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A Meditation on Said's *Beginnings*: Reconsidering Text and Career as Sites of Power and Resistance

Abstract I: In this essay I use Said's claim for a return to philology in *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* as a point of departure for reconsidering some aspects of his early book *Beginnings*. I linger upon the epistemological and ontological values of text and career considered as sites of power and resistance to highlight how writers' texts and careers become 'sites' when Said engages the 'Gramsci factor' on the Foucauldian matrix. Said's contrapuntal 'inventory' of the traces of the historical process is a human as well as an intellectual need: he entangles his philological assumptions of Vico, Auerbach and Gramsci with his traditional humanistic education and his exilic biography. The final result is a personal dimension which redefines the concept of career as such and which radically characterizes Said's praxis as a secular intellectual attitude, a philological method of inquiry and a genuine vocation to criticism.

Abstract II: Partendo dal recupero della filologia che Said propugna in *Umanesimo e critica democratica*, in questo saggio mi soffermo su alcuni aspetti di *Beginnings*, uno dei suoi primi lavori, per riconsiderare il valore epistemologico e ontologico dei concetti di testo e carriera come siti di potere e resistenza. Quello che mi preme sottolineare è la particolare modalità di questo passaggio prospettico compiuto da Said: l'analisi del testo e della carriera degli scrittori diventa 'sito' quando s'innesta quello che lui chiama 'fattore Gramsci' sulla matrice foucaultiana. Said propone un 'inventario' contrappuntistico delle tracce che il processo storico lascia in ognuno di noi come espressione di un'esigenza tanto intellettuale quanto umana che

intreccia le lezioni di Vico, Auerbach e Gramsci con la sua forte formazione umanistica e l'esperienza biografica di palestinese esiliato. Said propone una dimensione personale che ridefinisce il concetto di carriera e caratterizza radicalmente la pratica intellettuale come un'attività secolare, un metodo filologico-sintetico d'indagine e una genuina vocazione alla critica.

Introduction

The beginning is the fundamental moment of the creative process when the perspective, the style and the aim of an author concur to give life to an authentic contribution. *Beginnings: Intentions and Method* was Edward W. Said's first remarkable publication and at the same time quite a different text from the ones which later set the Palestinian critic's fame. It was one of those 'eccentric' volumes dotting in an exceptional but fundamentally meaningful way the history of literary criticism. It was also Said's seminal starting point for a radical revolution of the conception of 'criticism', considered as the constitutive activity of intellectuals in contemporary society, and 'humanism', assumed as the core of Western cultural existence. Appeared in a moment when post-structuralism was starting to transversally cut across the Western cultural debate, this book proposed a really peculiar confrontation with the initial charge of French authors such as Barthes, Derrida and Foucault, presenting a radically different reception from the coeval American one. Said, indeed, used a certain post-structuralist fundamental vocabulary as a privileged instrument of critical connotation along his analysis picking up rather outstanding concepts, to the extent that the book could seem almost unbalanced between the old, deeply rooted, psycho-historical approach and the new, still unexplored, post-structuralist perspective.

The main theme of the book underwent the most impressive transformation: it became a topic that "is more a structure than a history, but

this structure cannot be immediately seen, named or grasped" (Said 1975: 16), whose subject has a certain discriminant of authority, even if provisory and foucauldianally 'nomadic' (Said 1975: 23). Yet for Said it was "rather a question of letting the structure multiply into more branches, into projects" that "it makes especially interesting (and in some cases even makes possible): fiction, the making of texts, and the criticism, analysis, and characterization of knowledge and language" (Said 1975: 17). *Beginnings* inaugurated his political path with a pressing urgency for a reform of criticism and humanism, both in a general and a specific sense. Said had not yet 'discovered' Antonio Gramsci's works, and, though heavily influenced by Michel Foucault, the pivotal reference author in *Beginnings* is surprisingly the great Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico. An influence that has been often thought of as secondary to the Foucaultian one. Indeed, scholars such as Brennan, Mufti, Lindenberger, Hussein, Veeseer and Pala, have highlighted the massive influence of Vico, via Erich Auerbach (Lindenberger 2004: 46) and via György Lukács (Brennan 2004: 118), on Said's methodology. Even if the chapter "Abecedarium Culturae" in *Beginnings* (Said 1975: 277-344) was one of the very first introductions of Foucault to the American public, and though undoubtedly the Palestinian critic was intrigued by the critical potential of the notion of discourse as regards the inextricable relationship between power and knowledge, nevertheless Foucault played only a secondary role in the book. His influence would become definitely more important in *Orientalism* (Spanos 2007: 71), but Said eventually rejected him, attacking the closure of the political depiction and the denial of the emancipatory potential in his model (Said 1983: 158-177). Here, I will consider some particular aspects of Vico's and Auerbach's presence in *Beginnings*, *Culture and Imperialism* and *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* to highlight the strong link between the philological approach to literary criticism and the human condition of the author.

Vico, Auerbach and Said: Intention, Philology and Method

Beginnings is shaped, above all, by a complex constitutive framework built upon an innovative – and again eccentric – reading of modernist literature through Giambattista Vico's *La scienza nuova*. First of all, there is the fundamental distinction between 'sacred history' and 'secular history', 'divine world' and 'gentle world'. In Vico's science, the divine world is the expression of who chooses to live according to a transcendental absolute outside time and space (that is out of history): religion prohibits 'divination', as a science to fathom one's own origin, to avoid a return to primordial barbarity. The gentle world is made by the *gens*, "the family group whose exfoliation in time generates history" (Said 1975: 130), through the agency of the *ingegno*, the human form of knowledge as ingenuity and spirit for which Vico's new science had claimed against the divine *fons et origo*. This first distinction is mirrored in the fundamental concepts of 'origin' and 'beginning'. The beginning is "the first step in the intentional production of meaning" (Said 1975: 5) which constitutes the radical problem of agency, that is its "intention and method", as the discriminant for the factual role of the human subject in the making of secular history. Vico had pursued the etymological nexus *ingenium-inventio* in order to state that the *ingegno* is the human faculty responsible for the informing of that "web of filiations and affiliations that composes human history: law, politics, literature, power, science, emotion" (Said 1975: 5) because the creed which characterizes the human mind is "its intention to be" (1), that is its will to perpetuate the race and to shape the world of nations:

The collective human fate is far from a simple choice over extinction. It entails the historical creation (also constantly experienced) of an order of meaning different from the order of God's sacred history. Man's beginning is a transgression; and so long as man exists, the fact of his existence asserts the beginning-as-transgression (Said 1975: 353).

Ingegno, considered a faculty of historical creation, implies an unlimited possibility to produce solutions: it just needs to be normalized along the factual course of history in order to save the social order of human communities. Yet perception and creation require both a strong initial act of will to unhinge the anti-historical Cartesian presumptions (2): such a beginning intention is the historical creation of the self, inasmuch as "in the very act of understanding the world, man is in reality understanding himself" (Said 1975: 364). Human knowledge must not be limited to the mere spheres of universal logic and rational truth; moreover, the perspective of genealogical philology has to involve the whole historical complex to serve as a universal modality to understand human reality. Vico had built the oppositional pair philosophy/philology as homologues to the ones true/certain and science/consciousness. If the 'true' is ungraspable to man because it is the expression of a divine wisdom, the 'certain' will always be the practical knowledge upon which lies the progress of civilization, and because the 'certain' is the expression of *invention* it is a historical product that can be grasped through a philology reduced to the form of a science, i.e. as philosophy (Vico 2006: 390).

After an ulterior etymological specification, Vico bound the *ingegno* with memorial and imaginative faculties as a *memento* of the past and as a 'phantasy' towards the future for the comprehension of the *novum*. What really mattered about this novelty, as fantastic or mathematical as it was, was "some valid purpose for the mind that created it and held it [...] the beginning point which is neither entirely mind (or abstraction) nor matter (or concreteness)" (Said 1975: 360) or the 'conation'. This conation is exactly the beginning intention taken by Said as the theoretical *Leitmotiv* of the book: it indicates the capability to initiate something, to produce meanings, "to make the history of gentile nations" starting from the 'certain' upon which human knowledge is based according to a metaphysical individuation of the agency as the meeting

point between the temporal and the universal. The 'conation' is the beginning as identity of mind and history: it is the history viewed as the study of the eternal persistence of the human mind's idea, in other words it is the temporal narrative of man's existence (Said 1975: 361).

The relationship between subject and world must be intended as relation between will and beginning, so that Vico's theory of *corsi e ricorsi* had configured itself as an index of the invariant regularities of the chaotic human act. Only such an order of repetition opposed to a constant originality could – according to the well-known threefold scheme of God's, Heroes' and Men's epochs – normalize the validity of the infinite possible choices made according to the 'certain'. This normalization is carried on by the reduction of the grand divine soul in the body of the single human being: the succession of generations implies man's will of continuity and genealogy. Man must willingly reduce himself from a divine to a secular being, giving up his unlimited possibility of acting in the world, amassing "dead bodies" (Said 1975: 371-373) in intelligible sequences, and assimilating his history in a fantastic language able to mimic such complexity. It is a linguistic rationalization, because along the eras language will lose its poetic quality to become a regular expression of man's secular nature: a man no more able to glean that poetic wisdom which let him understand his past history, so that the cycle will begin again forever and ever. Here the philologist comes into the picture that has to rebuild adjacencies, dispersions and complementarities in order to reinstate a theory of historical coherence that:

showed how each period shared in its language, art, metaphysics, logic, science, law, and religion features [...] Thus human history and society are created, a laborious process of unfolding, development, contradiction, and, most interestingly, representation (Said 2004: 91).

Philology returns poetic wisdom, the universal modality of connection between every field of human knowledge that allows scholars to find a sense in the linguistic chaos, a picture of trace fossils whose interpretation recovers a “vocabolario mentale delle cose umane socievoli” (Vico 2006: 126) (3).

According to Said, it is then necessary “to live the author’s reality and to undergo the kind of life experiences intrinsic to the author’s life, all by that combination of erudition and sympathy that is the hallmark of philological hermeneutics” (Said 2004: 92) in order to fully understand a text. From this assumption it is possible to pinpoint the ‘beginning intention’ of Said’s literary criticism as a transversal conceptualization, similar to Vico’s ‘conation’ as well as to Auerbach’s *Ansatz* (Auerbach 1967: 11): a philological approach to literary texts aiming to return to the representation of that pristine transgression which started humanistic history. This ‘transgression’ is the articulation of three main issues: “human identity, human history and human language” (Said 1975: 90), which mirror the initial components of the novel as a literary genre binding it to the narrative representation of the gentle world. As fiction, the novel approaches ‘true reality’, following the personal choices of the author, that is a skim of his perception of reality: Said considers “the institution of narrative prose fiction as a kind of appetite that writers develop for modifying” (Said 1975: 82). However, because of this personal perception, it is necessary to underline again the tragic imperfection of knowledge, because it is imperative to understand what kind of role ‘poetic wisdom’ has to play in the constitution of what Auerbach called Vico’s “philosophical philology or philological philosophy” (Auerbach 1958: 16). It is the humanistic science of world comprehension: it fights against a mere accumulation of facts and notions in order to rediscover the creativity of man’s historical being, the manifestation of reality and the unfolding of truth ‘in human history’. Vico rediscovered the power of poetic language and of fantastic universal in the primal thought and in the corporeal sensibility of suffering man. The same constitutive grade of fallibility, which

undermines human knowledge, is the constitution of man as a “measure of all things”: “L'uomo, per l'indiffinita natura della mente umana, ove questa si rovesci nell'ignoranza, egli fa sé regola dell'universo” (Vico 2006: 355) (4).

Therefore, Vico's (and Said's) humanism is not an absolute and essentialist system, it actually makes a claim for a democratic process of critical investigation and of questioning knowledge instead. Vico is, indeed, “that prototypical modern thinker who perceives beginning as an activity requiring the writer to maintain an un-straying obligation to practical reality and sympathetic imagination in equally strong parts” (Said 1975: 349). This ‘obligation’ is exactly the ethical measure of responsibility that an effective humanism's renewal requires:

By *obligation* I mean here the precision with which the concrete circumstances of any undertaking oblige the mind to take them into account [...] by learning, first, that there is no schematic method that makes all things simple, the second, whatever with reference to one's circumstances is necessary in order to begin, given one's field of study. And by referring to *sympathetic imagination* I mean that to begin to write is to “know” what at the outset cannot be known except by inventing it, exactly, intentionally, auto-didactically. It is the interrelation between this obligation and the sympathetic imagination, however that is crucial (Said 1975: 349).

The quality of such an interrelation measures the success of the inquiring method and the effective potential of intellectual renewing. Said's acquisition of Auerbach, Gramsci and, partially, Foucault, will bear ulterior terms for the clarification of this “synthetic philological method” and will define the modalities of its application to the interpretation of historical narratives and cultural productions for the delineation of a criticism able to face the challenges of post-modernity.

The Techno-ethical Conditions of Writing and the Authorial Will in History

The issues at stake in *Beginnings* involve two topical paths. The first, as previously mentioned, regards Said's assimilation of Vico's philological historicism within his methodology of critique. The second issue is the concept of 'authority': Said underlined, through Freud and Auerbach, how in Modernism, due to the socio-economical upheavals of the early 20th century, the form and the representation of narrative realization are contingent upon the wish – legitimated, but at the same time 'abused' by the authorial consciousness – of the author's self-edification in his historical time, a mimetic will of the vital processes of birth, growth and death. When Auerbach focused on the conception of reality in modernity, he found a radical change in the modalities of its representation. The ancient claim to fully show the complex development of reality along literary narration had shattered itself against the psychological upheaval of modernity, and such a clash then shifted the narrative attention towards a most extreme and rarefied subjectivity.

After Vico, and through Auerbach and Freud, such an evaluation on the importance and the essence of Modernism, considered as a humanly historical and psychological literary event, posits the issue of *beginnings* according to a double perspective of "authority and molestation" (Said 1975: 84-85). The first term regards writing as a creative act of projection of will onto reality, which is Vico's "beginning intention", that allows the unpredictable realization of man's history in opposition to the immutable divine origin. The second one is more problematic from an hermeneutic point of view, because it means 'abuse' or 'molestation' in the sense that, when the writer's consciousness confronts itself with the responsibilities and duties of its authorial power, it forces the writer, both as subject and perpetrator of the 'abuse', to realize the narrative limits of the novel as genre and its illusory representation of reality, and it instills a fundamental doubt about the actual possibility of historical realization that 'authority' allows as 'beginning'.

Throughout the book, Said analyzes some great modernist texts (Conrad, Lawrence, Freud, etc.) through this double perspective searching for those "inner struggles" which made those texts possible (5). These struggles are the intimate and psychological explications of the dramatic intercourses between authority and molestation because they are the proper "roots of the fictional process" (Said 1975: 84). These struggles inevitably characterize and influence the text, they become its propulsive source concretizing in the writer's self the intention to write exactly 'that text', thus those 'texts' are paradigmatic instances of Modernism's revolutionary changes in thought and literature along the first decades of the 20th century. The ways in which these texts are written epitomize the transformations of novel as representation of reality, the radical shift in the intercourse between writing and will, and the upheaval in the subjective perception of human history. According to Said, such a transformation derives essentially from those maniacal obsessions of some capital authors for their techniques of writing and realization, obsessions obviously rooted in those dramatic 'inner struggles':

Therefore, the text is a multidimensional structure extending from the beginning to the end of the writer's career. A text is the source and the aim of a man's desire to be an author, it is the form of his attempts, it contains the elements of his coherence, and in a whole range of complex and differing ways it incarnates the pressures upon the writer of his psychology, his time, his society. The unity between career and text, then, is a unity between an intelligible pattern of events and for the most part their increasingly conscious transformation into writing (Said 1975: 196).

In a previous footnote Said writes that "one rarely finds, however, an English-language critic asking where a text takes place, or how it takes place" (Said 1975: 195). This footnote appears in a paragraph which suggests considering

“the text as a structure in the compositional process started from strong initial creative intention” in order to scrape off the ancient prejudices against the conception of text as a solid and validated object. Said underlines the author as a potential creator and the text as a product of will because he wants to show more interesting and deeper interpretative possibilities. To fully comprehend this remark, that “radical attitude toward language” (Said 1975: 72) suggested as a ‘label’ of a different intellectual and literary tradition must be considered. A more genius and effective tradition because it had been able to grasp that “the life of language was the first fact of the writing life” (6) returning constantly to “the connection between the characteristics of language as a form of human knowledge, perception, and behavior, and those fundamental facts of human reality, namely will, power, and desire” (Said 1975: 72). When Said asks in the footnote “where and how a text takes place”, he wants to underline the will to political power transpiring from the ‘career’ considered as the ontological project (Said 1975: 231-232) of an author through his public and private works. Such a conceptualization of these socio-psychological authorial tensions could be viewed, through the geo-historical perspective of Antonio Gramsci and Erich Auerbach, *mutatis mutandis* as a profound homology between the authorial will of the writer, considered as the legitimation of his representation of the world, and the intellectual’s will to hegemony, considered as the legitimation of his *Weltanschauung*.

Modernity has modified the relationship between text and writing: the text, far from being a simple object to be created, became the *simulacrum* of the writer’s perpetual struggle to live up to his career, because writing itself became an effort in self-realization following an ontological and not simply existential becoming (Said 1975: 194-195). At the same time, the intellectual could no longer consider theory as an interpretation of reality sustaining praxis for the change of society, because it became the interest of his self-edification within hegemony. The synthesis between theory and praxis would have

occurred then as the assimilation of one's own *Weltanschauung* within the dominant hegemony according to the historical becoming of the interest which lay beneath. Career has a double nature: from a personal point of view it is a union between the author's production of texts and the author's representation projected by those texts. At the same time, from an ontological point of view it is an extended conception of text: it is the whole discursive order of a peculiar theoretical situation, much more complex than that single act of will which undertook the endeavor.

Here the question is how to understand the effectual rules of coherence and implementation on this background of the author-subject's self-edification: virtually it is the 'interplay' between real life and writing career (Said 1975: 226-228) – fundamentally 'oppositional' because of the antagonistic nature of these two realities – which has to be called rigorously into question by criticism. Any kind of interpretation must return the 'ethical elaboration' of the creative act and the author's ontological nature as a determined subject. These "techno-ethical conditions of writing career" (Said 1975: 231) have to be analyzed as fundamental issues of the ontological project of the intellectuals inside the historical becoming of contemporary postcolonial, post-imperial and, above all, trans-national consciousness. Such an operation could be afforded only through a decisive evaluation and a careful appreciation of the scholar's ethical attitude (both as 'expert' and as intellectual 'amateur') of the employed methodologies and of the social and political conditions of writing 'as and on' culture.

The geospatial problem is that concepts like Orientalism and Occidentalism have not been built upon real entities, instead they refer to congenitally labile discursive fields: they are myths subjected to thousands of ceaseless influences and actualizations according to the will to political, intellectual and social power of every new nation, interest and hegemony involved in the historical becoming. Said appealed to criticism as a "discipline of

detail" (Veesser 2010: 14), grounded in local knowledge as well as in global theory, to state that these myths are not simple misrepresentations of factual realities, instead they are subtle 'spatial pre-conceptualizations' of hegemonic logic. There is not any real Orient or West: such representations earn their 'overdriving status' just because they are objectifications of something 'without concrete history' and therefore they can be used 'to do such things': these ahistorical concepts become 'knowledge' just when they are powerfully used 'to state something'. Hence, the intellectual has the responsibility to figure out what kind of representations they are, which kind of role they had, from and in which 'site' (Said & Donato 1979: 71) they gain their mythological status, and finally "speaking the truth to power" (Said, 1994: 102).

Text and Career as Sites of Power and Resistance

Eccentricity is not only an effective definition of Edward W. Said's critical agency in relationship to his colleagues, but it is moreover the *raison d'être* of his intellectual, biographical and, above all, human existence. In *Beginnings* he wrote:

[We consider] literature as an eccentric order of repetition, not one of sameness – where the term *repetition* is used in order to avoid such dualities as "the original versus the derivative" [...], and where *eccentric* is used in order to emphasize the possibilities for difference within repetition and to signify that while authors, works, periods, and influences are notions that pertain to writing in specific cases, they are really terms used to describe irregularities of varying degrees and qualities within writing as a whole (Said 1975: 12).

'Eccentric' must be also the movement of the philological *Ansatz*, where to begin the interpretation, how to read texts as alternation of 'reception' and 'resistance', how to perceive the contrapuntal (Said 2004: 57-84). As Hussein

eloquently suggests in his excellent analysis, Said's philology assumes the traits of a "technique of trouble" (Hussein 2003: 4) – just as the Palestinian critic described Foucault's genealogy borrowing an expression of R. P. Blackmur (Said 1975: 283) – and Rubin insists on the active and militant force of Said's philology against the association between philology and sterile erudition (Rubin 2003: 869).

Culture and Imperialism has been an effective result of Said's philological-synthetic method of inquiry in the study of the pervasive relationships between texts and imperial hegemonies. His method relied precisely on texts as fundamental 'sites' of authors' realizations in times and places, as proper 'events', and not simple moments of human history, that retain much more importance than that of mere contingent or contextual contours. Said used philology to go beyond the individual text into the larger worlds (Linderberger 2004: 51), a complex of many intertwining histories and geographies, of opposed individual wills and global constituencies, in which every text is productively embedded. This "whole web of often contradictory cultural notations" (Said 2004: 64) must be fully comprehended in order to grasp the effective trace that the text has left in the historical process. What Said carried out with his philological approach was a 'contrapuntal reading', a global and comparative, dialectical but productive criticism, that sought "to take into account all sorts of spatial or geographical and rhetorical practices – inflections, limits, constraints, intrusions, inclusions, prohibitions – all of them tending to elucidate a complex and uneven topography" (Said 1993: 318). Again, Said recognized a constitutive eccentricity also in his contrapuntal movement because in the chronological line of his analysis he tried to show how those texts "irradiate and interfere with apparently stable and impermeable categories [...] presuming that the West and its culture are largely independent of other cultures, and of the worldly pursuits of power, authority, privilege and dominance" (Said 1993: 111).

Brennan highlights how Vico has been Said's starting point to reorient comparative literature and change the fatal directions of theory against both the anti-humanist attempts of structuralism and the disinterest of theory in the "sheer semantic thickness of a literary text" (Brennan 2006: 106-107). Thus, Said recovered already in *Beginnings* the primacy of the author as writing subject in his connection with the massive linguistic production. In this later topical 1993 work, Said fulfilled his contrapuntist perspective in the analysis of authors, texts and socio-geographical contexts developing his 'discovery' of Gramsci. The need to confront the relations of production in power and culture with the pervasivity of the imperial hegemonies and the subalterns' struggle for resistance found an immediate critical response in a different reading of literary masterpieces and in a different assumption of the subaltern texts throughout the history of colonization and imperialism. *Cultural and Imperialism* finally compiled the inventory of "the infinity of traces that the historical process deposited in you" that Said 'discovered' in Gramsci as an uttermost imperative of the critical elaboration (Said 1978: 27).

The chapter "Consolidated Vision" (Said 1993: 73-229) is a paramount example, where Said focused on the relations between power and culture, willingly or unconsciously masked, behind the literary canon. As for the reflection upon Modernism regarding the inner and psychological relations between writing and reality, in *Culture and Imperialism* Said wrote about Austen, Camus, Conrad, Verdi, Flaubert and Kipling because in their 'careers' he philologically 'dug up' those traces of the historical process pointing to the existence of a more pervasive imperialistic cultural model, which was universally embedded in all those civilized societies directly connected to the real places of worldwide power's production and execution. William Spanos claims that *Culture and Imperialism* finally reveals the "specter of the Empire" in disclosing that:

the opposition between the Being of the British and the nonbeing of the colonies' indigenes permeated the body of the cultural discourse – from

Austen, through Dickens, Thackeray, and Meredith, to Conrad and Kipling – of nineteenth-century Britain right down to the capillaries. More important for my purposes, he also reveals the profound extent to which this deeply inscribed perspective – this being inside the colonial-imperial nation – kept British nationalism immune to disturbance from the outside: to the immediacy of the violence of imperialist practice in the colonies and to the human suffering this predatory violence entailed (Spanos 2007: 118).

Modernity brought the clash between metropolis and colonies to the final stage: the mass of eradicated people disrupted the fulfilment of the imperial desire and revealed its massive presence claiming for recognition and agency. When Said confronts the British middle class literary tradition with the Modernist works in the last pages of the second chapter (Spanos 2007: 119) he makes explicit the terrible anxiety that troubled the narrative and representational 'struggles' of writers and intellectuals between the wars. The 'Other' arrived at the heart of the *Imperium* and it could not be assimilated nor repressed by the old exhausted social mechanisms. Hence, literary Modernism would elicit the external history to focus on the aesthetic representation of a self-referential and autotelic fragmented interiority. Here the task of Said's renewed humanism is to trace contrapuntally the common roots of these specters of the Empire, to recognize them in their sites and to restore their denied agency in history.

Similarly, in the chapter "Resistance and Opposition" (Said 1993: 230-340) the Palestinian critic probed the works of Césaire, Fanon, Naipaul, James, Du Bois, Yeats, Ahmad, and others, because in them he found the common experience of resistance against the imperial hegemony and the will to express a different narration of history. As for the inquiry into the will to domination as hegemonic realization of Western identity, it is then necessary then to contrast the study of the will to resistance as historical narratives of the subaltern identities. Said starts with the reciprocal influence between the imperial and the

subaltern cultures in order to delineate a massive net of exchanges and transfers and, moreover, to show how every narrative – every fictional as well as cultural representation – is a 'part' of the entire historical process and not a unique point of view.

Said noticed how the resistance against imperialism was expressed as a reaction to the intellectual consciousness which developed the historical becoming of such hegemony, an attempt to claim "an alternative way of conceiving human history" to "writing back to the metropolitan cultures, disrupting the European narratives of the Orient and Africa, replacing them with either a more playful or a more powerful new narrative style" (Said 1993: 260). Even after decolonization, the resistance against imperialism continued its historical process of constitutionalization to face the constant pressures and pretensions of the many still unresolved political situations. This was because the 'texts' and the 'careers', which concurred with the constitution of political and cultural discourse of the former colonies, were indeed informed by a profound wish of opposition, claim and, above all, reconstruction.

Trans-Humanism against the Grain

In *Representation of the Intellectual* the Columbia professor argued how intellectuals, both as public figures and private authors, had to find inside themselves the vocation to criticism as a humanistic activism, an attitude embedded in the whole complex of human history: a necessary call to duty, an ethical vocation, to contrast the perversion and the insanity of a possible recurrence of our painful past. Such a humanistic attitude demands a valuable synthesis between theory and praxis capable of disrupting the prejudices of all the contenders: it needs an effective project of plural edification and democratic enlightenment, of true respect for the lives and the memories of the unconscious victims of the perverse hegemonic logics. *Culture and Imperialism* has been a formidable 'beginning', an *Ansatz*, using the fundamental term that

Said borrowed from Auerbach, for a contrapuntal analysis of such contemporary issues, a highly incisive demystification of the actual complexity of human civil and political society due to its highly interwoven and continuously problematized interpretation of literary, political, geographical and historical texts and of the biographical and personal issues of the authors of those texts. Philology was not another way to elicit the author in favor of the critic, instead it was a way to scrutinize the whole complexity of the human 'endeavor' that produced that particular text in that precise historical moment and geographical space as a meaningful element of the global historical process. The role of the critic was to find the right angle, the best *Ansatz*, to renew the critical elaboration and the aesthetic appreciation.

What Said really criticized throughout his entire career, in regards to other critical approach, was the systematic anxiety towards self-fulfilled and self-referential planning, something which an umpteenth 'revolutionary model' could easily subsume and spend. Instead, his humanistic project of excavation followed Peirce's abductive reasoning: "What is the word that Peirce uses? Some notion of *abduction*, generalizing from the known facts. A hypothesis of the new situation, projecting forward" (Said 2001: 163). Forward a radically and humanly different future. It is not a mere recommendation for a micro-politic of critical praxis reevaluating the rule of the informal, the unconventional, and the dislocated with respect to the rituals and the performances of the metropolitan homologated intellectual. On the contrary, it is the beginning of a different and more human endeavor. *Beginnings* had been Said's first claim for a new critical attitude and new literary interpretation, radically diverging from tradition, and yet intimately bound with it, seeking its efficacy in a renewed conception of the humanist's heritage itself: an intellectual attitude of representation and self-edification of man in secular history and worldly geography.

Said's criticism does not aim to simply review 'facts' and 'sites' for a better interpretation of the truth, but it claims for a will to the historical realization of the

expressive possibilities of man, a man profoundly interested in life. It is a passionate faith in the value of culture as a fundamental “act of emancipation and enlightenment” (Said 2005: 66), a faith in human amelioration through aesthetic elevation and ethical struggle. However, this is a faith in a possibility that must not be presumed, but always intensely sought after, a synthesis of theoretical research and practical work for the constitution of a responsible awareness of the outer reality. Said’s Humanism is not a mere tolerant instance, it is a radical one. The contemporary situation is no longer tolerable, its continuous regression must be stopped (Said 2004: 83). A Trans-Humanism for the sake of humanity itself, that is always “against the grain” (Said 2006), always against the hegemonic interest of homologation and subjugation.

NOTES

1. “In one thing above all else is man’s indefinite mind definite: in its intention to be, an intention which is the zero point of man’s existence” (Said 1975: 353).
2. Vico attempted to theorize a different humanistic style based on invention in order to fight against the overwhelming domination of Cartesian method (Said 1975: 359-373).
3. “The mental dictionary for assigning origins to all the diverse articulated languages” (Vico 1984: 64).
4. “Because of the indefinite nature of the human mind, wherever it is lost in ignorance man makes himself the measure of all things” (Vico 1984: 60).
5. Said’s reading of Joseph Conrad’s *Nostramo* (Said 1975: 130-131).
6. Probably Said was connecting this dichotomy with Roland Barthes’ distinction between “écrivain” and “écrivain”.

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