"Double Vision": Visual Practice and the Politics of Representation in Edward W. Said and Jean Mohr's *After the Last Sky*

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Abstract: "Double vision," a figure Edward W. Said invokes in the introduction to the photo-essay *After the Last Sky*, is a fitting name for the critical visual practice that the text engenders. A joint effort of Said and photographer Jean Mohr, *After the Last Sky* models a self-conscious vision that always also interrogates its own conditions of viewing. The book couples Said's textual reflections on the plight of the Palestinians with photographs Mohr took in the Middle East over the course of several decades. Said's text speaks to or with Mohr's images but not necessarily for them, and the images, in turn, alternately generate, illustrate, and frustrate the text. The doubleness at the heart of the text's visual discourse and practice seeks to unsettle the affects, rhetorical figures, and political postures that fuel the violence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and thus perpetuate suffering. As a model for ethical seeing, this critical double vision also has much to offer as a compelling answer to the all-too pervasive iconophobia, or suspicion and hostility toward the visual, that theorists such as W.J.T. Mitchell, Jacques Rancière, and Rey Chow argue has characterized a great deal of cultural criticism over the last several decades. This way of seeing is both particular to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Said and Mohr's unique relationship to it, and supple enough to translate to other violent and politically complicated circumstances.

Edward W. Said first invokes the concept of "double vision" in the introduction to *After the Last Sky* (1986) in reference to his collaborator Jean Mohr's vision as a photographer; he writes that Mohr "saw us as we would have seen ourselves—at once inside and outside our world" (6). Said then asserts the same quality of duality in his own contribution to

the volume as a Palestinian-American exile who is both insider and outsider to the Palestinian community.[1] This "double vision" is not simply a clever figure that Said casually drops into the conversation. Rather, it speaks to the central logic of the text and defines its form: a textual vision coupled with a photographic vision.[2] *After the Last Sky* combines Said's personal reflections—on exile, the plight of the Palestinians, how they have been represented by others, and how they struggle to represent themselves—with photographs Mohr took of Palestinians over the course of several decades. It is thus a collaborative effort: Said's text speaks to or with Mohr's images but not necessarily for them, and the images, in turn, alternately generate, illustrate, and frustrate the text.[3] The hybrid text-image form of the book captures something of the experiences of dispossession and self-estrangement faced by the Palestinians, or as Said writes, "the extent to which even to themselves they feel different, or 'other'" (*Last Sky* 6). Both text and image "look" at Palestinians, but they do not necessarily see the same thing. Thus, while they often overlap and reinforce one another, they never come together to form an entirely coherent and unified whole.

Crucially, the form of the text engenders a critical practice that might also be aptly named "double vision." *After the Last Sky* enacts a self-conscious vision that always also critiques its own conditions of viewing.[4] As a model for ethical seeing, this double vision has much to offer as a compelling answer to the all-too pervasive iconophobia, or suspicion and hostility toward the visual, that critics such as W.J.T. Mitchell, Jacques Rancière, and Rey Chow argue has characterized a great deal of cultural criticism over the last several decades.[5] The doubleness at the heart of the text's visual discourse and practice seeks to unsettle the affects, rhetorical figures, and political postures that fuel the violence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and thus perpetuate suffering. It disrupts oppressive Israeli state narratives—to the extent that such narratives are underpinned by a single and selectively blind vision—at the same time that it necessarily renders a similarly coherent Palestinian narrative untenable. Moreover, the way of seeing enacted by Said and Mohr is at once specific to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and their unique relationship to it, and supple enough to transport to other violent and politically complex situations.

According to Said, a major impetus for the book was the curious official response to a planned exhibition of Mohr's photographs for the United Nation's International Conference on the Question of Palestine in 1983. Mohr and Said were initially told that the photographs could be hung only without any accompanying text. Eventually, a compromise was reached in which the photos could be exhibited with only the sparest of captions indicating the name of the country or location where the photograph was taken. The proscription on explanatory words came, somewhat surprisingly, mainly from Arab member states, for whom the Palestinian struggle was only "useful up to a point" (*Last Sky* 3).[6] The notion that both adversaries and purported allies wanted to control the stories and images that could be circulated was, Said and Mohr felt, one of the central problems faced by the Palestinians. Whereas in some Western academic disciplines iconophobia has for some time been almost an orthodoxy, Said and Mohr suggest that the problems of representation that plague the Palestinians have had more to do with suppression, one-sidedness, and an aversion to complexity than with any one particular mode of representation, be it verbal or visual.[7]

The doubleness of *After the Last Sky* registers the violence of dispossession in the many forms it takes for the Palestinians—epistemological, aesthetic, and physical. Notably, Said and Mohr's Palestinian double vision resonates deeply with W.E.B. DuBois's concept of double consciousness, which he lays out in distinctly visual terms:

> [T]he Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. (10–11)

Like the African American subject DuBois so lyrically describes, Palestinians are forced to view and evaluate themselves through the eyes of adver-

saries, erstwhile allies, and bemused bystanders. But as DuBois suggests when he uses the language of being "*gifted* with second-sight" (emphasis added), double consciousness—or double vision, in this case—has its uses as well. While Said and Mohr want us to recognize the Palestinian experience of self-estrangement as an alienating and troublesome effect of dispossession, the double vision to which it gives rise also enables the productive work of interrupting what otherwise might simply be taken for granted, including the powerful Western mass media icons of the Palestinian terrorist and the hapless Palestinian victim.

My decision to employ the term "double vision" rather than "double consciousness" in this essay is purposeful. I elect to use "double vision" because it keeps the focus on visuality, a necessary focus in this political context that is very much about who is visible and how they are visible. The fact that Palestinians are seen too much either as terrorists or as victims necessitates a degree of iconoclasm on the part of the viewer or critic. However, iconoclasm alone will not solve the Palestinians' political image problem, because they are often not visible enough as a people with dignity and rights, particularly to Israeli and American powers.[8] The situation in which Palestinians find themselves demands a response that carefully modulates iconophobia and iconophilia. Thus, while double vision compels us to closely examine the relationship between visuality and epistemology, it is not simply a figure for an epistemological condition. In other words, it is not merely a metaphor for a way of knowing. Instead, it indicates a literal turn to external visual artifacts concomitant with a deep consideration of the ways such artifacts shape and disrupt how viewers (including Palestinian viewers) know and feel about Palestinians.

The self-alienation described by both Said and DuBois is a direct consequence of violent domination founded on an oppressive view of difference that Said addresses in his 1985 essay "An Ideology of Difference." The dominant culture, in this case Israeli society, sees the differences of the dominated culture as marking it as "inferior or lesser" ("Ideology" 81), thus justifying its exclusion and oppression. As Said notes, however, "one can . . . declare oneself *for* difference (as opposed to sameness or homogenization) without at the same time being for

the rigidly enforced and policed separation of populations into different groups" (81; emphasis in original). He thus argues for the implementation of "a new logic in which 'difference' does not entail 'domination'" (100).[9] A critical double vision as it informs and is enacted in the different modes of text and image in *After the Last Sky* becomes an ethical practice that paves the way for difference without domination.

In Said's view, Palestine's political problems stem largely from the refusal of Israel and the United States to really see the Palestinians and their point of view. These political problems are at the same time formal problems. Although it would be a mistake to treat Israeli narratives of state as a monolithic discourse—indeed, we must recognize that civil and religious narratives of Israel statehood are varied—those that drive policy continue to hinge on a denial of both the complexity and validity of the Palestinian perspective, each narrative presenting single and unified, though slightly different, visions. As Ilan Pappé notes, for example, prior to the 1980s Israeli historiography outright denied the forced expulsion of Palestinians and the reality of a legitimate Palestinian presence in the region. Then, during the 1980s, the "New History" in Israel began to examine Israeli history more critically, drawing out the contradictions and blind spots of previous accounts (Pappé 7–8). However, Pappé observes that, after the second *intifada*, although the expulsions remained present in the discourse—for example, in Israeli history textbooks—they were now treated as retrospectively necessary and justified (8–9). In effect, the Palestinian view had once again been foreclosed. Tracing the development of Israeli historiography from the founding of the state to the present, Pappé identifies "a transition from adherence to the national consensus, to a recognition among certain elites of its many contradictions and fabrications, to a rejection of the post-Zionist questioning of the national consensus" (6–7).

Raef Zreik notes the relatively recent insistence on the Jewishness of Israel in Israeli juridical documents and observes that initially "[t] here had been no need to spell out in legislation that Israel was a state for the Jews when this was the operating premise of the entire state apparatus, the project in whose service the entire state was organized"

(28). He argues that "[f]rom the moment of Israel's founding, the invisibility of the Jewish state in the legal texts went hand in hand with the invisibility of the Palestinians in the land" (29). However, Zreik suggests that as the decades wore on, events such as the 1967 war and the first and second *intifadas* led to overt political and juridical assertions of Israel's essentially Jewish character. Zreik notes that, ironically, "[Benjamin] Netanyahu's [recent] insistence that recognizing Israel as a Jewish state [be] an essential component of a final settlement [between the Israelis and Palestinians] . . . has made the rights of the Jews in Palestine," which were hitherto taken for granted, "*a subject for negotiations*" (35). Netanyahu thus unintentionally "invit[es] the Arabs and the Palestinians to *intervene* in the question of the nature and the form of the Jewish state" (35). Both Pappé's and Zreik's analyses make clear the continued prevalence of narratives of Israeli statehood that refuse the validity of Palestinian perspectives. Yet both Pappé and Zreik point to the instability of such narratives and the contradictions that a critical double vision can identify and exploit.

Said's personal experience of exile both calls for and profoundly shapes the double vision of *After the Last Sky*. His long-term absence from Palestine and (at the time of the text's composition) inability to travel there, coupled with Mohr's status as a linguistic and cultural outsider, means that much of what appears in the photographs goes unnamed and unexplained. Said brings considerable imaginative force to his interpretations of Mohr's images, but with the full awareness that this can neither bridge the geographical distance nor fill in the cultural, linguistic, and political gaps that separate him from the people and places pictured.[10] Nevertheless, as he acknowledges in "Reflections on Exile," exile does have some positive effects: "Seeing 'the entire world as a foreign land' makes possible originality of vision. Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that—to borrow a phrase from music—is *contrapuntal*" (186; emphasis in original). Without denying the grief or pain of exile—indeed, while marking it—Said demonstrates the value of the double vision it effects.

Modulating Iconophobia and Iconophilia

And so *After the Last Sky* begins with an image problem, or, more precisely, with a problem with the way certain images and words are habitually linked. As Said writes in his introduction:

> To most people Palestinians are visible principally as fighters, terrorists, and lawless pariahs. Say the word 'terror' and a man wearing a *kaffiyah* and mask and carrying a *kalachnikov* immediately leaps before one's eyes. To a degree, the image of a helpless, miserable-looking refugee has been replaced by this menacing one as the veritable icon of 'Palestinian.' (4)

Images such as the "icon" Said describes represent Palestinians as invariably and unlawfully violent and consequently do violence to Palestinians as a community and as individuals. Indeed, there is violence even in the either/or quality that adheres to images of Palestinians: Palestinians are either violent or victims of violence; as Said notes in the quotation, the image of the terrorist replaces the image of the "miserable-looking refugee." This either/or quality obscures the complexity of the situation in which Palestinians find themselves. Unquestionably, violence has, as Said notes:

> been an extraordinarily important aspect of our lives. Whether it has been the violence of our uprooting and the destruction of our society in 1948, the violence visited on us by our enemies, the violence we have visited on others, or, most horribly, the violence we have wreaked on each other—these dimensions of the Palestinian experience have brought us a great deal of attention, and have exacerbated our self-awareness as a community set apart from others. (*Last Sky* 5)

What is too often overlooked is how this violence that has been made the most visible feature of Palestinian life has visited a further, less visible violence *on* Palestinians, making them either pariahs or victims rather than respected players on the world stage.

A few words must be said about what it means to discuss this text and the images it contains in a post-9/11 world. Certainly, some of the

specific claims Said makes about the very limited possibilities for visual representation of Palestinians, and particularly the singling out of the mask-clad, rifle-toting terrorist as the icon of "Palestinian," are simply no longer accurate in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, as well as more positive developments such as the U.N. resolution recognizing Palestinian statehood and increasing international recognition of the legitimacy of the Palestinian cause. Nevertheless, as Said and others argue, the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks has given rise to a reinvigorated Orientalism, evident in the rhetoric of U.S. media pundits and U.S. and Israeli politicians, that treats Palestinian violence as a variant or sub-species of a broader Arab terrorism hell-bent on the destruction of the West and its values of democracy and individual freedom (a general Middle Eastern menace for which Osama bin Laden has perhaps become the major icon). Indeed, writing in *Al-Ahram Weekly* in 2001, Said observes:

> There seems to be a minor campaign in print media to hammer home the thesis that "we are all Israelis now," and that what has occasionally occurred in the way of Palestinian suicide bombs is more or less exactly the same as the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks. In the process, of course, Palestinian dispossession and oppression are simply erased from memory; also erased are the many Palestinian condemnations of suicide bombing, including my own. ("Backlash and Backtrack")

Thus, with slight recalibrations to more accurately reflect the new historical moment, the major claims Said makes in *After the Last Sky* still resonate. Indeed, they may prove even more relevant as Israel comes to represent, in influential circles, a major front in the "War on Terror" standing between Western values and a pervasive Arab menace.

While the icon of the Palestinian as terrorist might understandably provoke a virulent case of iconophobia in a Palestinian writer, Said chooses a more productive path. *After the Last Sky* is partly a self-conscious attempt to counter the stereotypical and harmful icon of the terrorist (and the problematic image of the refugee) with a broader range of images of Palestinians and Palestinian life. However, it is also concerned with what and how images mean, how they command or fail to com-

mand attention, and the ethical and political implications of their rela-
tion to language, knowledge, and viewers.

The language Said uses—"Say the word 'terror' and a man wearing
a *kaffiyah* and mask . . . leaps before one's eyes"—subtly registers the
slippage between the images that take concrete visual form in pictures
and mental images, thus carrying us into the slippery terrain of stere-
otyping. Mitchell identifies stereotypes as "social screens" that "circulate
across sensory registers from the visible to the audible and . . . typically
conceal themselves as transparent, hyperlegible, inaudible, and invis-
ible cognitive templates of prejudice" (*What Do Pictures Want?* 296).
He notes that "[t]he stereotype is most effective . . . when it remains
unseen, unconscious, disavowed, a lurking suspicion always waiting to
be confirmed by a fresh perception" (296). Mitchell thus suggests that
the stereotype is not so much a single, static image that is constantly
repeated as it is a cognitive screen that makes "fresh perception[s]" im-
possible. Stereotyping works by allowing a viewer to see in a given image
or sight only what it wants her to see, while obstructing everything else.
The most effective response to the stereotype is not, then, an outright
iconoclasm or iconophobia, but rather a critical vision that renders the
working of stereotypes visible and enables viewers to see alternative
possibilities.

After the Last Sky, as I have noted, responds to two stereotypes of
Palestinians in circulation in the 1980s: the menacing terrorist and the
wretched refugee. In doing so, it is—somewhat ironically for a photo-
essay—an iconoclastic text. One can argue quite easily that it aims to
obliterate such icons and challenge the cynical or paternalistic attitudes
often implicit in the production, dissemination, and viewing of images
that appear to confirm them. Yet in collaborating with a photographer
to present us with alternative images and in allowing these images to
shape and respond to his text, Said clearly maintains an iconophilic con-
viction of the value and potential of the visual to critique the stereotype's
narrow vision.

Double vision appropriately names the text's strategic deployments of
both iconophobia and iconophilia: its desire to do away with the stere-
otypical images of the menacing terrorist and the hapless refugee and its

endorsement of more complex and varied images and ways of seeing; its wariness about "being seen" and "being seen as" (in the senses of being under surveillance and being represented by others); and its commitment to both looking back at one's observers and seeing oneself and one's own community as clearly as possible. This duality, as well as the complex and nuanced attitude toward vision that it implies, is present within particular images, in the interaction between text and image, and in the inter-iconic exchange among images.

After the Last Sky may seek to reattach certain words to certain images—Said poetically describes exile as "a series of portraits without names" (12)—but it also seeks to sever the too-automatic connections made between certain words and images, such as the word "Palestinian" and the image of a gun-wielding, mask-clad terrorist. Notably, no picture closely matching this "icon" appears among Mohr's photographs, perhaps to emphasize that such images are, regrettably, too readily called to mind for the authors to need to provide one. Yet despite the omission of such images, the collection does not include other photographs that Palestine's political adversaries might be tempted to label "terrorist."

These images, however, refuse to yield to such reductive readings. One is a close shot of a young man's face, wrapped in a *kaffiyah* so that only his eyes are visible (fig. 1). Although this image has a certain resonance with the *kaffiyah*- and ski-masked icon of the terrorist, it also resists connotations of militancy and menace. The young man has a sad, care-worn appearance, owing to the slight lift of his inner eyebrows and the dark shadows encircling his eyes. The gesture of two fingers pressing lightly against his chin contributes the impression of preoccupation and sadness. The photo appears in a short series documenting what Said calls the "dynastic passage from youth to age" (162). Said writes that if one observes the series "with the eyes of someone for whom photographs are not the exhibition of a foreign specimen of some sort, you will see in it the representation of people for whom you care with concern and affection—family members or intimate friends" (162).

This hybrid visual-textual passage is particularly remarkable for its modulation of the relational dynamics of seeing, as Said asks us to abandon a distancing and alienating way of seeing in favor of the way we see

when we are looking at the familiar and intimate. The phrase "the exhibition of a foreign specimen" conflates modes of vision that are decidedly one-sided and dominating. "Exhibition" and "specimen" evoke the purportedly detached scientific gaze that probes and categorizes, while "foreign" brings to mind the colonial gaze that renders both colonized subject and land mere objects of knowledge and power.[11] Against this positively Foucauldian (and quite disheartening) picture of seeing, Said offers an alternative—an affectionate, affiliative gaze that emphasizes relationship, shared humanity, and empathy.

Crucially, Said does not suggest that images are inert and static, and that only the way we see creates change; rather, changing our way of seeing enables us to see alternative meanings already present in images. In instructing us in the double vision of seeing the familiar and loved in the strange and feared, *After the Last Sky* makes it harder to view even stereotypical images in a simplistic way. This is not to say that Said and Mohr aim to obscure the horrifying and often pointless vi-

Figure 1. From After the Last Sky*, by Edward W. Said and Jean Mohr. Copyright © 1999. Reprinted by permission of Columbia University Press and Jean Mohr.*

olence perpetrated by Palestinians; rather, it suggests that we ought, when viewing such images, to think critically about the underlying violence that has led to the moment captured on film rather than dismissing those involved with the label "terrorist," a term often deliberately invoked to forestall dialogue and critical engagement. Mohr's images and Said's text, partly because of their dialogical relationship to one another, work against the conversation-stopping violence of both stereotypical images and words such as "terrorist."

If the book complicates the portrayal of Palestinians as terrorists, it also challenges the view of Palestinians as helpless victims. While there are many images of refugees in *After the Last Sky*, there are few, if any, stereotypical images of "*helpless, miserable-looking* refugee[s]" (4; emphases added). Rather, the book's images of refugees convey resilience, strength, and capability, as well as suffering and hardship. For instance, one photo from South Lebanon shows a woman walking down a dusty road with the haphazard, dilapidated structures of the Ein-el-Hilwe refugee camp in the background. The woman is dwarfed by the ramshackle structures and surrounding debris, although her central position in the foreground makes her the focal point of the image. Aside from the woman, only TV antennas and hanging laundry alert viewers to the presence of life in the bleak-looking camp. Two rubbish bins immediately behind her in a pile of rubble bespeak both the ephemeral nature of the Palestinians' living conditions and, more subtly, their disposability to both their enemies and purported allies. However, despite the run-down appearance of the camp, nothing about the woman suggests defeat or misery. Her stride is broad and purposeful, her posture is upright, and her face turns toward the camera; she appears to scrutinize the photographer. The caption to the photo reads: "Time passes: destruction, reconstruction, redestruction" (39). Both image and caption, then, point powerfully to both the defeat and resilience of Palestinian refugee life.

Considered intractable problems and presumed threats, Palestinians are frequently monitored by others—whether Israel or Arab states, the U.N., or non-governmental organizations—with little control over when or how they are seen. Said alludes to this problem in an intriguing moment early in the text when he reflects on a pair of portraits of

a man and woman who look distinctly uncomfortable in front of the camera:

> I cannot reach the actual people who were photographed, except through a European photographer [Mohr] who saw them for me. And I imagine that he, in turn, spoke to them through an interpreter. The one thing I know for sure, however, is that they treated him politely, but as someone who came from, or perhaps acted at the direction of, those who put them where they so miserably are. There was the embarrassment of people uncertain why they were being looked at and recorded. Powerless to stop it. (12–14)

Said recognizes the ethical complexities involved in producing even these sympathetic images. Mohr's "[seeing] them for" Said is as close as the author can come to "reaching" these individuals. This kind of seeing, then, differs from the distant and dominating gaze of surveillance, representing instead an attempt to negotiate and overcome the distance that exists between seer and seen. Nevertheless, despite Mohr's good intentions, his subjects might well have understood him to be implicated in the power structure that dominates them, and thus they would have felt as "powerless to stop" him from capturing their images as they were to control how that power structure monitored them.[12] The man and the woman look away from the camera, indexing both the "embarrassment" and "uncertain[ty]" referenced in the text. However, in many of the portraits, people do look directly at the photographer, thus appearing to look at us, the viewers, as well. Over the course of the text, looking back comes to be associated with mutuality, subjectivity, and agency.[13]

Palestinians not only figure *in* images but are also figured *as* images in *After the Last Sky*. Said contends that since before the establishment of Israel, Zionists have wished to deny the presence of a native Arab population with a viable claim to the land. In *The Question of Palestine*, a polemic intended primarily to educate American readers about the Palestinian situation, Said discusses "the background of Zionism in European imperialist or colonialist attitudes" and argues that "whatever it may have done for Jews, Zionism essentially saw Palestine as

the European imperialist did, as an empty territory paradoxically 'filled' with ignoble or perhaps even dispensable natives" (81).[14]

Searching for a figure that will convey the ineluctable fact of Palestinian presence and the quality of haunting that, for Said at least, characterizes Palestinians' relationship to Israel, he settles on "image." He describes Palestinians:

> To the Israelis, whose incomparable military and political power dominates us, we are at the periphery, *the image that will not go away*. Every assertion of our nonexistence, every attempt to spirit us away, every new effort to prove that we were never really there, simply raises the question of why so much denial of, and such energy expended on, what was not there? Could it be that even as alien outsiders we dog their military might with our obdurate moral claim, our insistence (like that of Bartleby the Scrivener) that 'we would prefer not to,' not to leave, not to abandon Palestine forever? (*Last Sky* 41–42; emphasis added)

Here, the image is a disturbance at the margin that jeopardizes the integrity of the center. This peripheral, uncooperative image threatens to unravel and render incoherent Israel's narrative about its prior and superior claims on the land.[15] Said associates the image with an "obdurate moral claim." For master narratives dependent on a fixed viewpoint or the elimination of contesting viewpoints, the mutuality intrinsic to the visual—the fact that pictures are always capable of reminding us on some level that we can be seen as well as see, that we are both the center of our own visual worlds and objects in the visual field viewed from other centers—is profoundly dangerous. The potential to focalize the situation from another "center" raises a formidable challenge to the controlling narrative, as well as to the notion of "centers" in general.

This textual passage is juxtaposed with two photographs that reinforce its message. The first has been shot from the passenger side of the interior of a car. The driver's face is turned away, toward two women outside the car who are framed in the driver's-side window. The women are shot from the inside of the car out. In this respect, we might read them as outsiders on the periphery. But they are also the central focus of the

photo. This otherwise mundane image, then, takes on considerably more interest and meaning in conjunction with Said's analysis in that it makes visible the inversion of the peripheral "image that will not go away" and the center. Notably, while one of the women speaks to and looks at the driver, the other looks back at the camera and therefore appears to look at the viewer. Considered alongside Said's remarks about Palestinians' "obdurate moral claim," the woman's gaze, one almost cannot help feeling, places a claim on us as well. At the very least, she makes a claim on our attention, reminding us that she too is a seeing subject and must be seen by us as such. Both this image and the one that follows illustrate the unfeasibility of an outright iconophobia in a political context in which questions of whether and how one is visible are central.[16]

The second photograph bears an even more direct relationship to the text (fig. 2). In the foreground, out of focus and partially lost in a shadow that blends with the dark background, an Israeli officer sits facing toward us, with downcast eyes and a hand covering the lower part of his face. Just above him, in sharp focus, a young boy stands outside a window looking plaintively in toward the camera, his hand, nose, and forehead pressed against the windowpane.[17] The boy stands out against the light, almost white, background. The picture seems to ratify Said's claims about the Israeli attempt to deny the continuous presence of Palestinians in the region. The soldier may, at the moment the photograph was snapped, simply have been lost in thought, unaware of the presence of the boy at the window, but viewed in light of the text he looks as though he is making a concentrated effort to ignore the boy. The text thus gives priority to a symbolic meaning of the photograph over its ambiguous literal meaning, without entirely erasing the latter. As with the preceding image, the boy's look toward the camera means he appears to look at the viewer as well. The economy of gazes in this image—the photographer's/ours, the boy's that looks back at the photographer/us, and the soldier's that looks away—reminds us once again of the potential for mutuality in seeing and being seen. The image challenges us to recognize the seen as seeing subjects, dramatizing the choice we have about visual relations with others. We can meet their gazes and subject ourselves to their judgment, or we can ignore

them. This choice has great ethical and political significance, as we are reminded by the interplay between text and image in which, crucially, different interpretive possibilities remain in tension.

Figure 2. From After the Last Sky*, by Edward W. Said and Jean Mohr. Copyright © 1999. Reprinted by permission of Columbia University Press and Jean Mohr.*

The Palestinian as seeing subject as well as figure seen is a major motif in the text. Viewers are frequently confronted by the photographic subjects' eyes. Although the sense we are being looked at is of course illusory, it nonetheless has the effect of making us feel implicated in the violence of the situation, or at the very least interpellated into the conversation. At the end of the text, Said makes this explicit:

> I would like to think . . . that we are not just the people seen or looked at in these photographs: We are also looking at our observers. We Palestinians sometimes forget that—as in country after country, the surveillance, confinement, and study of Palestinians is part of the political process of reducing our status and preventing our national fulfillment except as the Other who is opposite and unequal, always on the defensive—we too are looking, we too are scrutinizing, assessing, judging. We are more than someone's object. We do more than stand passively in front of whoever . . . has wanted to look at us. If you cannot finally see this about us, we will not allow ourselves to believe that the failure has been entirely ours. (166)[18]

This is a strong assertion of Palestinian agency, and this agency is explicitly construed in terms of seeing, both literally and figuratively. The passage is also something of a confrontation: a direct challenge to the reader, who is addressed in the second person, to either see Palestinians as subjects or to recognize her or his own visual, cognitive, and ethical failure to do so.

The passage is followed by a final photograph, so that images, in effect, get the last word. This photo, captioned "Jerusalem, 1979. The photographer photographed," shows two small girls in the foreground, the one in front holding a camera in front of her face, the other standing behind her looking at the photographer. They appear particularly small and vulnerable because of the sharp downward angle from which the photographer has captured them. The street recedes behind them; in the middle distance, a man sweeps debris away. Rocks and refuse occupy the upper left-hand corner of the photo. Further away, a shadowy figure stands next to the wall that lines the street. The children's proxim-

ity to the bottom edge of the photograph and the depth of the scene behind them suggest that they have stopped the photographer's forward progress, arresting his motion. The photo is by turns cute, funny, and poignant. As such, it reiterates the theme of all of the images in the book: the humanity of the Palestinian people, a fact that should be obvious but has too often been obscured by the "terrorist" label. But it also supports the text's declaration of Palestinian agency and representation of Palestinians as seeing subjects who must not be regarded merely as objects of power and knowledge. This is *After the Last Sky's* final message.

If the text's double vision disrupts the falsely unified and selectively blind vision underlying Israeli state narratives, it also insists upon interrogating itself. The images in the book do not just return our gazes; they also "look back" at Said's text (Mitchell, *Picture Theory* 319).[19] The images thus challenge his mode of viewing and interpreting just as his writing draws out and asks questions of them. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the pairing of an image of the face of a man with a shattered lens in his glasses and the following textual passage:[20]

> There is an irrepressible cheerfulness to the photograph as a whole, although the shattered lens still stands out with considerable force. A symbol, I said to myself, of some duality in our life that won't go away—refugees and terrorists, victims and victimizers, and so on. Having said that, however, I was dissatisfied with the concept behind the thought. If you look at the photograph honestly, you don't see anything about the man that suggests either pathos or weakness. . . . The blotch is on the lens, not on him. (128)

Said places an emphasis on revising his already-sophisticated interpretation of the image—he literally looks again, and this second look alters his initial impression. He insists on looking at the image "honestly," and looking honestly appears to have something to do with taking the image on its own terms and resisting the impulse to make the image do the work one wants it to do regardless of the violence this does to it. This practice is consistent with Said's claim in his essay on Mohr and John Berger's *The Seventh Man* that "[p]hotographs are . . . potentially insur-

rectionary, so long as the language interpreting them does not, like most semiological discourse, become 'reductive and disapproving'" ("Bursts" 151).[21] Said's second look does not entirely dismiss the idea of duality he mentions in his first assessment but rather modifies it so that it relates more directly to the question of seeing and being seen:

> As I look at him I am bothered by how unresolved his cheerful resolution seems to be. I see one lens that is clear, another that is hopelessly impaired. Admittedly he does not need to depend very much on the broken one, since the intact lens seems sufficient, but no matter how clearly he sees (or is seen), there is always going to be some interference in vision, as well as some small disturbance for whoever looks at him. (*Last Sky* 129)

In narrating his own process of looking and interpreting, Said dramatizes the image's resistance to his first attempt to articulate its meaning. Rather than try to dominate the image with words, he allows, even encourages, us to see where the image might be incommensurate with those words.[22]

But the passage is not only about resistance in the relationship between text and image; the two modes of representation also work together to help Said convey his point. He models an ethical way of seeing that depends on one's willingness to look again and revise one's interpretation accordingly, a process that occurs over time. The still image alone cannot teach us much about revision; it requires the assistance of textual narrative. Said therefore demonstrates how the interaction between text and image can be mutually productive. The image of the man with the shattered lens generates Said's textual reflections, while the text animates the image by engaging with it. The relationship of text to image in this passage models an ethical relationship to an "other": seeking to understand, to be in dialogue, to exchange—all while refusing to dominate.

Seeing Across and Without Borders
Said has, in the past, endorsed "mixing," "crossing over," and "stepping beyond boundaries" as "more creative human activities than staying inside rigidly policed borders" ("Ideology" 83–84). Formally speak-

ing, *After the Last Sky* is entirely about engaging in such activities. It deals implicitly and explicitly with questions of the boundaries between image and text: where they are located and reinforced; how permeable they are; what sorts of exchange and meaning they make possible and foreclose; and to what extent they are policed and challenged, and with whom this power rests. Not coincidentally, the book is also profoundly concerned with other kinds of geopolitical, physical, and conceptual boundaries and divisions: boundaries between ethnic groups, genders, and private and public realms. Borders, whether physical or cognitive, are intimately and intricately bound up with questions of difference and sameness, who "we" are and who "they" are. As such, they can be oppressive or protective, and often both in varying measure. Said explicitly addresses this doubleness of borders in "Reflections on Exile": "Borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond reason or necessity" (185). *After the Last Sky* demonstrates that image-text border crossing is more than just an aesthetic technique; it reflects the central political problem Said and Mohr address.[23]

In "An Ideology of Difference" (1985), which was published around the time that *After the Last Sky* was composed, Said reminds us that paying attention to difference is not always an inclusive gesture. A focus on difference can be constitutive of a radically unequal society, as is the case in Israel, where being a non-Jew—and especially an Arab—marks one as inferior and secondary. This is difference separated and "rigidly policed" ("Ideology" 84), and Said contends that it generally emerges out of a fantasy of the attainability of "a pure race, pure nation, or a pure collectivity" (81). More positively, however, acknowledging difference can mean embracing the mixing and impurity of "all social situations, and hence all populations, states, groupings" (81).

Borders and barriers are too often a hard fact of Palestinian life, separating Palestinians from one another and restricting their movement. In the chapter of *After the Last Sky* titled "States," Said laments that:

> The stability of geography and the continuity of land—these
> have completely disappeared from my life and the life of all

> Palestinians. If we are not stopped at borders, or herded into
> new camps, or denied reentry and residence, or barred from
> travel from one place to another, more of our land is taken, our
> lives are interfered with arbitrarily, our voices prevented from
> reaching each other. (19)

At the time of undertaking *After the Last Sky*, Said, as a member of
the Palestinian National Council, was unable to travel to Israel, the
West Bank, or Gaza. Mohr, however, had had access to the region for
years and had an archive of photos dating back to the late 1940s (Said,
"Panic" 16). From the beginning, the collaboration between Said and
Mohr represented an exercise in finding creative ways across borders.
On a formal level in *After the Last Sky*, the interplay between and cross-
fertilization of the photographic images and the text test the permeabil-
ity of representational borders and the productivity of working at and
across borders, including the real and perceived borders between the
visual and the verbal and the concrete and the symbolic. The book per-
forms what Said identifies as "the Palestinian genius," which "expresses
itself in crossings-over, in clearing hurdles, activities that do not lessen
the alienation, discontinuity, and dispossession, but that dramatize and
clarify them instead" (*Last Sky* 41).

The image of the man with the shattered lens and the text that Said
juxtaposes with it provide an excellent example of this. In seeking to
interpret the image, the text attempts to cross over representational
boundaries. It does so with limited success. Said records the failure of
his verbal interpretations to do full justice to the image, dramatizing the
difference and division between text and image at the same time that
the text itself illuminates the distance and division between Said and his
photographed compatriot. Even this limited success is productive, how-
ever, in that it does the work both of crossing over and, by doing this, of
highlighting the distance and division it must overcome.[24]

But while borders can be obstructive, divisive, and oppressive, they
can also protect and give definition. In other words, the relationship be-
tween Palestinians, violence, and borders is quite complex. It is not just
that borders do violence to Palestinian life and Palestinian nationhood; a

lack of national and epistemological/representational borders also leave Palestinians constantly vulnerable to various forms of violence. Susan Stanford Friedman speaks to the problem of "align[ing] the erection of fixed borders with oppression and resistance, while linking syncretism with peace and reconciliation of differences" (156). She observes:

> [S]yncretism is not always the result of peace. . . . The cultural hybridity and creolization that mark all forms of cultural expressivity . . . are often the product of unequal power relations, forced assimilation, and cultural erasure of difference imposed by a stronger power. . . . [I]n positing an intercultural narrative poetics, [one] need[s] to avoid the all-too-easy identification of hybridity as utopian panacea for the brutalities that difference can sometimes exhibit. (156)

Friedman eloquently expresses the problems of a too-easy critical celebration of the abolition of borders. Said and Mohr's exploration of the ambivalence of borders in *After the Last Sky* encourages a recognition of this complexity.

In some instances, text-image interaction demonstrates the vulnerability Palestinians are subject to without their own borders protecting them. In a particularly unsettling passage, Said writes, "None of us can forget the whispers and occasional proclamations that our children are 'the population factor'—to be feared, and hence to be deported—or constitute special targets for death. I heard it said in Lebanon that Palestinian children in particular should be killed because each of them is a potential terrorist. Kill them before they kill you" (*Last Sky* 25). The image placed beneath these chilling words shows a vertical grouping of three Palestinian children (fig. 3). The boy in front, who appears to be the most adventurous of the three, looks delighted to be having his picture taken. The two children standing behind him seem interested in the photographer but more apprehensive. The girl in the back furrows her brow slightly, but shyly smiles at the same time. The cast shadow of an unseen figure falling from the left edge of the image to the edge of the girl's shoulder adds an ominous note to the photo. Throughout the book, images are presented in varying formats. Some images are given a

page of their own, while others are crowded to the margins of the page by text. Many photographs are bounded by black lines, but quite a few are not bounded at all.[25] Most of the images appear in a conventional rectangular format, but the photo of the three children is one of a few exceptions. The picture is not cropped conventionally; instead, the edge of the image follows the contours of the children's bodies, as if they had

Figure 3. From After the Last Sky, *by Edward W. Said and Jean Mohr. Copyright © 1999. Reprinted by permission of Columbia University Press and Jean Mohr.*

been cut out of a snapshot with scissors. The effect renders the children visually vulnerable to the violent rhetoric hovering above them at the top of the page. In other words, no clear boundary, such as an unbroken black borderline, separates image from text; both simply occupy the white expanse of the page. Belying the potential qualification that such violent words are, in spite of their menace, "just words," the page symbolically questions the boundary between words and the world, between rhetorical violence and physical violence. No explicit boundary separates the words and the image, just as no geopolitical border protects Palestinian children from the kind of violence expressed in those words.

Of course, this page also relies on the combination of words and images to convey its message, so while on the one hand this passage is about the vulnerability of not being protected by a border, on the other it demonstrates productive exchange across representational boundaries. Text and image cooperate. The juxtaposition of the gazes of the happy children and the sad-eyed boy on the page opposite—who, clad in an ill-fitting John Travolta disco T-shirt, hardly accords with anyone's image of a "terrorist"—and the imperative "Kill them before they kill you" underscores the violence of that statement and the peril that Palestinians, lacking the protection of a secure homeland, often face from infancy.

At the end of *After the Last Sky*, Said claims, "My own purpose here was, with Jean Mohr, to give a sense of what our essential national incompleteness is now" (165). His assertion of an "essential national incompleteness" communicates his powerful yearning for a whole and coherent Palestinian nation. Indeed, Mitchell avers that "[*After the Last Sky*] is that most ambitious of books, a nation-making text" that aims "to help bring the Palestinians into existence for themselves as much as for others" (*Picture Theory* 321). *After the Last Sky* ccertainly represents an attempt to give shape to Palestinian experience, to sketch out its contours, and to define its boundaries; it proffers this attempt at representational unity to counteract the effects of dispossession and dispersion. In this sense, the text reflects a modernist impulse to shore fragments against ruins.

However, at the same time, it is both a reflection and condition of the text's double vision that it also always resists doing so, both because of Said's desire to underscore the "incompleteness" of a post-1948 Palestinian experience and because of his awareness of the violence that nation-making and nationalisms engender. At an earlier point in the text, Said draws attention to the epistemological and aesthetic violence of Israeli nation-making: "If our lesser status as the victims of a major Victim has any consolation, it is that from our relatively humble vantage point we can see our adversaries going through the enormously complicated procedures to get around us or pretend we are not there" (*Last Sky* 141). Said's double vision helps him recognize the epistemological and aesthetic violence that accompanies the state of Israel's attempt to maintain a coherent national narrative and fuels its physical violence. His "humble vantage point" enables him to see the difficulties and ethical pitfalls of the Israelis' attempt to stick to a particular national script; however, the recognition of these pitfalls complicates the process of generating a Palestinian counter-narrative. Thus, the critical double vision it engenders forces him to hint at his ambivalence about national coherence and completeness in general, given the ethical and human costs.

The curse and blessing of a critical double vision like that given expression in *After the Last Sky* is that it is fundamentally concerned with the act of unsettling: unsettling preconceptions, including those about what, whom, and how we see; unsettling positions; and unsettling established forms. This latter point is not merely aesthetic (as if any aesthetic question is ever *merely* aesthetic). A critical double vision gives rise to novel ways of thinking and giving form that can, in turn, generate new ways of seeing, which might, in their turn, produce solutions to seemingly intractable problems.

Notes

1 Within the Palestinian community, Said's family belongs to a minority Christian group that is part of a larger Palestinian Christian minority, which further complicates his affiliations and identity and exposes the limitations of the binary terms "insider" and "outsider."

2 Mitchell and Shloss have also addressed the doubleness of the book's form (Mitchell calls writing and photography the "two lenses of [the] book") as well as the interplay between text and image, in their incisive analyses of *After the Last Sky* (*Picture Theory* 316). My argument is indebted to their work and builds on their very important insights.

3 It should be noted that the nature of Said and Mohr's collaboration is somewhat unusual and uneven. Said was primarily responsible for the composition of the book, both in terms of the writing of the text and the selection, arrangement, and layout of the images. His selection and arrangement of the images preceded the writing of the text and so, to a degree, dictated what was written. Said also determined the placement and appearance of the images on the page (Said, "Panic" 16–17). Mohr's contribution—the importance of which I by no means wish to understate—lay primarily in having lent his photographic vision to Said's project.

4 I have previously addressed the idea of and necessity for a critical double vision in my article "'One Cannot Look at This'/'I Saw It': Pat Barker's *Double Vision* and the Ethics of Visuality." In Barker's novel, the need for this critical double vision arises out of the ethical challenge of producing and viewing representations of violence and suffering in distant places—a situation that has often led to charges of voyeurism from critics such as Sontag. To simply not produce or view such images or to focus primarily on the pitfalls of the production or reception of them is, to Barker, an inadequate response. Instead, her text models a way of seeing compassionately and critically simultaneously, a practice that requires "an ongoing engagement in the production and consumption of images concurrent with an unrelenting critique" (Kauffmann 80). In reading Barker's text alongside Said and Mohr's, I was struck by the fact that both explicitly evoke the phrase "double vision," which seems particularly apt for naming some of the central problems of violence in/and vision they address and, more crucially, the critical practices they have developed in response to those problems. It is, of course, important to note that Barker's novel engages with slightly different issues relating to the relationship between visuality and violence than Said and Mohr's book does and approaches them in different ways (through the form of a novel that strains against the strictures of its own genre, for example). However, it is also worth noting that adaptability is one of the advantages of a critical double vision as I envision it. See also Sontag's *On Photography* and *Regarding the Pain of Others*.

5 Rancière notes that it:

> is worthwhile . . . to rescue the analysis of images from the trial-like atmosphere in which it is still so often immersed. The critique of the spectacle has identified it with Plato's denunciation of the deceptiveness of appearances and the passivity of the spectator. The dogmatists of the unrepresentable have assimilated it to the religious controversy over idolatry.

> We must challenge these identifications of the use of image with idolatry, ignorance or passivity, if we want to take a fresh look at what images are, what they do and the effects they generate. (95)

See Mitchell's *Iconology* and *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*, Chow's "Toward an Ethics of Postvisuality," and Rancière's *The Emancipated Spectator*.

6 Said addresses this incident in his introduction to *After the Last Sky* (3–4).

7 Chow argues that the prevalence of critical iconophobia owes partly to critiques like Said's own *Orientalism*, understood (or misunderstood) by subsequent critics as a call to simply dismantle the West's images of "the rest" (Chow 677–78).

8 Writing in *Al-Ahram Weekly* in September 2001, Said observed that in the U.S., "Palestinians are viewed neither in terms of a story that is theirs, nor in terms of a human image with which people can easily identify. So successful has Israeli propaganda been that it would seem that Palestinians really have few, if any, positive connotations. They are almost completely dehumanised" ("Propaganda and War").

9 This idea may be a veritable critical commonplace by now, but it has only attained that status because of the groundbreaking work of scholars like Said. It bears repeating here because it is so central to Said and Mohr's aesthetic and ethical project in *After the Last Sky*.

10 Shloss states that in "[l]ooking at images of people and places to which he is legally denied access because of his nationality, Said reflects on the strangeness of a world in which knowledge of his own people has to be brought to him by a European photographer who saw for him and who probably communicated through an interpreter" (149).

11 For more on the colonial gaze, see Ryan, Pratt, and Alloula.

12 Shloss writes that "[i]f Mohr could not completely avoid being associated with 'official' supervision, he could at least avoid stereotyping the Palestinians as fighters, terrorists, or 'lawless pariahs' (*Last Sky* 4). Many of his images are highly self-reflective; that is, they speak imagistically of the situation of their own composition" (Schloss 149). This self-reflexivity is one way that a critical double vision is present *within* many of the images in *After the Last Sky*.

13 As Shloss notes, "Said . . . joins with his subject to look outward to those who observe in order to remind them that Others have a viewpoint and that their seeming marginality does not condemn them always to be the objects of history. Judgment is a mutual activity" (150). Of course, the "self-reflexivity" of Mohr's photographs, referenced in the previous note, and their emphasis on the mutual gazes of their subjects work in tandem with Said's writing to convey this message.

14 According to Quigley, "To bolster its territorial claim, the Zionist movement downplayed the size and longevity of the Arabs' residence in Palestine. This was expressed in a phrase that became popular: that the movement sought 'a land without people for a people without land'" (73).

15 In her review, Hazleton takes issue with Said's claims that Israelis do not see Palestinians, writing that to an Israeli it is "self-evident . . . that the Palestinians are real people. (Few of us, you see, are capable of Golda Meir's willful blindness: 'There is no such thing as the Palestinian people.' Everyday reality proves otherwise, no matter how much we try to blur it by using the word 'Arab' instead)" (21). Yet Hazleton seems to prove Said's point that a certain complex visual and epistemological sleight-of-hand frequently occurs whereby many Israelis "see" Palestinians and yet stop short of fully acknowledging the questions and counterclaims to which really seeing would give rise.

16 Butler notes, "The public sphere is constituted in part by *what can appear*, and the regulation of the sphere of appearance is one way to establish what will count as reality, and what will not. It is also a way of establishing whose lives can be marked as lives, and whose deaths will count as deaths" (xx–xxi; emphasis added).

17 These images of figures on the outside looking in also resonate with Said's position as an exile.

18 Shloss also quotes this passage and notes that "true human equity allows scrutiny to be reciprocal" (150).

19 Mitchell writes that Said's "recognition that the photographic image has a life beyond the discursive, political uses he would make of it . . . allows the photograph to 'look back' at him and us and assert [its] independence" (319).

20 See Mitchell's discussion of this image in *Picture Theory* (319–20).

21 Said's claim resonates with and anticipates Rancière's assertion that "[i]mages change our gaze and the landscape of the possible if they are not anticipated by their meaning and do not anticipate their effects" (105).

22 It is no surprise, then, that Mitchell selects *After the Last Sky* as one of the representative "case studies" for his examination of the photo-essay as genre. Mitchell asserts, "The text of the photo-essay typically discloses a certain reserve . . . in its claims to 'speak for' or interpret the images; like the photograph, it admits its inability to appropriate everything that was there to be taken" (289).

23 Shloss focuses on the aptness of the image-texts for thinking about borders and border-crossing in her essay, which concentrates on Berger and Mohr's *A Seventh Man* but also briefly addresses Mohr's work with Said on *After the Last Sky.* Her analysis focuses on the repressiveness of borders and how image-texts by Berger, Mohr, and Said enact symbolic border-crossings and returns that restore lives and relationships fragmented by official state power.

24 In Mitchell's analysis of the photo-essay, understanding the "resistance" the photograph puts up to textual interpretation is one of the most crucial and interesting tasks we undertake when we engage with the genre (see "The Photographic Essay: Four Case Studies" in *Picture Theory*).

25 As Said notes in his interview with Mitchell, he decided how and where images would appear on the page and whether or not they would have borders ("Panic" 17). The appearance or lack of a border on any given image, then, is deliberate.

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