

# THE EDWARD SAID SYMPOSIUM: LOCATIONS - READINGS - LEGACIES

Berlin  
25 to 27 September 2008

Out of his academic base at Columbia University, from the perspective of a displaced Palestinian, both in Arabic and English, languages which were and were not his own, Edward Said has written on a wide range of subjects. His passion for cosmopolitan New York, his commitment to the Palestinian cause, his focus, as a comparatist, on Western literatures can seem incongruous. And yet, the negotiation of place – the location of reading, the localization of narrative, the locale of the intellectual – is not only a result of biographical circumstance or readerly preference: it is emblematic of a politics of reading, and a politicisation of reading, for both of which Said's work stands. What, then, are its legacies today?

Not only in terms of his praxis but in terms of his subject matter, too, Said was fascinated by the productive tension between locality and dislocation. Be it his posthumous *Freud and the Non-European* or his magisterial *Orientalism*, be it his long-standing and fluctuating support of Palestinian sovereignty or his interest in the "formal dislocations and displacements in modernist culture," Said has always worked with a keen awareness of the weight of cultural inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and unbelonging, of location and dislocation. Although his work is marked by a high degree of engagement and political awareness, Said has never subscribed to an overarching political 'home'. Whilst taking on causes and granting them sustained support, Said seems to have cultivated a political and cultural 'homelessness'. But rather than simply juxtaposing any of these terms and interests, he practised a strategy he called "contrapuntal reading", trying to relate one to the other. How may his own texts become subject to contrapuntal readings, from different viewpoints and with changing locations?

Said has not only stated that the central theme of his work could be "the figure of crossing over"; his desire to intimately inhabit a culture without being *of* it, cherishing at once a location *outside* it, is also evident from his work. And yet, in his photographic essay *After the Last Sky*, Said deciphers photos by Jean Mohr, inscribing into them his own, personal memories of Palestine. His autobiography *Out of Place*, too, traverses distinct locations and navigates discrete histories and backgrounds. At the same time, he underscores the "worldly affiliations" of texts and insists that, for example, Europe's cultural connections to overseas domains need to be heeded when reading European texts; his interests in Orientalism and in Empire, too, bear out his recognition of the significance of location, cultural interdependence, and power.

Thirty years after the publication of *Orientalism*, fifteen years after *Culture and Imperialism*, five years after Edward Said's death, we invite papers for a symposium which will bring into focus Said's politics of reading in diverse fields, from his literary criticism in English to his political columns in Arabic. Analyses of Said's attention to historical displacement, political iniquity alongside issues such as canonicity, memory, and representation, or the interactions between narrative and authority, are especially welcome.

The Edward Said Symposium will take place from 25 to 27 September 2008 in a conference hotel at Lake Griebnitzsee, near Berlin, well connected to the city centre by public transport. It aims to bring together Said readers and debaters from Literary Studies, Cultural Studies, Theatre Studies, Media and Visual Studies, History and the Social Sciences, so as to open a transdisciplinary dialogue on the legacies of his work.

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