousness is the *ethics* of the proletariat, and any party that represents it must live up to its role as "the incarnation of the ethics of the fighting proletariat" (42).

The proletariat has this theoretical and practical potential because of its location in the processes of capitalist society. If reification brings with it the commodification and objectification of the entire life-world, it must be said that it has different effects and ramifications for the proletariat than for the bourgeoisie. For the proletariat to attain self-knowledge it must escape the mire of immediacy in which the bourgeoisie is entrapped. The true knowledge of its historical situation will always be hidden behind the immediate but reified empirical facts, which describe "reality" for the bourgeoisie. But the thought

of the proletariat does not require some clean slate of knowledge: since the proletariat aims for the complete transformation of society, it takes bourgeois society—its culture and ideas—as the "point of departure" (Lukács 1971a, 163) or the "beginning" point for its project (Said 1985, 1). In contrast to the bourgeoisie, embedded in its positivist vision of reality, the proletariat constantly must pierce this barrier:

> The proletariat is confronted by the need to break through this barrier, to overcome it inwardly *from the very start* by adopting its own point of view. And as it is the nature of the dialectical method constantly to produce and to reproduce its own essential aspects, as its very being constitutes the denial of any smooth, linear development of ideas, the proletariat finds itself *repeatedly* confronted with the problem of its own point of departure both in its efforts to increase its theoretical grasp of reality and to initiate practical historical measures. (Lukács 1971a, 164).

According to Lukács, the bourgeoisie perceives reality in a dual manner or in "antinomian" terms. The split between perceiving subject and perceived object is always present—the individual always sees herself set over and against an overwhelming objective reality of which she can comprehend only fragments. Yet in fact it is "the conscious activity of the individual" that is to be found "on the object-side of the process," whereas the subject cannot be awoken to his class consciousness, which remains obscure to him (1971a, 165). But the proletariat has a different view—for it, social reality does not appear in this divided form:

> It appears in the first instance as the pure *object* of societal events. In every aspect of daily life in which the individual worker imagines himself to be the subject of his own life he finds this to be an illusion that is destroyed by the immediacy of his existence. This forces upon him the knowledge that the most elementary gratification of his needs, "his own individual consumption, whether it proceed within the workshop or outside it, whether it be part of the process of reproduction or not, forms therefore an aspect of the production and reproduction of capital." . . . The quantification of objects, their subordination to abstract mental categories makes its appearance in the life of the worker immediately as a process of abstraction of which he is the victim, and which cuts him off from his labor-power, forcing him to sell it on the market as a commodity, belonging to him. And by selling this, his only commodity, he integrates it (and himself: for his commodity is inseparable from his physical existence) into a specialized process that has been rationalized and mechanized, a process that he discovers already existing, complete and able to function without him, and in which he is no more than a cipher reduced to an abstract quantity, a mechanized and rationalized tool. (Lukács 1971a, 165-66; emphasis in original)

The bourgeois has a sense of this reified world, but he still sees himself as an agent in the wider socio-political process. But the worker has no such sense of agency, yet this very fact "forces him to surpass the immediacy of his situation." What are, for the bourgeois, the *quantitative* differences of exploitation that he sees as the quantitative determinants of the objects of his perception are felt by the proletarian rather as the "decisive *qualitative* categories of his whole physical,

mental and moral existence" (1971a, 166; emphasis added). It is precisely because the worker experiences himself as objectified or reified, as an object, that he is enabled "to surpass the immediacy of his situation" (166). On the one hand, the worker is forced to understand himself as an object in the process of production, but on the other, "because of the split between subjectivity and objectivity induced in man by the compulsion to objectify himself as a commodity, the situation becomes one that can be made conscious" (168).

For Lukács, then, it is *because* the worker is objectified in the reified world of monopoly capital that he has the potential to attain a special kind of knowledge of that socio-economic system, or indeed to produce a *new kind of knowledge* of that system: "the worker can only become conscious of his existence in society when he becomes aware of himself as a commodity" (1971a, 168). The proletarian's consciousness, that is, becomes the self-consciousness of the commodity, or the self-knowledge of the social system based on commodity exchange. This formulation is dramatic enough, but Lukács pushes it further: he argues that the worker's self-knowledge brings about *an objective structural change in the object of knowledge*. In the worker's self-knowledge, the "use-value" of labor becomes social reality.

Ultimately, ramifying out from this opening up of the commodity fetish in proletarian self-knowledge are, no matter how complexly mediated, the idea and the epistemology of totality. So, for Lukács, "the essence of the dialectical method lies in the fact that in every aspect correctly grasped by the dialectic the whole totality is comprehended and that the whole method can be unraveled from every single aspect" (1971a, 170). Not merely this, but the same broad process of the universalization of commodity exchange and reification also creates the proletariat as a *class*: it results, Lukács argues, in the abolition of the isolated individual (171). But the unique element of the situation of the proletariat is not only that it represents and dramatizes the dissolution of the bourgeois idea of individuality, but that its aspiration to transcend its immediacy, the given elements of its environment, always contains the aspiration toward society in its totality. For Lukács, this means "*the transformation of the objective nature of the objects of action*" (175; emphasis in original). By this he wishes to suggest that the objects of reality are now understood as fluid, in (historical) process, and in the context of praxis and action directed at the transformation of the whole. The historical process, Lukács tells us, is the source for this dialectical and totalizing understanding, and the proletariat is its embodiment:

> Since its consciousness appears as the immanent product of the historical dialectic, it likewise appears to be dialectical. That is to say, this consciousness is nothing but the expression of historical necessity. . . . When its consciousness is put into practice it can only breathe life into the things which the dialectics of history have forced to a crisis; it can never "in practice" ignore the course of history, forcing on it what are no more than its own desires or knowledge. For it is itself nothing but the contradictions of history that have become conscious. (Lukács 1971a, 177–78)

So the consciousness of the proletariat is not merely the source of a properly totalizing understanding of society, but is the "consciousness" of historical process in the Hegelian terms crucial to Lukács. Via his conception of the consciousness of the proletariat, Lukács has bridged the gap between the micro-detail of the commodity and the overall pattern of historical change of society. In becoming aware of the commodity relationship, the proletariat only becomes conscious of itself as the object of the production process. But if the reification of reality is dissolved into an understanding of flux and change, if the working of capital can be broken into "an unchanging process of its production and reproduction," then "it is possible for the proletariat to discover that it is itself the *subject* of this process even though it is in chains and is for the time being unconscious of the fact" (181).

Lukács now draws on Hegel once more to reframe his argument. In understanding social development, Becoming is the meaning of Being, and process is all. And so "the developing tendencies of history constitute a higher reality than the empirical 'facts'" (1971a, 181). History is no longer a mysterious flow to which human beings are subjected, or to be explained by transcendental forces. History is the work of human beings, but it is also and at the same time the succession of the processes by which the forms of human work are overthrown. Hence the famous Lukácsian formulation: "*history is the history of the unceasing overthrow of the objective forms that shape the life of man*" (186; emphasis in original).

Lukács goes on to conclude:

> Reification is, then, the necessary, immediate reality of every person living in capitalist society. It can be overcome only by *constant and constantly renewed efforts to disrupt the reified structure of existence by concretely relating to the concretely manifested contradictions of the total development, by becoming conscious of the immanent meanings of these contradictions for the total development.* (Lukács 1971a, 197; emphasis in original)

The proletariat must attain a particular level of consciousness for this overcoming to begin. It must point toward the path of the dialectics of history. Only when this happens, only when proletarian consciousness becomes consciousness of this process, can the proletariat, in Lukács's words, "become the identical subject-object of history whose praxis will change reality" (197). The fullness of totality does not need to be explicit in the actions of the workers; what is necessary is that there should be "an aspiration towards totality." So when considering whether a given action is right or wrong, what matters is how it relates to its function in "the total process" (198). Lastly, it must be realized that the consciousness of the proletariat is eminently *practical* (199). It is this characteristic that makes it *transformative*. Merely contemplative thought—as in the bourgeois tradition— will be swamped once again by its immediacy. Proletarian thought must maintain its dialectical self-consciousness and capacity for self-criticism, which orientates it toward totality as process and the activity of the workers as a class. Only in this way will it develop, dialectically, from being a *theory of praxis* into a *practical theory* that will overturn the world (205).

This is the theory that underpins Said's appropriation of Lukács and his vision of Lukács as a thinker of "beginnings." What Lukács in particular offers Said, and therefore offers criticism, is a model of how thought can escape the reified and reifying conditions of ordinary, "immediate" social values and intellectual discourse and how it can attain a new knowledge of those conditions with a view to their destruction. Deep within the economic and philosophical logics of modernity, Lukács posits an immanent route to their overcoming *within* the terms of reified consciousness, rather than depending on an "outside" or an external "key." Consciousness can therefore escape the capture of reification at certain crucial moments. At a moment of crisis in the social system that is characterized by reification, the values or ideas that lie outside of the capture of the economic laws of capitalism—sentiment, passion—become themselves vital to reified thought. Suddenly the reified mind has the opportunity to see behind the apparently ineluctable portrait of society as a mere array of economic factors and inert objects. The mind can then think not merely of the lifeless reified world, but of the process by which it came to be that way. The reified mind can understand its own objectified nature, but by so doing, it can then think past it, into a possible future. The crisis has become a moment of opportunity, of dialectical analytical thought, or, as Said sees it, of *criticism*. "Criticism" here, of course, means several things: it means that totalizing analytical angle which is able to dissolve the apparently rigidly fixed "facts" of a given historical and cultural situation and redispose them in terms of the totality—as dialectically and historically fluid, dynamic, and interrelated. For Lukács, this vision is the prerogative of the proletariat, but for Said it is also available to the critic, positioned "between culture and system" (1983, 178). If Lukács anticipates that the consciousness of the proletariat will be embodied and dramatized in a vanguard party, Said realizes that any such leadership of a new political or cultural vision must come via *criticism*.

In *Beginnings*, Said reads Marx through Lukács and in the company of Vico and Nietzsche. "The beginning," he says, "is a way of grasping the whole project":

> As Georg Lukács surmised in *History and Class Consciousness*, it was Marx's job to show first that the apparently immutable and object-like beginnings hitherto accepted by the norms of bourgeois thought contributed to, rather than lessened, the separation between man and his nature. (Said 1985, 41)

Marx goes on to show, "as Vico had shown before him," that man is actually "the beginning" of all study—man for whom "the *social* reality of nature, and *human* natural science, or the *natural science about man*, are all equal terms." As Said says, and here it's worth quoting him at length:

> Clearly, this signals a radical displacement of previous thought, for in order to see man as the true origin of social change a new fusion between man and his activity must be considered possible and thereby rethought in man's mind. The very act of beginning must no longer set man apart from his end, but must immediately suggest significant connections between it and man. Marx thus tied

his interpretive activity to human activity in general at a common revolutionary
point of departure. (Said 1985, 41)

In this passage, Said is rewriting Marx's declaration in the *Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach*: "Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it" (Marx 1967, 402). Interviewed by the journal *Diacritics* a year after the publication of *Beginnings*, he spells out this project for criticism even more directly. Said is arguing that if we accept Lukács's analyses of reification, alienation, and class consciousness, then we as critics must start with our own zone of activity. To accept the text's economic and institutional modes of being under conditions of capitalism and bureaucratized, instrumentalized education is to acquiesce to the reification of text, criticism, and the critic:

> Thus to interpret man's work (as a laborer, literary critic, engineer, or whatever) as radically and organically connected with what man is and a whole entity (despite the fact that his consciousness cannot recognize or accept the connection) is the common and revolutionary point of departure both for the interpreter as interpreter and, as Lukács tried also to show, the proletariat as reinterpreter and upsetter of bourgeois reification. (Said 2001, 17)

Lukács is a writer to whom Said returned repeatedly. That return was made in a more pessimistic mood as Said got older, until it began to be radically revised in the last decade of Said's life. But the felt need for the founding Lukácsian gesture of seeking to reattach critical work to a "whole entity" and to overcome a condition of reified objectification would be experienced repeatedly throughout Said's work. The explicit and dramatic linkage made here between "the interpreter as interpreter" and "the proletariat as reinterpreter and upsetter of bourgeois reification" was rarely made in quite such clearly class terms. But I would argue it must be seen as underpinning fundamental critical "beginnings" or ground-clearings Said repeatedly made in his later career. Many of the great Lukácsian themes are crucial for Said: the need to renew theory in order to renew practice; the idea (present also in his phenomenological heritage, as we saw above) of meaning as a potential for human praxis and consciousness residing in nature; and, though he is not fond of the terms, the dialectical insistence on the whole— "The beginning as a way of grasping the whole project"—and on the presence of history and human consciousness suffusing the facts of a given situation—"so much the worse for the facts," as Lukács sarcastically dismissed merely empiricist or positivist accounts of reality (1972, 27).

Within a couple of years of *Beginnings*, the founding, beginning gesture is repeated and reinflected in *Orientalism*, but now via the ideas of Antonio Gramsci. If Lukács and Gramsci were roughly contemporaneous intellectual-revolutionaries, then we must recognize that their thought on totality overlapped in some regards and differed sharply in others. It seems reasonable, with Stuart Sim, to see a broad similarity between Lukácsian reification and Gramscian hegemony (Sim 1994, 2). Both of these phenomena constitute the intellectual infrastructure that must be escaped and then overthrown by the radical critic and the movements to which she is attached. Where Lukács and Gramsci differ is

in regard to the mode of escape and overthrow. Two important areas where they differ are in regard to the avant-garde status of the working class and the position of the critic-intellectual.

Gramsci did not use the vocabulary of "totality," but his work still employs such ideas, which he developed by way of his relationship with Hegel and Croce as much as through his Marxism. Martin Jay points out how important the idea of the "organic" was for Gramsci and how it forged his totalizing holism. Gramsci's idea of *hegemony* (which he actually attributes to Lenin)—an ideological leadership, thought and made and disseminated by organic intellectuals—is in many ways a version of the idea of totality. But it is certainly a looser concept than Lukács's totality, and it is therefore more dynamic. Gramsci famously advocated what he called a "philosophy of praxis," which was predicated on an "absolute historicism" (Gramsci 1971, 465). Jay reminds us that Gramsci's idealist heritage helps account for his concept of history as a "longitudinal totality," "a coherent whole with an implicit telos" (Jay 1984, 156). In 1918, stressing the importance of culture in an article in the paper *Il Grido del Popolo*, Gramsci is very clear in his totalizing vision:

> Persuaded that all human historical activity is one, that thought is one, I see in the resolution of any cultural problem the potential resolution of all others, and I believe that it is useful to accustom the intellect to grasping this unity in the manifold aspects of life, to accustom it to the organic search for truth and understanding, and to apply the fundamental principles of a doctrine to all contingencies. (Quoted in Cavalcanti and Piccone 1975, 29)

He links this view of history to the agency of the workers in an article from 1916:

> If it is true that universal history is a chain of efforts by man to free himself from privileges, prejudices and idolatries, then it is not clear why the proletariat, which wants to add another link to this chain, should not know how, why and by whom it has been preceded, and what benefit it may derive from this knowledge. (Quoted in Cavalcanti and Piccone 1975, 23)

Subsequently, in the *Prison Notebooks*, the view of history as totality is reiterated:

> Every real historical phase leaves traces of itself in succeeding phases, which then become in a sense the best document of its existence. The process of historical development is a unity in time through which the present contains the whole of the past and in the present is realized that part of the past which is "essential"— with no residue of any "unknowable" representing the true "essence." (Gramsci 1971, 409)

Yet it must also be noted that unlike Lukács, Gramsci did not accept the idea of the proletariat as a historical metasubject, as the engine of history, and his conception of hegemony-as-totality is looser than Lukács's model. Hegemony is precisely a network of ideas and values arrived at by a group under the guidance of organic intellectuals, not ideological domination delivered from on high. Jay suggests that this conception in Gramsci is derived from Vico's idea of a "*sensus communis*" (Jay 1984, 160), which, conjoined with Gramsci's historicist

understanding of language, helps produce an idea of hegemony as intersubjectively constructed meaning, more important (because more effective) than truth as an *a priori* postulate:

> Rationality and objectivity for Gramsci are to be constructed in a process of cultural unification, a kind of collective *Bildung*. Instead of a metasubject at the beginning of the process, who creates the totality expressively, there is an intersubjective totalization which is to be completed in the future. (Jay 1984, 159)

Gramsci is famous for his typology of intellectuals, most particularly organic and traditional intellectuals. Jay reminds us that few thinkers in the Western Marxist tradition highlighted the role of intellectuals in the social whole as much as Gramsci; indeed, "none acknowledged their links with the concept of totality as candidly as he did" (1984, 166). It may well have been this element in Gramsci's thinking that most attracted Said—the tasking of intellectuals, as against the proletariat, as the "identical subject-object of history," with totalizing hegemonic thinking (Lukács 1971a, 197). Of course, Gramsci envisaged that the working class would eventually throw up its own "organic" intellectuals, though it must be said that most radical intellectuals attuned or affiliated to the needs and experiences of the oppressed have come from outside of the oppressed class, Edward Said himself being a good example. But this is precisely the problem for Gramsci: is the totalization or hegemony elaborated by intellectuals created "outside" or "within" the proletariat? Is he allying himself with other Marxist revolutionaries such as Lenin, Kautsky, and Luxemburg in suggesting that proletarian consciousness must be delivered to the workers? Or is he assuming, naively, that the workers will autonomously generate their own theory? He gets around this problem by suggesting, famously, that "all men are intellectuals . . . but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals" (Gramsci 1971, 9). Added to this is the imperative for intellectuals not simply to lead or direct social blocs, but to merge with the oppressed in the form of an "intellectual-moral bloc"—it is out of such a bloc that a new hegemony can be forged, and society changed (332–33).

In *Orientalism*, then, we find a reinflection of some of the Lukácsian motifs, but now filtered through Gramsci. In the introduction, Said gives a description of Arab life in America that he then reframes as both the context and the opportunity for critical intellectual formation. He starts by reminding us that to live as a Palestinian Arab in the United States has been "disheartening." Said writes that "there exists here an almost unanimous consensus that politically he [the Palestinian] does not exist, and when it is allowed that he does, it is either as a nuisance or as an Oriental" (Said 1979, 27). He continues:

> The web of racism, cultural stereotypes, political imperialism, dehumanizing ideology holding in the Muslim or the Arab is very strong indeed, and it is this web which every Palestinian has come to feel is his uniquely punishing destiny. (Said 1979, 27)

Again, we remember the force of the June 1967 war as an impulse for Said's formation. With *Orientalism*, this shattering history finally produced the critical intellectual we recognize today:

> In the *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci says "The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory." . . . Gramsci's Italian text concludes by adding, "therefore it is imperative at the outset to compile such an inventory." (Said 1979, 25; quoting Gramsci 1971, 324)

There are a couple of points to make here. First, what is striking in looking at these formulations consecutively is that in them, the "historical process" is equated with, coterminous with, isomorphic with, the "web" of domination that is the Palestinian's "uniquely punishing destiny." Within this frame, the Palestinian Arab does not really exist: certainly not as a political subject, at best as a form of inert impediment or irritant. Burdened with racism, stereotype, dehumanization, the Palestinian has been objectified, marginalized, rendered passive and amenable to instrumentalist manipulation—in a word, reified. Second, the suggestion, worked out through Gramsci, is that for the Palestinian to come to self-consciousness as "an infinity of traces" deposited by persons and forces outside of herself is for her to attain the "starting point"—the *beginning*—of critical elaboration. Behind these arguments lies the Lukácsian idea that to absorb, come to self-consciousness about, and then make an inventory of that "infinity of traces" is the first step toward a radically totalizing insurrectionary critical procedure. To recognize oneself as the hitherto passive object of this hostile "historical process" is the first step in what Raymond Williams called the "unlearning" of the "inherent dominative mode," the becoming the subject of one's own history (Williams 1993, 336). The simple point here, rarely acknowledged by Said's readers, is the suggestion that the overwhelming "discourse" of Orientalism Said narrated *is* the "infinity of traces" deposited in Said, and in other "Orientals" in the West, by Western intellectual culture. This renders *Orientalism* not merely a devastating account of the discursive coherence and force of Western representations of the Orient, but also and at the same time a terrifying narrative of the overmastering Western tradition to which an Oriental is subjected—in which Edward Said is an object.

We must also note here that, with Gramsci, Said offers a picture of the historical process constructing and defining a Palestinian "Oriental," now turned ninety degrees on its axis and conceived of as a kind of *spatialized* history. He has, at this point, already discussed the distinction between what he calls "pure and political knowledge" (Said 1979, 9). He bases this distinction in two discursive frameworks: that of area studies, of which the most important analytical unit is the nation-state; and that of Gramsci's differentiation of political and civil society. These are, of course, *spatial* frameworks. We therefore should not be surprised to find him describing Orientalism in such terms. It is

> a *distribution* of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts; it is an *elaboration* not only of a basic geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident) but also of a whole series of interests which, by such means as scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description, it not only creates but also maintains; it *is*, rather than expresses, a certain *will* or *intention* to understand, in some case to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different . . . world. (Said 1979, 12; emphasis in original)

Thus, Orientalism is as much a matter of geography as it is of history. But this spatializing of history is itself suggested to Said by Gramsci. Much later in his career, Said wrote explicitly on Gramsci's spatial or geographical terminologies, which he suggested offered an alternative to the remorselessly Hegelian temporal logics of Lukács's thought (Said 2000, 453–73). It might reasonably be argued that Said overplays this idea, given Gramsci's enormous debt to Croce, one of the great Hegelian thinkers of the twentieth century. But certainly Gramsci's vocabulary and analytics have a distinctly spatial bent: he uses and places a great premium on the idea of "world" or one's "conception of the world," and his accounts of historical development are frequently imbued with the language of territory, war, manoeuvre, conquest (Jessop 2008, 101–17). Even more vivid, and never discussed by Said's literary interpreters, is Gramsci's anticipation of the basic premise of *Orientalism*, fifty years before Said:

> In order to understand exactly the possible significance of the problem of the reality of the external world, it may be useful to develop the example of the notions of "East" and "West" which do not stop being "objectively real" even if on analysis they prove to be nothing but conventions, i.e. "historico-cultural constructions." . . . It is evident that East and West are arbitrary, conventional, i.e. historical, constructions, because outside real history any point on the earth is East and West at the same time. We can see this point more clearly from the fact that these terms have been crystallized not from the point of view of man in general but from the point of view of the cultured European classes who, through their world hegemony, have made the terms evolved by themselves accepted everywhere. (Quoted in Wainwright 2005, 1037)

Here we have enacted, briefly and effectively, precisely the procedure that was so important for Said: the identification of geographical signifiers as conventional but also as "historico-cultural," and the identification of their hegemonic deployment. We can now see more clearly than ever before how *Orientalism* can be understood as a historical geography of European descriptive and analytical rhetorics of the Near East, as much as an account of a Foucauldian "discourse." This vision of the book is best appreciated through the linkage it deploys of Lukácsian and Gramscian historical and spatial critiques.

Consequently, we must then realize that Said in fact views all culture, and therefore criticism, in such terms. In "Secular Criticism," the lead essay of *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, Said explicitly suggests that there is a relationship between culture, especially a majority culture or "high" culture, and the state.

Said notably understands culture as a hegemonic system and as being in a strong sense spatial. He takes this from no less conservative a figure than Matthew Arnold. He notes "the power of culture by virtue of its elevated or superior position to authorize, to dominate, to legitimate, demote, interdict, and validate: in short, the power of culture to be an agent of, and perhaps the main agency for, powerful differentiation within its domain and beyond it too." Further, culture is for Said "a system of values *saturating* downward almost everything within its purview" (1983, 9). Via Arnold, he identifies a dominant culture with the state, "insofar as culture is man's best self, and the State its realization in material reality" (10). Thus the power of culture is effectively the power of the state. This interdependence of culture and the state means that "to be for and in culture is to be in and for a State in a compellingly loyal way." Said then offers a formulation that links culture, the state, and geography in significant ways:

> With this assimilation of culture to the authority and exterior framework of the State go as well such things as assurance, confidence, the majority sense, the entire matrix of meanings we associate with "home," belonging and community. Outside this range of meanings—for it is the outside that partially defines the inside in this case—stand anarchy, the culturally disenfranchised, those elements opposed to culture and State: the homeless, in short. (Said 1983, 11)

Said is describing culture here as a *spatialized* system, which defines itself partly by means of that which it rejects and extrudes, and suggesting that the borders of culture are related to the borders of the state.

Over and against this image of culture as a geopolitical system of authority and hegemony, Said pitches criticism, or "critical consciousness" (1983, 24). Criticism, he tells us, "is always situated" (26) or "oppositional" (29). Again, the metaphors are geographical: criticism is a mobile, vulnerable, committed, anti-dynastic, non-systematic guerrilla operation, attendant equally to that which is occluded by texts but necessary to their functioning, and to that web or network of *affiliations* which permits texts their existence and durability *as* texts. Using this Gramscian vocabulary, Said produces an idea of texts not merely as historical objects, *but as elements of a historical geography of culture*, and of criticism as the necessarily roving consciousness best equipped to survey that terrain. We can confirm this if we look at an oddly neglected essay of Said's, "Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies, and Community." There Said sets up a model of "secular criticism" based on ideas not only from Gramsci, but also from Vico. Criticism takes place in what Said calls Vico's "gentile realm"—a "web of filiations and affiliations that composes human history," humanly made (2000, 130). Taking Vico's conception of secular history (from which divine origins have been excluded), Said derives the idea that history and "everything in it, presents its interpreter with a vast *horizontal* expanse, across which are to be seen many interrelated structures" (131). Once again, spatial metaphors emerge: the spatialization of history in fact, but cast in terms taken from Vico and Gramsci, not Foucault as some might expect.

At this point, we need to put together two homeless or unhoused elements in Said's thought: the "culturally disenfranchised" (1983, 11), but also, of course,

criticism itself: a discourse, for Said, of "transcendental homelessness." Culture, in the sense understood in Said's Gramscian reading of Arnold, is a hierarchical system of

> exclusions legislated from above but enacted throughout . . . [the State's] polity, by which such things as anarchy, disorder, irrationality, inferiority, bad taste and immorality are identified, then deposited outside the culture and kept there by the power of the State and its institutions. (Said 1983, 11)

The broad point here is that Said sees criticism sharing the same space as the disenfranchised. But we might also note that the disenfranchised are in a similar cultural space to the "Oriental": defined, demoted, and marginalized.

Let us now return to the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness*, with its analysis of reification, and its argument that reification can be overcome by the theory of totality in proletarian consciousness. I wish to suggest that in Said's description of the Palestinian exile in America, in the description of those shunted outside the honorific spaces of Arnoldian state-centered "culture," we see a version of Lukácsian reified subjects; and in the writing of *Orientalism*, we see a version of the Lukácsian theoretical totalizing rearticulation of subject and object. In spite of the borrowing from Foucault evident in *Orientalism*, and indeed also in Said's description of culture, it seems to me that he is also drawing on Lukács's image of isolated, demeaned, passive, and alienated subjects under conditions of monopoly capitalism. It equally appears that not only the discussion of "beginnings" in the book of that title but also the suggestion that *Orientalism* can be read as (among other things) the coming-to-historical-geographical-consciousness of a Palestinian intellectual, alienated both historically and geographically, is a version of Lukács's class consciousness. If we go back to *History and Class Consciousness*, we remember that it is precisely *because* the proletariat is the most downtrodden and reified social fraction that its coming to self-consciousness is so powerful, and has the potential "unceasingly to overthrow the objective forms that shape the life of man." In Said's extraordinary narrative of Orientalism, we see an example of "thought thinking its way through fragmentation to unity" (1983, 233). Here is Said describing consciousness attaining self-consciousness:

> Consciousness attaining self-consciousness is no Emma Bovary pretending to be a lady in Yonville. The direct pressures of capitalist quantification, that relentless cataloging of everything on earth, continue to be felt, according to Lukács; the only thing that changes is that the mind recognizes a class of beings like itself who have the power to think generally, to take in facts but to organize them in groups, to recognize processes and tendencies where reification only allows evidence of lifeless atoms. Class consciousness therefore begins in critical consciousness. Classes are not real the way that trees and houses are real; they are imputable by consciousness, using its powers to posit ideal types in which with other beings it finds itself. Classes are the result of an insurrectionary act by which consciousness refuses to be confined to the world of objects. (Said 1983, 233)

It is not unreasonable to suggest that *Orientalism* has gone further than any work of Western literary criticism in the last fifty years as an "insurrectionary act."

I must register therefore some agreement with Aijaz Ahmad when he suggests that, among other things, *Orientalism* can be read as a shadow or "secret sharer" text of Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* (Ahmad 1992, 163). Said sees in this magisterial account of Western realist literary representation both a model and a foil. Lukács suggests to him that critique emerges in close proximity to that which oppresses or blocks it. Gramsci suggests to him that Auerbach's work must be seen not only in historical but also in geographical terms, and this leads him to his famous (and arguably romanticized) narrative of the composition of *Mimesis* in Istanbul.[1] No matter that Auerbach represents a form of criticism and thought rather more conservative than that of Lukács; the movement into exile and out of his normal cultural home is what enables the thinking of a new mode of cultural and critical "totality." Citing the book's epilogue, Said notes that it might never have been written had Auerbach not been unshackled from the normal professional confines, limits, procedures, and codes of German philological scholarship by his geographical location in Turkey. If Bachelard regarded intellectual experiment that did not risk the thinker's reason as no experiment at all, then Auerbach risks accusations of intellectual overreaching, superficiality, and mere amateurism in executing what he regards as an act of cultural survival. In the late essay "Philology and *Weltliteratur*," Auerbach quotes the passage from the *Didascalicon* of Hugo of St. Victor, of which Said was so fond:

> It is, therefore, a great source of virtue for the practiced mind to learn, bit by bit, first to change about in visible and transitory things, so that afterwards it may be able to leave them behind altogether. (Auerbach 1969, 17)

Noteworthy here is the stress on the intellectual *working through* experiences and ideas so as eventually to leave them behind; this process works in multiple directions. If Auerbach, the Jewish scholar of Christian European literature, produces an extraordinary affirmation of that literature from exile in Muslim Turkey, then Said, the Christian Palestinian Arab exiled in the United States, performs what he would later call the intellectual "voyage in," in a brilliant implicit critique of Auerbach and the tradition he represents.[2] "One must have tradition in oneself," as Adorno put it in *Minima Moralia*, "to hate it properly" (1974, 52).

The World, the Text, and the Critic, composed of essays originally published between 1969 and 1982, is the single work by Said most concerned with criticism and theoretical politics. In keeping with the book's overall status as a powerful and still relevant manifesto for a radicalized American criticism, it can be recast both overall and at the level of individual essays in our Lukácsian/Gramscian terms. It opens, as we have seen, with Said's Gramscian-geographical reformulation of reification-and-totality in the narrative of Auerbach's exile in Istanbul, and the way in which his geographical removal from Europe permitted his totalizing critical reappropriation of European culture in *Mimesis*. It then buttresses this reading in theoretical terms with its Gramscian reformulation of Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*. But much else in the book can be framed in this manner also. For

example, the "literary" writer given most attention in the collection is Swift, whose attraction for Said is precisely his seeming resistance to the reifying impulses of modern criticism and scholarship. Swift, to whom two essays ("Swift's Tory Anarchy" and "Swift as Intellectual") are devoted, was politically conservative, but he is for Said a "Tory anarchist" (the term George Orwell coined to describe Swift). For Said, Swift represents "critical consciousness in a raw form, a large-scale model of the dilemmas facing the contemporary critical consciousness that has tended to be too cloistered and too attracted to easy systematizing" (1983, 28). To read Swift is to encounter a series of events "in all their messy force," textual events that cannot easily be monumentalized or institutionalized and hence are resistant to the reifying tendencies of modern criticism and scholarship. Not merely this, but Swift's political involvement, the occasional status of so much of his writing, is related to his tendency to inhabit that which he criticizes— by absorbing his object he can then most effectively criticize it. Most famously (or notoriously) in *A Modest Proposal*, Swift produces a blistering critique of the reifying and life-denying rhetoric of political-economic rationality as applied to Ireland in the early 1700s, by arguing from within that rhetoric that the Irish, afflicted by economic collapse and famine, should raise and fatten their children to be eaten or sold on the market. Swift, in fact, emerges with the most positive image of critical consciousness that Said offers in the book:

> In its energy and its unparalleled verbal wit, its restlessness, its agitational and unacademic designs on its political and social context, Swift's writing supplies modern criticism with what it has sorely needed since Arnold covered critical writing with the mantle of cultural authority and reactionary political quietism. (Said 1983, 28)

When we come to the essays on critical theory, we realize that the reification of intellectual life, and specifically literary criticism, is Said's principal theme. The essay "Reflections on American 'Left' Literary Criticism" deploys Gramsci to remind such American critics that their theoretical radicalism is always-already contained by the hegemonic apparatus of the state, and that real radicalism will necessitate explicitly thinking through that reifying and bureaucratizing dominative and discursive machinery. But on a wider canvas, an essay such as "Roads Taken and Not Taken in Contemporary Criticism"—a neglected but valuable piece—has as its primary theme the *functionalism* of most modern criticism. Said notes earlier in the book that in spite of (perhaps even because of) the arrival in the American academy of the most advanced and radical European cultural theory since the 1960s, criticism has become increasingly abstract and professionalized. He points out that the origins of theory in Europe were "insurrectionary" (1983, 3). Thinkers as various as Saussure, Lukács, Bataille, Levi-Strauss, Freud, Nietzsche, and Marx were all critical of the traditional university, of "the hegemony of determinism and positivism, the reification of ideological 'bourgeois humanism,' the rigid barriers between academic specialities." Yet what has happened is that American criticism has "retreated into the labyrinth of 'textuality'" (3). This textuality "has therefore become the exact antithesis and

displacement of what might be called history" (4). By "functionalism," Said means a concentration on "what a text does, how it works, how it has been put together in order to do certain things, how the text is a wholly integrated and equilibrated system" (144). Such an approach to texts may permit detailed analytical discussion, but it also risks scientism and technocracy, which for Said amounts to a reification of criticism. Functionalist criticism, in making for itself densely complex professional vocabularies, cuts itself off from a wider public of non-expert readers. Worse again, it may operate in a self-justifying, even tautological manner: "You experience the text making the critic work, and the critic in turn shows the text at work: the product of these interchanges is simply that they have taken place. Critical ingenuity is pretty much confined to transposing the work into an instance of the method" (145). Furthermore, such criticism suggests that a text's workings are chiefly internal, thus implying that the text exists in an autonomous idealized space of its own making: "The text becomes idealized, essentialized, instead of remaining as the special kind of cultural object it really is, with a causation, persistence, durability and social presence quite its own" (148). For Said, in contrast, the task of criticism is precisely to reread the text in totalizing terms, as part of the dialectical unfolding of the historical process.

It is appropriate, then, that *The World, the Text, and the Critic* should also include Said's reflexive and pessimistic analysis of the fate of Lukács's theory, which underpinned so much of his own work. This comes in the essay "Traveling Theory," which offers the template for the reification and institutionalization of radical theory that is the wider narrative of the book. Here Said argues that as Lukács's theory of reification-and-totality, which was originally produced in the openly revolutionary context of the Hungarian Socialist Republic in 1919, has moved to and been appropriated by more strictly academic contexts and thinkers—Lucien Goldmann at the Sorbonne in the 1950s, and Raymond Williams at Cambridge in the 1970s—it has itself become reified and institutionalized. It has changed, that is, from being the theoretical analogue and self-consciousness of the Hungarian revolution to being an analytical method:

> The sheer existence of class, or theoretical, consciousness for Lukcás is enough to suggest to him the projected overthrow of objective forms. For Goldmann an awareness of class or group consciousness is first of all a scholarly imperative, and then—in the works of highly privileged writers—the expression of a tragically limited social situation. (Said 1983, 235)

The question then is, legitimately, how does Said himself escape this logic of theoretical degeneration, institutionalization, emasculation? In *Culture and Imperialism*, we shall see how he reads Lukácsian ideas "travelling" to the colonial setting; but even before that, in his work on Palestine, Said himself performs precisely this move—reigniting critical ideas by redeploying them in new and fraught circumstances.

The kind of critical consciousness Said is advocating is given explicitly political, even insurrectionary, expression in his splendid essay "Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Victims," the centerpiece of *The Question of Palestine*.

"Beginnings," Said writes in *Orientalism*, "have to be made for each project in such a way as to *enable* what follows from them" (Said 1979, 16; emphasis in original). This essay is surely one of Said's most important single interventions in the cause of Palestine. As was the case with *Orientalism*, it takes the form of a Gramscian inventory of traces deposited in the reified Palestinian subject by the processes of oppressive historical geography, which, once made, then enables fostering Palestinian consciousness both as the victim of Zionism and, therefore, as the agent and embodiment of its final overthrow.

Once again, we are presented with the sense that what is to be analyzed and critiqued exists on both historical and geographical axes: "Every idea or system of ideas exists *somewhere*, is mixed in with historical circumstances, is part of what one may very simply call 'reality'" (Said 1992, 56). Part of the problem with Zionism, Said suggests as his opening gambit, is that it has mostly been treated as an *idealist* phenomenon, without determinate material or worldly effects. But to the Palestinian, "Zionism was somebody else's idea imported into Palestine . . . for which in a very concrete way he or she was made to pay and suffer." Said then suggests the investigation of a political idea such as Zionism in both geographical and historical ways:

> Effective political ideas like Zionism need to be investigated historically in two ways: (1) *genealogically* in order that their provenance, their kinship and descent, their affiliation both with other ideas and with political institutions may be demonstrated; (2) as practical systems for *accumulation* (of power, land, ideological legitimacy) and of displacement (of people, other ideas, prior legitimacy). (Said 1992, 57; emphasis in original)

Again, one notices the mixture of temporal and spatial, historical and geographical, metaphors at work in this passage. Ideas like Zionism can be traced by a radical Nietzschean genealogy, but they must also be seen as taking place or unfolding in a determinate space that is not merely discursive, and as aspiring to displace other comparable or rival systems of ideas. Of course, Zionism has been particularly successful because it has "hidden, or caused to disappear, the literal historical ground of its growth, its political cost to the native inhabitants of Palestine, and its militantly oppressive discriminations between Jews and non-Jews" (57). Again, Zionism's power is related to its geographical purchase.

To show the historical-geographical process by which Zionism has treated Palestine and Palestinians as reified objects, Said proceeds by way of an examination of the writings of Chaim Weizmann, the chief architect of the relationship between Britain and the Zionist movement and the first president of Israel. Said detects in this writing a will to visualize and then to implement a scheme for creating a network of realities—a language, a grid of colonies, a set of institutions—which would convert Palestine from its present state of "neglect" into a Jewish state (Said 1992, 86). This network would not so much attack the existing realities as ignore them, grow up beside them, and overshadow them, eventually choking them like so much ivy. Weizmann modified the wording of the Balfour Declaration, which had promised to "establish" a Jewish homeland

in Palestine, by arguing for the "re-establishment" of a Jewish state there (86). Thus, the construction of the state would not be the supplanting or breaking up of an existing society, but a reclamation, a redemption, a repetition, a realization of Palestine and of Jewish hegemony over it. The ancient state is repeated and realized by the new one, and so the Zionist narrative construes Israel as a return to an earlier state of affairs, and, thereby, as legitimate (Said 1992, 85-87).

Said argues therefore that the respective denials of each other by the Jewish and Palestinian communities are not comparable. The Zionist denial, he says, is strikingly paradoxical:

> Zionism aimed to create a society that could never be anything but "native" (with minimal ties to a metropolitan center) at the same time that it determined not to come to terms with the very natives it was replacing with new (but essentially European) "natives." (Said 1992, 88)

The Palestinian denial, by contrast, is a much simpler thing, and this accounts to a degree for the weakness of the Palestinian position vis-à-vis Israel. According to Said, the Palestinians have failed to appreciate that Zionism is "a policy of detail, not simply a general colonial vision" (95). Palestine, to Zionism, was not simply the Promised Land, which is a highly abstract concept. It was also a territory that was to be known, surveyed, studied, planned for, and worked on down to the last square meter. "Another acre, another goat," Weizmann once wrote (1983, 634). Palestinians opposed Jewish settlement in general; they described it as foreign colonization (which the early Zionists admitted it to be); they said it was unfair to the natives (which it was); but they had no detailed counterproposals or actions of their own of a proximate or comparable kind.

In a distinctly Lukácsian manner, Said seeks to show the means, the processes, by which Zionism has managed to reify both Palestine and Palestinians. He suggests that the Palestinians have failed to understand the extraordinary Zionist drive not merely to take over land but, in a real sense, to *produce* it. It is this historical-geographical carapace that must be pierced for a Palestinian national subject to break back into history. In his autobiography, Weizmann quotes from a document of 1917, an "Outline of Program for the Jewish Resettlement of Palestine in Accordance with the Aspirations of the Zionist Movement." In this document, Said finds an extraordinary language used, a "vision of a matrix of organizations whose functioning duplicates that of an army." He notes that the document speaks of "opening" the country to "suitable" Jews (Said 1992, 96). For Said, this recalls a Foucauldian disciplinary apparatus. It is an army, after all, that "opens" territory and prepares it for settlement; that supports immigration, shipping, and supply; and, most important of all, that converts mere citizens to "suitable" disciplined agents whose job it is to establish a presence on the land and to invest it with their structures, organizations, and institutions. For Said,

> Just as an army assimilates ordinary citizens to its purposes—by dressing them in uniforms, by exercising them in tactics and maneuvers, by disciplining everyone to its purposes—so too did Zionism dress the Jewish colonists in the system of Jewish labor and Jewish land, whose uniform required that only Jews were acceptable. The

power of the Zionist army did not reside in its leader, nor in the arms it collected for its conquests and defense, but rather in the functioning of a whole system, a series of positions taken and held, as Weizmann says, in agriculture, culture, commerce, and industry. (Said 1992, 96–97)

But this process can also be seen as the production of what we would call, after Hegel, Marx, and Lukács, "second nature," or what Neil Smith in his book *Uneven Development* calls "the differentiation of national space according to the territorial division of labor" (Smith 1984, 146). We need to note also the abstract implications of Said's analysis here, for this leads us back to his other writings on criticism, worldliness, and the state. First, he is offering us here a powerful example of Zionism's ability to effect what he called in *Orientalism* "a *distribution* of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts." Hence we can now understand Zionism in the way we understand the discourse of Orientalism: "It *is*, rather than expresses, a certain *will* or *intention* to understand, in some case to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different . . . world" (Said 1979, 12). Further, we can now go further and say, with Said and Gramsci, that what this amounts to is the marshaling of the civil society of the Yishuv into the elaboration of essentially military directive ideas. If Weizmann uses military metaphors to describe the colonial program of Zionism, then it is worth remembering that an army is part of the repressive apparatus of a state and also the ultimate defender of state sovereignty. Furthermore, its primary role is to control space—its task is the spatial projection of state power. But an army also functions as, in Althusser's famous terms, an "ideological state apparatus": it turns citizens into citizen-soldiers; it inculcates in citizens values such as the paramount status of the state, its sovereignty, its territorial integrity, the legitimacy of its violence, the necessity of subsuming individuality in the corporate body that is the state (Althusser 1971, 125–86). Zionism, in this analysis, with its extraordinary powers of "accumulation" and "displacement" (Said 1992, 57), is only a particularly dramatic illustration of Said's radical reading of Arnoldian culture as a spatialized system of authority coterminous with the boundaries of the state, constructed out of that which it objectifies and extrudes—into geographically marginal space and outside of the historical process as conceived in an Enlightenment or Hegelian manner.

However, "Zionism from the Standpoint of its Victims" is not only a Gramscian inventory. It also represents, as does *Orientalism*, the assertion that the most powerful and thoroughgoing critique of Zionism is that made by its victims. Surely we can say that in Said's work Palestine and the Palestinians represent—in Lukács's terms—the denial of linear history: that the Palestinians find themselves "repeatedly confronted" (Lukács 1971a, 164) with the problem of their own point of departure; that Zionism has given Israel and Israelis a powerful sense of agency; but that while the Palestinians lack such agency, this very fact "forces [them] to surpass the immediacy of [their] situation" (166)? Ultimately, is Said not suggesting that Palestinian critical consciousness will bring about an "objective structural change in the object of knowledge" of the situation in

Palestine/Israel (169)? Refracting Said's work back through Lukács, we realize that he is saying nothing less than that Palestinian critical consciousness "is itself nothing but the contradictions of history that have become conscious" (178). Just as Lukács's proletariat comes to consciousness as the consciousness of the commodity through its objectification, just as it has the potential to attain a knowledge of the historical process as a totality, so Said is arguing (if chiefly implicitly) that the Palestinians—the reified Other of Zionism—may not only articulate but actually embody by their praxis a properly dialectical history of the Jewish question as transposed to Palestine: the "question of Palestine."

In 1984, Said published a long review essay in the *London Review of Books* under the title "Permission to Narrate" (Said 1994, 247–68). This was a lengthy consideration of a number of books arising out of the Lebanon war and the Beirut camp massacres, most notably Noam Chomsky's *The Fateful Triangle*. Underpinning Said's reading and analysis, however, was a linkage of *narrative* and *authority*. Hayden White, Said points out, argues that "narrative in general, from the folk tale to the novel, from annals to the fully realized 'history,' has to do with the topics of law, legality, legitimacy, or, more generally, authority" (White 1987, 13). White notes also that, conventionally, the proper subject of historical narrative has been, following Hegel, the state (11–12). Said is interested in his essay to note the competition and intertwining of the Israeli and Palestinian narratives. Broadly speaking, his point is that the Israeli narrative had successfully interdicted the Palestinian one at the time of his writing because the Israeli narrative was underpinned by the authority conferred by the possession of a state. Said argues that the target of Operation Peace for Galilee was the "coherent narrative direction pointed towards self-determination" of the Palestinian people with their history, actuality, and aspirations (Said 1994, 249). Competing against the Zionist narrative of Jewish ingathering, return, and redemption has been the Palestinian narrative of dispersion, fragmentation, alienation, struggle, and hoped-for return. The Palestinian narrative, Said says, "has never been officially admitted to Israeli history, except as that of 'non-Jews,' whose inert presence in Palestine was a nuisance to be ignored or expelled" (254). With the military destruction of the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1982, the narrative of the transformation of Palestinians from peasants to refugees to revolutionaries "has . . . come to an abrupt stop, curling about itself violently" (252). We could reframe this in Lukácsian terms and say that the Zionist narrative of Jewish redemption and revival and subjective restoration has necessitated, as its dark obverse, the reification, partial destruction, and violent dispersal and alienation of the Palestinians from Palestine and from themselves.

A crucial example here for Said is the discourse of "terrorism," which is capable of both absorbing and delegitimating a narrative such as that of the Palestinians:

> Terrorism is the biggest and yet for that reason the most precise of concepts. This is not at all to say that terrorism does not exist, but rather to suggest that its existence has occasioned a whole new signifying system as well. Terrorism signifies . . . in relation to "us," the alien and gratuitously hostile force. It is destructive,

systematic, and controlled. It is a web, a network, a conspiracy run from Moscow. . . . As such it can be used retrospectively . . . or prospectively . . . to justify everything "we" do, and to de-legitimize as well as dehumanize everything "they" do. The very indiscriminateness of terrorism, actual and described, its tautological and circular character, is anti-narrative. Sequence, the logic of cause and effect as between oppressors and victims, opposing pressures—all these vanish inside an enveloping cloud called "terrorism." (Said 1994, 257)

It is easy to see here that the term "terrorism" is both reified and reifying: it is itself an example of overused Orwellian Newspeak, a piece of dead language, which also unfortunately confers on its users the capacity to dehistoricize, denarrativize, decontextualize, objectify, and pulverize all understanding of its object. The point here is that societies, nations, oppressed groups need to achieve a kind of narrative coherence in order to obtain socio-political prominence and legitimacy. The most powerful mechanism yet devised for instituting or institutionalizing this narrative is that form of totality called the state. Thus Zionism struggled to create a state in Palestine and the Palestinians struggle to create a rival state-in-exile, or a state-in-waiting. Further, the established states have the power to regulate narratives, this power at its most extreme being that of designating groups or ideas that fall outside of the coercive or representational capacity of the state as "terrorist" in the manner Said describes. If there is a linkage between states and narrative, then an important weapon in the arsenal of a state is the capacity to block rival narratives. It was not for nothing that the Israel Defense Forces confiscated Palestinian archives in Beirut in 1984. But in discourse, the blockage comes in the form of the appellation "terrorism." "Terrorism" is that which has ceased to be rational, logical, sequential, historical, causal, linear. "Terrorism," one might say to turn full circle, is that which is outside culture and the state, "the homeless, in short" (Said 1983, 11).

In his last major critical book, *Culture and Imperialism*, Said's deployment of Lukács and Gramsci has undergone some modifications. This late book is more determinedly geographical than any of Said's earlier work. Said deploys Gramsci's famous theorization of the "Southern Question" as part of his project to articulate the grand European line of thought about *Weltliteratur* and the philological tradition, on the one hand, and the insurgent literary and cultural voices of the Global South, on the other, into a disjunct unity. Reading the essay "On Some Aspects of the Southern Question," Said takes his example from Gramsci's argument about the need in the early twentieth century for the Communist left in Italy not simply to assume the primitivism of the great mass of the peasantry of the Mezzogiorno, since to do so was to risk leaving them open to the hegemonic capture of an alliance between the northern bourgeoisie and southern large landowners, and hence become an anti-revolutionary force. Said's point is that Gramsci recognizes the need for a hegemony to be forged across differential political geographies that will be at once coherent, but loose enough to allow for the different temporalities, the uneven patterns of development, the complexities of modernity, across those spaces, be they spaces of politics or spaces

of culture (Said 1993, 56–59). Gramsci's "absolute historicism" (Gramsci 1971, 465), his recognition of the importance of the question of nationalism, permits Said to propose a radicalized model of comparative literature that recognizes the relationship between that discipline, the ideal of "world literature," and imperialism while also preserving a critical space for Said to look at the cultures, places, and histories that have been occluded by the traditional model.

In this spirit, then, Said invokes the work of Frantz Fanon, the most brilliant of decolonizing intellectuals, in his discussion of anti-colonial nationalism and resistance culture. Fanon's work was a blend of Freudianism, Marxism, and Sartrean existentialism. But the peculiarity of Said's manoeuvre is to draw out the Lukácsian undertones of Fanon's posthumous masterpiece, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). Said conjectures that Fanon's book, with its searing analyses of colonial and anti-colonial violence and of the rigidities of colonial and even anti-colonial culture, is partly inspired by Lukács's model of reification-and-totality. This proposal is of a piece with Said's late essay "Traveling Theory Reconsidered," originally published a year after *Culture and Imperialism*. There Said suggests that, in the hands of Adorno and Fanon, Lukács's theory is not weakened or tamed—as he had suggested was the case with Goldmann's or Williams's appropriations of it—but rather reignites in new unreconciled inflections (Said 2000, 436–52). In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said suggests that Fanon's depiction of colonialism is of a ruthlessly omnivorous system, which distorts the life of the colonial population and territory in every sphere. But against—and because of—this remorseless domination, its dialectical opposite emerges: "the insurrectionary native, tired of the logic that reduces him, the geography that segregates him, the ontology that dehumanizes him, the epistemology that strips down to an unregenerate essence" (Said 1993, 323). Fanon portrays the force of colonialism as precisely matched and held by the counterforce of resistance. In the brutally dualistic structure that Fanon envisages, Said detects a reinflected version of the subject-object split that Lukács had suggested was the most profound damage done by capitalist reification. Fanon redeploys Lukács's theory in the colonial space, with its reified and demarcated territories, cultures, knowledges, even ontologies. What is needed is some kind of dialectical synthesis and movement. For Fanon, the totalizing move is insurrectionary violence. Violence is the lightning bolt that rejoins the ossified and separated worlds of colonizer and colonized, "white man as subject, black man as object" (326). Said then quotes Fanon:

> The appearance of the settler has meant in the terms of syncretism the death of the aboriginal society, cultural lethargy, and the petrifaction of individuals. For the native, life can only spring up again out of the rotting corpse of the settler. . . . But it so happens that for the colonized people this violence, because it constitutes their only work, invests their character with positive and creative qualities. The practice of violence binds them together as a whole, since each individual forms a violent link in the great chain, a part of the great organism of violence. (Fanon 1967, 73; quoted in Said 1993, 328)

Fanon's writing, Said argues, offers a profound radicalization of European theory in the colonial setting. It sets out in prose at once eloquent and analytical the colonial problematic, portrays the vicissitudes of decolonization, and anticipates, in tones of sovereign contempt, the emergence and renewed reifications of the thought and actions of the postcolonial bourgeoisie. Fanon also stands, for Said, as an example of the intellectual radicalized by his colonial environment. While Fanon and Foucault were contemporaries (born only a year apart), Fanon was the truly liberating thinker. Where Foucault's brilliant analytics of power as vested in discourse eventually issue in a theoretical over-totalization, and even a kind of self-reification of the "specific" intellectual, it is Fanon's work that thinks Europe and the colonies together, moving from confinement and reification to liberation (Said 1993, 336).

The argument here has been that, though Said's appropriations of the ideas of Georg Lukács and Antonio Gramsci may have been heterodox and unsystematic, these two thinkers gave the Palestinian critic some of the most important weapons in his arsenal. Much has been made in discussion of Said, both before his death and since, of his alleged eclecticism, his theoretical inconsistencies. A more sympathetic and, I would argue, more accurate perspective on this might be to say that he used ideas pragmatically—the point was always for thought and criticism to be open, to be exposed to other thought and to the "world." Highly elaborated theoretical or philosophical systems are vulnerable to becoming self-justifying and tautological. With Lukács and Gramsci, Said did more than most critical scholars ever do to expose high theory to the world and to return it to its once-revolutionary beginnings.

NOTES

[1] For a clearer-eyed account of Auerbach's (and Leo Spitzer's) time in Istanbul, see Emily Apter's *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (2005, 41–64).

[2] For the motif of the "voyage in", see Said 1993, 288–316.

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