

Jane C. Desmond

'And never the twain shall meet?' : Considering the Legacies of Orientalism and Occidentalism for the Transnational Study of the US

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‘AND NEVER THE TWAIN SHALL MEET?’

Considering the Legacies of Orientalism
and Occidentalism
for the Transnational Study of the US

Around the world, tens of thousands of scholars share as our object of study the ‘United States.’¹ We approach this object of study as a geopolitical entity, as an economic juggernaut, as a territory with permeable borders, as a nation with an imperial history and some would say an imperial present, as a cultural imaginary that exerts its presence in so many parts of the world, as a military actor with bases around the globe, as the source of tangible and intangible commodities from computer code to Hollywood blockbusters, as the location of educational institutions of world prominence which many of us will have attended, and as a complex collective of many different communities and populations, past and present. People, ideas, things, and social practices. All of these cultural, political and economic realms are part of our shared purview as specialists on the ‘United States.’

And yet, although we share this object of study in the most capacious sense, each scholar is positioned differently personally and intellectually in relation to this object. For myself, this includes being born in, raised in, and living most, but not all of, my life in the United States. My scholarly training for a PhD in ‘American Studies’ took place there as well, at Yale University. For many other scholars, there is less physical proximity between the territorial and experiential place of the referent and the production

Jane C. Desmond
Immdt. Past-President
IASA
University of Illinois
Urbana-Champaign,
USA

1. A version of this work was first presented as the presidential address at the Fourth World Congress of the International American Studies Association meetings in Beijing, September 17, 2009.

of scholarly knowledge about it. And because our knowledge is always produced in complex historically specific matrices of location, communities of scholars, scholarly traditions, epistemologies, politics of knowledge, and subjectivities, this means that what we think about and how we think it will likely not be the same. This is a crucial and valuable resource.

In working towards the formation of a transnational community of scholars specializing on the US in all its multifaceted aspects, we cannot simply assume that our communications will be transparent. How do we come to know, acknowledge, and grapple with the differences in the social dimensions of our knowledge production? Of the differing 'use values' of producing that knowledge—that is, what that knowledge means in our home contexts? Of the differing academic traditions and trajectories of which we are a part? In this article I want to begin an analysis of how these multifarious positionings and the perspectives they may give rise to can be understood through the ideological and epistemological legacies of Orientalism and Occidentalism. I want to urge us as scholars to be attentive to these frameworks when they emerge and to take their presence and operation as part of our foci.

This article grew out of practical experiences in my scholarly life, especially as President of the International American Studies Association (IASA) from 2007–2011, and the duties that position required to oversee the organization of IASA's Fourth World Congress, held in Beijing in September of 2009. IASA is the only world-wide association of scholars working on the US or the Americas more broadly. It is not a confederation of national scholarly organizations, but rather a collective of individual scholars who, through their membership, actively signal their commitment to engaging with their peers around the globe. We have hundreds of members in more than 30 countries so far, even though we are a young organization, and our rotating slates of officers and Executive Council members are drawn from dozens of countries. We are not a US based organization nor a European one, although many of our founding members hail from those countries.

Our previous three bi-annual World Congresses had been held in Leiden, the Netherlands, Ottawa, Canada, and Lisbon, Portugal. I and many of my colleagues felt strongly it was time to move out of the Euro-North American sphere for our next congress, and the Council accepted the proposal from our colleagues in China to schedule the 2009 congress in Beijing. Our processes over the next two years offered practical examples of the production of scholarly work and revealed how the powerful, even intractable, frames of Orientalist and Occidental thought can still haunt us, having an impact upon the possibilities for transnational scholarly relations between those of us based in 'Asia' and those of us based elsewhere. These conceptual frames for understanding the world are so widespread and have such deep historical and political roots that none of us is immune to their power. These are also deeply complex and politically sensitive issues, but ones that I think we must take on collectively.

Jane C. Desmond
 Imrmdt. Past-President
 IASA
 University of Illinois
 Urbana-Champaign
 USA

PRACTICAL MANIFESTATIONS OF ORIENTALISM/OCCIDENTALISM

Because part of our challenge is to understand how implicit frameworks shape not only large ideas but their more minute material and practical manifestations, let me give some very concrete, and seemingly small, examples before moving into wider-scale theorizing in the next section.

I was first alerted that this framework of Orientalism/Occidentalism might be a problem when the possibility of holding our congress in China was broached. Several of my IASA colleagues from Europe or from North America exclaimed 'but no one would go!' A second complaint was 'it's too far!' The obvious answer to these fears is that lots of people would go, although perhaps they would be different people—not as many from Europe or North America as had attended our three previous congresses in Leiden, the Netherlands, Ottawa, Canada, and Lisbon, Portugal. For instance, lots of scholars from China would go, whereas few had attended our previous congresses.

To the second worry—'It's too far!'—the answer is also a question—too far from where?! A truly decentered globe—

a fiction perhaps, but still a desirable one when we envision a truly global community of scholars—does not have a given near and far, but rather complex sets of proximity and distance, of multiple centers and hence multiple peripheries, all of which are calculated relative to each other under changing conditions. My ‘near’ may be your ‘far’ for instance, and the center of my scholarly and daily world may be peripheral to yours. China is not far from Japan, Australia or India for example, although it is farther from Germany, say, than Lisbon was.

It became apparent to me that the perceived distances were more conceptual than physical. Would the time and money invested be ‘worth it’ or not? That so few distinguished Chinese scholars of the Americas are read in Europe or in North America added to this sense of distance. Speaking more broadly about the intellectual imbalance in knowledge flows, Prof. Zi Zhongyun noted in Hong Kong at the 2005 China American Studies Network conference: ‘There is a conspicuous gap in how familiar Chinese and American academics are with each others’ research and writing... our American colleagues are acquainted with very few works that Chinese scholars have written on the United States’ (Zi, 2007: 46).

A different but related process emerged after the approval of the site selection, when the planning began. These differences were cast in the framework of the Chinese way of doing things and the ‘international’ way of doing things. Here already we were awash in the intellectual complexities and political quick sands of labeling. Were we planning a Chinese conference which invited IASA, or were we planning an IASA conference hosted in China? Would the normative practices for organizing conferences follow one model or the other (by the ‘other’ I mean the models developed in the three previous IASA conferences in the Netherlands, Canada, and Portugal). Food is a good example. My hosts explained to me during our May 2008 planning meetings at Beijing Foreign Studies University that all of the meals must be provided for all participants and covered by the registration fee, since that is what scholars in China expect as the norm. In past congresses of IASA, some meals were on your own, and a fancy banquet was optional,

and incurred a significant additional fee if one chose to attend or could result in a lower registration fee if one did not. We went with the all-inclusive model.

The theme that runs through these telling details is the distinction drawn between a host/non-host way of doing things. We might expect this to some extent anywhere, but implicit here I think was a sense that we were uncertain how this would be a Chinese conference or—and here I introduce the largest booby trap of a word—a ‘Western’ conference... or a combination of both styles and, if so, what compromises would be made. I’m going to come back to this problem of the concepts of ‘the East’ and ‘the West’ later, but let me provide one final example of the tensions that challenged all of us in working together.

When it came time for the program committee to construct a series of panels from individually offered papers, the IASA program committee with representatives from India, New Zealand, Turkey, and the US received two spreadsheets carefully prepared by Professor Li Qikeng who did so much work to make this conference happen. One was for the ‘international’ scholars and the other was for the Chinese—the latter had their names in Chinese characters, which only one member of the IASA committee could read. IASA is a hugely multilingual organization in terms of the languages that our members speak, write and read, but the only language we ALL have in common is English, or I should say world Englishes. It is his and our shared passions for our objects of investigation, whether these be the US *per se* or the Americas more broadly, that creates both the possibility and the reason for our trying to come together every two years for substantial discussions. Let me be clear here, I am certainly not promoting English as a world-wide language; rather I am noting that it is the only language among the dozens spoken by our membership that we all have in common to some degree.

In our grappling with two lists of accepted proposals, Chinese and non-Chinese, we encounter the material manifestation of a conceptual framework of insiders and outsiders. In this case, I want to suggest that in our organization, this divide is one

Jane C. Desmond
 Immdt. Past-President
 IASA
 University of Illinois
 Urbana-Champaign
 USA

that runs through many, many of our attempts to work together, to think together, to trust each other enough to debate together, and ultimately to try to understand our shared objects of study not from one but from multiple points of view and scholarly standpoints. I recently argued for this conception of what I'm calling a 'prismatic American Studies' in a recent issue of *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies*.

I offer these small examples of practical, and not unexpected, ways of operating as a way into a larger and harder intellectual work. Are we still tethered to and limited by profound conceptual maps of Orientalism and Occidentalism that create and sustain bi-modal concepts of the world, and if so, how does that limit what we expect of each other, of each other's scholarship, and of the ways we imagine working together as colleagues in the future to create new knowledges?

DEFINING 'ORIENTALISM' AND 'OCCIDENTALISM'

One of the many problems with this complementary set of ideologies—of 'Orientalism' and 'Occidentalism'—is that they are mental mappings that masquerade as territorial referents, while simultaneously banishing much of the world from consideration. Is the entire continent of Africa with its many countries, groups and languages, part of 'the East' or part of the 'West'? Or, are poor and poorly educated rural persons not mapped in this framework? If so, are the elite, trained often in the centers of their colonial pasts, part of a so called 'cosmopolitanism' aligned with the imagined community of 'the West'? What about Latin America? Is it not the East surely (despite the relatively large populations of Japanese or Chinese origin citizens in Brazil and Peru), but not exactly those populations usually referenced by the term 'the West' either? Or are the urban intellectuals and elites part of 'the West' and the indigenous populations not a part of it?

And where is 'the West' anyway? As a referent, there are some places and populations that are undoubtedly 'in' this category. Sweden, France, Italy, Ireland, Canada, the US (but maybe not some of its post colonial territories like

Guam?)... All of the growing EU? (What about Slovenia? Bosnia?) Are Muslims part of this conceptual imaginary? Or is it implicitly Christian and Jewish? What about South America... Uruguay for instance? Well—if the West is not a place but an idea, then what about the East? Who is definitely ‘in’—China certainly, and Japan (despite its membership in the G-8) and Southeast Asia. What about India? Iran? The eastern part of Russia by Vladivostok? The Aleutian Islands and their indigenous populations? How about Tasmania?

When we try to locate the actual living populations and territorial sites referenced by these huge conceptual dividers of ‘the East’ and ‘the West’ we see the impossibility of doing so and reveal the power of the concepts as lying in part in this very ambiguity and in the ways that the ‘core’ referents of the concepts are ALWAYS invoked by it, implicitly, thus dividing a world in half—while ignoring a great deal of it. We have some other emergent terms to cross-cut these conceptual territories, like the Global South or the circumpolar indigenous populations of Inuit and Sami. But none of these has the historical longevity or power of the East/West binary, itself a legacy of long colonial empire-building by both ‘sides.’

And a binary it is, as Edward Said so eloquently and exhaustively convinced us in his 1978 book *Orientalism*, in which he sifted out the descriptors attached to ‘the East’ by European and European origin scholars over time, and revealed a set of ascribed characteristics that were alternately desirable and despised. Orientalism, as Said develops the concept, is not just a delineation of assumptions about someplace(s) termed ‘the Orient’ by scholars in Europe. It is, more fundamentally, a whole episteme developed over multiple centuries. We can define it as a complex of assumptions, facts, fictions, and ideologies that comprise, while purporting to explain, a scholarly and political imaginary, in this case an imaginary about a part of the world outside of Europe.

Said’s preoccupations with excavating the beliefs undergirding European productions of knowledge about ‘the Orient’ focused on the Middle East (another problematic term, because obviously it raises the questions of ‘in the middle of where?’

Jane C. Desmond
 Immdt. Past-President
 IASA
 University of Illinois
 Urbana-Champaign
 USA

and 'between what or whom?'). But he could have easily focused on other sites, like China, India, and Japan, each of which has a long, rich, and equally central legacy in this episteme of Orientalism in Europe and to varying degrees among populations in the US and the larger Americas.

Said describes this episteme as 'a political version of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, "the West," "us") and the strange (the Orient, the East, "them")' (Said, 1978: 43). This act of 'imaginative geography' both created and helped maintain a sense of two distinct worlds, and served as the ground for imperial and colonial relations (90). While Said sketched changes in this set of beliefs and presumptions over multiple centuries and in various scholarly discourses in Europe, he asserts that there is still a powerful 'latent Orientalism' at work today (206). This latent Orientalism still exerts power both within and outside of scholarly disciplines and has, he asserts, remained remarkably consistent over several centuries. Is his assertion still correct and relevant 30 years later?

Among those characteristics assigned to the mythic 'East' are the following: the 'East' is supposedly primitive, childlike, irrational, chaotic, mysterious, backward, eccentric, and despotic. On the other hand, it is also stereotyped as: sensual, sexual, wise (as in the notion of 'the wisdom of the East'), and as the site of unimaginable antiquity. A source of beauty, desire, and wisdom, it is also characterized in the Orientalist discourses Said analyzes as a place and peoples who are not to be trusted, are radically different in their beliefs and practices from those who write about them from 'outside' the East, and who are always stuck in a past which may be seen as, alternately, glorious or infamous.

Implicitly, Orientalist views describe and create a sense of an 'Occident' as the not-East, as well. Some of the characteristics ascribed by Orientalist discourses imply that the mythic place called 'the West' is the opposite: rational, modern, forthright, trustworthy and functioning according to a transparent and just rule of law. A moment's reflection surely shows us the mythic nature of these claims, but does that mean they are not still functioning? Of course they are, although now

perhaps more implicitly than explicitly, and hopefully in a more self-reflexive mode. Every time we take up the subject position of referring to 'the East' or 'the West' we activate a set of assumptions—and episteme—through which we speak.

If, as Said suggested, Orientalism is still with us, what about Occidentalism? Now the positional calculus becomes even more complicated. As we saw above, characteristics ascribed to 'the Orient' can be seen as either positive or negative: mysterious can be positive—intriguing, out of the ordinary—or it can be negative—unknowable, unpredictable, and thus, untrustworthy. The same can be said about characteristics ascribed to a mythic 'West,' which can be seen as modern and well off, or bullying, greedy, immoral and imperial. Desirable or despicable. It depends on who is talking, to what ends, and, of course, on what the baseline for comparison is.

The companion episteme to Orientalism is Occidentalism, and this idea has been explored by Chen Xiaomei in her book *Occidentalism: Theory of Counter-Discourse in the Post-Mao China*. Chen suggests that although 'Occidentalism' as an over-arching episteme is counterposed to Orientalism, valuing that which is undervalued in that episteme—it can be deployed for differing ends. Like concepts of Orientalism, Occidentalism can be used as a discourse to critique European and US power, or it can be used by dissenters to critique the 'Orient.' For instance, some governments or communities might speak out against what they see as 'Westernization,' as a road to immoral secularism or rapacious capitalism. But the term has also been used to describe a set of passions for those characteristics determined to be desirable in a mythic 'West' in contrast to local, homegrown 'Eastern' ones. For example, calls for 'Westernization' in some countries may be used to leverage movements towards more democratic systems of government. Or, when mobilized by speakers residing in the territories associated with the mythic 'West,' it can refer to a discourse of self-endorsement. For example, someone might say 'As a Westerner, I've always believed that...'

We see a similar use of 'Orientalism' in the 'West,' where the codified differences can be used to support the groups

Jane C. Desmond
 Immdt. Past-President
 IASA
 University of Illinois
 Urbana-Champaign
 USA

in power—praising Occidentalism by contrasting it with situations in ‘the East.’ Alternatively, values associated with a mythic ‘Orient’ can be invoked to critique dominant ideologies, philosophies, and artistic practices associated with Europe and the Americas, as we have seen in the US in many historical periods—for instance, in the 1960s where the ‘wisdom of the East’ was invoked in hippies’ Indian print bedspreads, embraced by leading experimental artists like John Cage, and popularized in books like Robert M. Pirsig’s *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, which was really more about philosophy than motorcycles, just to draw a few examples from US popular culture.

Are we as academics immune to these massive and powerful epistemes? Are we immune to the languages that promote them and offer us a subject position of Westerner or Easterner if only we will occupy them? Do we auto-Orientalize or auto-Occidentalize? Given the power and pervasiveness of such discourses it would be amazing if we did not. How can we recognize these discourses in play and what sorts of effects might they have to the detriment of our scholarly exchanges and engagements?

First of all, we can make our understandings of these discourses more complex and strive to more fully grasp the instruments of cultural interaction that the binary discourses of Orientalism and Occidentalism depend upon. And in this section of the talk I’d like to focus particularly on how these issues might relate to China.

In a persuasive 1996 article titled ‘Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism,’ Arif Dirlik, a US-based historian of China, takes a metahistorical view of Orientalism. He asserts that although Said described Orientalism as a part of the problem of European modernity, it should also be seen as part of the problem of Asian modernity, part of which consisted of the circulation of Asian and European intellectuals in a ‘contact zone.’²

Tracking a mutually influential relationship, although not claiming parity in those influences, Dirlik suggests that ‘to the extent

2. This is Mary Louise Pratt’s succinct term for a long-standing anthropological concept of cultural meeting, exchange, change, and intermingling, often in situations of radical inequality.

that orientalism had become part of “Western” ideas by the early nineteenth century, the “Western” impact included also the impact on Asian societies of European ideas of the orient’ (Dirlik, 1996: 104). Coming closer to the present, he suggests that ‘it is in the twentieth century, however that Euro-American Orientalist perceptions and methods become a visible component in the formulation of the Chinese self-image, and Chinese perceptions of the past. The process was facilitated by the emergence of nationalism’ (106). Noting the reductionist aspects of the Orientalist episteme and its parallel with the reductionism of cultural complexity and contestation that movements of nationalism often employ, he goes on to state that ‘...nationalism shares much with the culturalist procedures of orientalism, now at the scale of the nation’ (106).

If nationalist discourses often proceed through a process of homogenizing self-assertion in contrast to other nations (what ‘we’ are vs. what ‘they’ are), then we can see how the larger frameworks of European manufactured epistememes of ‘Orientalism’ may be pulled into play in the development of cultural nationalism in countries like China, just as notions of ‘the West’ are used in US nationalist discourses describing the US, for example, as the supposed height of ‘Westernized’ ‘modernity.’ Just as the self is defined as not the other, then at the national level too we can see this process of differentiation and comparison as a part of the development of a distinctive discourse of cultural uniqueness, employed in the building of national identities, often masking historical complexities of change and exchange, and differences among sub-national groups.

But what about the present day? If we follow Dirlik further, he asserts that ‘...what has changed [now] is the power relationship between China and Euro-America³ rather than the abolition of Orientalism’ (Dirlik, 1996: 108). In other words, the rise of the ‘New China’— the contemporary mainland China of rapidly expanding economic, military, and political power—does not mean the end of centuries-long epistememes

Jane C. Desmond
Immdt. Past-President
IASA
University of Illinois
Urbana-Champaign
USA

3. For Dirlik, the term Euro-Americans refers not to Euro-Americans, per se, but rather the complex of Europe and the United States.

of Orientalism, in both 'the West' and 'the East.' Rather, it refers now to *their reformulation and reconfiguration*. Dirlik offers one example in the depiction of the New Confucianism as a positive 'force in capitalism modernization' (Dirlik, 1996: 109). A detailed and nuanced discussion of the ways that such a reformulation is proceeding certainly requires the expertise of an expert on China, not myself, but I offer this example here as one of many that might be further explored. I suggest here too that Orientalism as an episteme in Europe and the Americas is, similarly, not dying out but resurfacing in ways that we need to analyze and document as the 'New China' plays a more and more central role on the world stage. Just as China 'stages itself' anew as it literally did recently in the spectacular opening ceremony of the 2008 Olympics, so too is the notion of 'China' and of the new 'Orient' subject to revision outside of China.

If Dirlik is right that Orientalism in China is being reformulated, not refuted, and if I am right that the deployment of the epistemes of 'Orientalism' and 'Occidentalism' retain their force even in the face of contemporary reconfigurations, then as scholars working across multiple national and regional configurations, we have much work to do. We need be alert to the ways that such positionings may influence our perceptions of each other's work. There are surely multiple scholarly traditions represented in our meetings and journals, and these shape indelibly the ways in which we conceive of 'good' argumentation, of what counts as scholarly 'evidence,' and of what is an appropriate scale of posing a research question, just to offer a few examples. These scholarly practices are not just individual choices; they are part of the stated and unstated presumptions of the various scholarly worlds in which we are each embedded. Thus, as sociologist of knowledge Pierre Bourdieu might remind us, they become 'doxa' in our own modes of operation and in the criterion we apply to analyze and assess intellectual work.

Wang Ning, professor of English and Director of the Center for Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies at Tsinghua University, writing in 1997, the year after Dirlik's article appeared, also takes on the question of the relationship between

Orientalism and Occidentalism. Although China was not a prime focus in Said's formulation of Orientalism, Wang notes that Occidentalism has played a key role in anti-imperialist movements in China over time. However, he suggests that the continuing oppositional construct of Orientalism and Occidentalism (whether or not 'the West' is conceived of as a dominating agent or an agent to be dominated) is a no-win situation. 'Will there be no other way out of these simple modes of thinking characterized by binary opposition?' he asks (Wang, 1997: 64).

Comparing the discourses of Orientalism and Occidentalism, Wang suggests that Occidentalism is '... far from a full-fledged episteme covering [as wide a] range of learning and representation as Orientalism [does].' He describes it rather as more of a response—a 'strategy of discourse opposed to Western cultural hegemonism' (Wang, 1997: 66). Whatever its origin and history, I suggest it is just as potentially limiting as the long shadow of Orientalism. The continuing presence of Occidentalism, Wang warns us, may well 'do harm to our cultural communication and academic exchange with Western and international scholarship [and] since it [Occidentalism] is still prevalent in present-day China and some other Oriental countries ... it deserves study and analysis' (66). This warning was given ten years ago, so we should ask ourselves if the situation has fundamentally changed now or not. If not, what strategies might help us change this?

Building on Dirlik's 1996 arguments, Chu Yiu-Wai writing in 2008 takes on these issues in his essay 'The Importance of Being Chinese: Orientalism Reconfigured in the Age of Global Modernity.' Chu opens a discussion of 'Chineseness' in a new global century by rejecting a notion of 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' Chineseness, focusing his discussion on mass media representations, especially those produced in China and circulating elsewhere. The details of his argument, and the mass media contexts he discusses, are beyond the scope of this discussion, but I want to indicate the importance of the question—what and who is 'Chinese' in a period of reconfigured Orientalism and Occidentalism? And I want to turn that question around

Jane C. Desmond
 Immdt. Past-President
 IASA
 University of Illinois
 Urbana-Champaign
 USA

to ask 'what and who is not-Chinese' in this same period. Or, what and who is not European? Or 'American'?

For this is part of our challenge as I see it: to become self-reflexively aware of the ways that our own scholarly work is always already embedded in frameworks of training, citational practices, analytical processes, and reading lists that shape what we decide are important questions, urgent investigations, legitimate forms of argumentation, and persuasive evidence, based on our own political historical epistemes of knowledge productions. And then, looking outward, to try to understand the complexes of those epistemes and histories of academic production which are different from our own, whoever the 'our' may be. And to create here, what Bryan Turner calls for: a contact zone of intellectuals with a shared object of study and a not fully shared, yet partially overlapping and partially contradictory, frameworks of modes of production, in this case, modes of intellectual production.

Many of us traverse several scholarly communities. We cross disciplinary boundaries, we work in several different languages, we collaborate with colleagues abroad, we obtain degrees in countries not originally our own, we teach as guests in different nations, we publish in journals outside our home countries or regions. Yet, for all of this, a majority of us operate on a daily basis in one intellectual community that exerts more pressure on us than the others. For myself, that community of scholars, a majority of my publication venues and conventions, all of my degrees, and a majority but not all of my faculty appointments, have been in the US where I have lived most of my life. Each of us can make this calculus. And, each of us is shaped by it, because as post-structuralists have persuasively demonstrated, knowledge is always produced from somewhere. And I would add that those 'somewheres' have histories and political frameworks that profoundly affect what we do as intellectuals.

We know this of course, and often investigate and critique these issues in our own scholarly work. But at the institutional level it is also a crucial resource to keep in mind as we endeavor to build global scholarly networks. We can, following British sociologist Bryan Turner, look to Edward Said's efforts

to chart a path out of the strictures of Orientalism and Occidentalism. Said urged us to work toward ‘an ethic of cosmopolitan care’ (Said 1978: 174). While many critics have focused on Said’s highlighting of the existence and operation of oppositional paradigms of Orientalism and Occidentalism, fewer have focused on his purposes in doing so, especially as articulated in his later works. As Turner states, ‘Said’s vision of intellectuals...offers a defense of cosmopolitanism which is the worldview of scholars in a political context where globalization, cultural hybridity and multiculturalism are re-writing the traditional Orientalist agenda’ (Turner, 2004: 176).

But cosmopolitans are not, I would hasten to add, un tethered border-crossers in a utopian flow of de-politicized difference. I’m not suggesting that there are not important differences in the histories and presents of populations and of how we, as members of those communities, view the world. There are distinctive philosophical and intellectual traditions. There are distinctive political histories that shape those traditions. There are variable canons and revolts against canons in different disciplines. But the invocation, whether implicit or explicit, of ‘THE West’ and ‘THE East’ actually mutes and even erases those particularities in favor of large generalizations. As scholars we owe it to ourselves to avoid these generalizations, except self-reflexively when we make them part of our objects of investigation in the constitution of new knowledge.

As intellectuals we have the privilege of seeking out and sustaining mutually challenging conversations, debates, and arguments that cross disciplinary, linguistic, national, and epistemological boundaries, while simultaneously tracking the power of those configurations. And we do so in the material and political configurations of the present—from the H1N1 flu outbreak, to the worldwide recession, to the relocation of Guantanamo Bay prisoners, and the ongoing wars in the Middle East, just to name a few of the largest challenges. We have the privilege of becoming temporary migrants, not due to economic, human rights, or political necessity, as is so often the case when people migrate to escape a situation, but rather

Jane C. Desmond
Immdt. Past-President
 IASA
 University of Illinois
 Urbana-Champaign
 USA

to embrace the difficult challenge of truly working together in mutually changing and mutually challenging collaborative productions of knowledge. Said's notion of an ethics of 'care,' and the implicit respect that it encapsulates, is a hallmark of what is necessary for that mutuality to occur.

A scholarly conference, a journal, a book series—all of these are material manifestations of an intellectual landscape for the production of debate, the exchange of opinions, and, hopefully, the production of new knowledge. Creating those arenas can be very challenging when we move away from zones of shared assumptions and practices into zones of more radical multiplicity. To do so successfully requires the type of double vision that Du Bois told us about, of being both enmeshed in our discourse and simultaneously stepping outside of it to watch it in action—to be alert for moments when our assumptions about what makes a good scholarly argument, what is an interesting intellectual question, and what it is important to know are set in high relief, and, to the extent possible, to see how our expectations of or encounters with each other just might be being shaped by the twin forces of Orientalism and Occidentalism. And, for the times when such frameworks seem to lessen our understandings of each other, or limit our abilities to engage intellectually, we step back, and just for that moment reject the notion of An EAST and A WEST—and work against the legacies of Orientalism and Occidentalism that will surely continue to sing their siren songs for a long time to come.

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Jane C. Desmond
 Immdt. Past-President
 IASA
 University of Illinois
 Urbana-Champaign
 USA