

## 12 The tragic predicament

Post-war American intellectuals, acceptance and mass culture

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In his explosively controversial memoir *Making It* (1964), Norman Podhoretz claimed to have blown the lid off the hidden secret of intellectuals. Recalling his early years as a member of the 'family' of New York intellectuals in the 1950s, Podhoretz wryly introduced himself as 'a man who at the precocious age of thirty-five experienced an astonishing revelation: it is better to be a success than a failure... it was better to be recognized than to be anonymous'.<sup>1</sup> Podhoretz understood what Thomas Kuhn had been saying in a way about the structure of scientific communities and what Pierre Bourdieu and his followers would later argue about intellectual distinction.<sup>2</sup> Of course, many at the time found distasteful, or at least misleading, Podhoretz's Horatio Alger imagery of his rise to intellectual acceptance and sometimes even fame – it undermined the symbol of the intellectual as someone unencumbered by pecuniary or status concerns. Yet Podhoretz was surely near the target in realizing that it is the nature of the intellectual to make distinctions (between high, middle and lowbrow cultural pursuits, between who is and is not an intellectual) and to attempt to be distinguished in the making of such distinctions.

If Podhoretz's reflections lacked depth and subtlety, then the evaluation of historian Richard Hofstadter must be seen as more satisfactory and cognizant of another truth about intellectuals. Hofstadter, who employed the concept of status anxiety in his historical analyses, found intellectuals to be both desirous of popular acclaim yet also antagonistic to such acceptance: 'when bourgeois society rejects them [intellectuals], that is only one more proof of its philistinism; when it gives them an "honored place", it is buying them off. The intellectual is either shut out or sold out.'<sup>3</sup> For Hofstadter, this situation constituted 'the tragic predicament that faces any man who is in one way or another caught between his most demanding ideals and his more immediate ambitions and interests'.<sup>4</sup> This tension between ideals and interests could not be resolved, according to Hofstadter. Nor should it be. From this 'tragic predicament' – at times almost comic, since it seemed so overwrought with the type of manic anxiety felt by characters in a Saul Bellow novel – might arise a middle-ground position, one not based on foundational alienation nor clawing acceptance of power.

Instead, the intellectual would have 'primary responsibility to truth or to his creative vision, and he must be prepared to follow them even when they put him at odds with his society'.<sup>5</sup>

In many ways, Hofstadter's ideal of the intellectual anticipates the recent formulation of the 'connected critic', as developed by Michael Walzer.<sup>6</sup> Walzer maintains that the intellectual or critic should proudly complain, not out of ontological alienation, but rather with responsibility to both a particular community and to abstract values. Walzer, as much as Hofstadter, views the critic as in a tense position. Numbing, tragic alienation can be avoided or lessened so long as the intellectual remains bonded to a larger community and to the pursuit of truth and justice. Hofstadter and Walzer's formulations may sound quaint in this Foucauldian era of suspicion of the universal intellectual and of recourse to ideals of 'responsibility to truth', as if truth were unproblematic or unrelated to the exercise of power. But to post-war intellectuals, upholding intellectual and cultural standards, however vague they might appear, seemed to be both a noble and an absolutely critical endeavour.

There is absolutely no reason why the intellectual - as either Podhoretz's man 'on-the-make', Hofstadter's tragically conflicted thinker or Walzer's 'connected critic' - cannot be engaged in important intellectual work. After all, on one level such creative production would obviously win for him or her intellectual distinction, respect and status from one's peers. Irving Howe admitted that one could find among New York intellectuals 'petty greed or huckstering, now and again a drop into opportunism'. But, rightly concluded Howe, he and other intellectuals were driven by 'a gnawing ambition to write something, even three pages that might live'.<sup>7</sup>

While, in the post-war years, American intellectuals often succeeded in penning a few 'pages that might live', they also spent an inordinate amount of time trying to define boundaries, to make distinctions, to establish their authority in opposition to the foes of mass culture and anti-intellectualism. These intellectuals sought to define themselves, in part, by their choice of enemies, both real and imagined. The definition of membership, function and status in the intellectual community was not carried out only in highbrow journals such as *Partisan Review*, *Commentary* and *New Republic*. The process of establishing status and place for the intellectual in American society was also a creation of the instruments of the mass culture that intellectuals found so distasteful. Mass culture played a critical role in the representation of the intellectual, in defining what constituted a highbrow thinker. Not surprisingly, many intellectuals were unusually sensitive and wary of such presentations.

The harried, often intemperate, attacks launched by post-war intellectuals against mass and popular culture - film and comic strips, no less than popularizations of highbrow cultural forms such as symphonic concerts - were critical, then, more for their role in the acts of exclusion and self-definition than for their insight and depth. For post-war intellectuals, status

and subject were bound together. To be a serious intellectual in America required that one be opposed to the insidious, levelling forces of mass culture; showing too much respect for mass culture (except as a threat) could even bring forth doubts about one's own intellectual credentials. Such anxiety generally blinded post-war intellectuals to the richness of mass and popular culture; it forced intellectuals to overstate the lines dividing elite and popular culture. In the post-war years, the distinguishing marks of the intellectual, the distinctions that he or she was moved to generate were vague matters of taste that paraded as unassailable standards. And even the expression of such distinctions, in the process marking oneself off as an intellectual, also proved particularly incapable of bringing satisfaction or surcease from doubts about status to the intellectuals making them.<sup>8</sup>

Dangers to the life of the mind, to the strenuous ideal of highbrow cultural enterprise lurked everywhere. Delmore Schwartz's famous quip that 'sometimes even paranoids have real enemies' may be taken as paradigmatic of the world-view of post-war thinkers as they confronted the impossible problem of self-definition in the face of the presumed threats of mass culture, McCarthy era anti-intellectualism, and even adulation. All too often, post-war intellectuals drew up the following equation: mass culture = kitsch; high culture = intellectuals. In attempting to maintain their identity as intellectuals, in general opposition to mass culture, post-war thinkers ultimately cordoned themselves off from much that was rich, challenging and experimental in American popular culture. As Susan Sontag warned in 1964, in 'Notes on "Camp"', a crucial document that marked a shift away from the post-war antagonism to popular culture: 'there are other creative sensibilities besides the seriousness (both tragic and comic) of high culture and high style of evaluating people. And one cheats oneself, as a human being, if one has *respect* only for the style of high culture'.<sup>9</sup> But post-war intellectuals were incapable of dropping their faith in the redeeming power of high culture. In the process, they ironically undermined their own status and power as intellectuals. By sharpening too fine a point to the pencil of their own tastes, they became less self-critical, overly resistant to innovation and experimentation in the life of the mind. If today the complaint about political correctness is that there is too much cant about race, class and gender, then for the post-war intellectuals fighting on the culture front, their ideals of 'irony, paradox, ambiguity, and complexity' took on their own talismanic and limiting connotations.<sup>10</sup>

This closing of the mind of post-war intellectuals – condemned by Harold Rosenberg as 'The herd of independent minds'<sup>11</sup> – is best perceived in their strident protests against mass culture. To be sure, there were valid reasons behind the attack. In part, the critical concern with mass culture may well have been indicative of the shift of intellectuals away from Marxian and radical political criticism toward non-political cultural criticism. But for many intellectuals, whatever their political positions, mass culture appeared to be dangerously antagonistic to the purity of highbrow ideals; it threatened

to reduce serious thinking into a commodity for mass consumption, corrupting both idea and thinker. If the social life of the post-war world, as captured in the suburban phenomenon of inexpensive but bland housing, represented the future as conformity and complacency, then so too might mass culture promise a Levittown<sup>11a</sup> of the mind. Cultural degeneration in society at large appeared to be mimicked in the huge numbers of students flocking into the universities and colleges, many supported by the GI Bill.<sup>11b</sup> To meet the demands of the new students, many of whom might be perceived as not the most intellectually gifted, it was feared by many intellectuals that the educational system would be forced to spoon-feed information, to transform highbrow cultural monuments into middle-brow products made for easy and pleasant consumption.

But, it must be remembered, this almost hysterical concern with mass culture on the part of post-war intellectuals was caught up in the question of the status, prerogatives and very definition of the intellectual.<sup>12</sup> And, given the horrors of recent history, the crimes of Stalin, the excesses of the Popular Front ideology of the 1930s and 1940s (itself an exercise in the creation of an artificial cultural construct) and totalitarianism, American intellectuals were wary not only of their own positions in America, but also of the danger of mass culture feeding into a frenzy of anti-intellectualism.<sup>13</sup>

To be sure, there is justice in emphasizing as the defining themes of the post-war intellectuals their movement from radicalism to conservatism, from an adversarial to a celebratory stance vis à vis America, or from ideological commitments to the ideal of an 'end of ideology'.<sup>14</sup> Such concerns are readily apparent, for instance, in the famous symposium 'Our Country and Our Culture', organized in 1952 by the editors of the *Partisan Review*. The American economy's apparently successful evolution from scarcity to abundance, and the demands of international anti-Communist politics, helped to explain the sudden willingness of intellectuals to affirm American life and institutions. Distinguished theologian Reinhold Niebuhr noted that the dangerous ideals of the 1930s, utopianism and progress, might now be recalled by mature intellectuals in the 1950s as little more than 'an adolescent embarrassment'.<sup>15</sup> The symposium editorial statement found that 'the tide has begun to turn, and many writers and intellectuals now feel closer to their country and its culture'.<sup>16</sup>

The discussions in the symposium were also redolent with concerns about the challenge of mass culture and the status of the intellectual. In addition, opinion differed as to whether it was actually a good thing for intellectuals to begin to feel comfortable, to attain success in America. The issue of success did not simply mean the danger of the intellectual being corrupted by wealth or being led into complacency by academic appointments. It also raised the spectre of how might an intellectual remain an intellectual when his or her thoughts were no longer part of what the critic Lionel Trilling had once proudly referred to as an adversarial culture.<sup>17</sup> The interplay between success, alienation and mass culture

defined the extended conversation carried on by post-war intellectuals about their own function and fate.

To understand the post-war intellectuals' assault on mass culture, it is first necessary to consider two critical texts that helped to define the issue and to frame questions for them: Clement Greenberg's 'Avant-garde and kitsch' (1939) and Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951). Both works pivot around mass culture and its affinity with totalitarianism. Of equal importance, both works assay the ruins of modernism and the nature of alienation: themes that predominated in the work of post-war thinkers.<sup>18</sup>

Greenberg's first major essay reveals many of the formulations that later became his signature in theorizing abstract expressionism: form over content, and emphasis on the evolution of the medium. Yet the essay is drenched in the politics of anti-Stalinism and anti-totalitarianism. Still a Trotskyist when he wrote the essay, Greenberg was in a foul mood about the possibilities of social change to save high art. Indeed, he closed his essay with the faint hope that 'Today we look to socialism *simply* for the preservation of whatever living culture we have right now'. The forces of doom – capitalism, fascism and Stalinism – were all guilty of trafficking in kitsch, which Greenberg viewed as serving powerful interests. Greenberg upheld the ideal of the avant-garde, but he recognized that avant-garde abstractionism was based on a shift 'away from subject matter of common experience' toward 'the medium of his [the artist's] own craft'.<sup>19</sup> Modern art became difficult and inaccessible; alienated, uneducated masses were logically estranged from high art. In such a situation, the worker would be drawn to the familiar representationality of kitsch. Kitsch was 'ersatz culture... the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of its times'. Prepackaged, predictable, sentimental, kitsch required none of the reflection demanded to appreciate high art. Kitsch was imperialistic and seductive. It 'converts and waters down a great deal of avant-garde material for its own uses and its enormous profits are a source of temptation to the avant-garde itself, and its members have not always resisted this temptation'.

Kitsch then worked as a corrupting agent, spreading itself throughout the culture, undermining the avant-garde artist, highbrow culture and the authority of intellectuals. Vigilance against the 'virulence of kitsch' was demanded of the intellectual. Yet at this historical conjuncture, the problem confronting the intellectual was more than kitsch as an abstract entity, to be quarantined off into a sanitary closet so that high culture might thrive. Greenberg emphasized that kitsch faithfully and powerfully served the totalitarian state as a vehicle for propaganda and legitimation: 'Kitsch keeps a dictator in closer contact with the "soul" of the people.' While dictators such as Mussolini might flirt briefly with high modernism, they were inexorably moved to repudiate artistic experimentation in favour of kitsch which supported the illusion of the masses being in control. Thus, Italian modernists 'are sent into the outer darkness, and the new railroad station in Rome will not be modernistic'.<sup>20</sup>

In his connecting totalitarianism (and capitalism) with kitsch art production, Greenberg had outlined the dangerous logic of mass culture and the shaky future of the avant-garde. Such concerns had not been centrally discussed during the war years. But with the conclusion of the Second World War, and the publication of Arendt's massive tome, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, the emphases of Greenberg on art and politics, kitsch and avant-garde, mass culture and totalitarianism, again came to the fore.

Arendt's volume achieved canonical status among post-war intellectuals because of the authority of her prose, from the authenticity of her experiences as a survivor of the Nazi assault on culture, the sparkle of her big ideas, and out of her exalted position among New York intellectuals. As Alfred Kazin remembered, Arendt 'became vital to my life. . . it was for the *direction* of her thinking that I loved her, for the personal insistencies she gained from her comprehension of the European catastrophe. She gave her friends. . . intellectual courage before the moral terror the war had willed to us'.<sup>21</sup> Such cultural capital was joined by a personal power that 'bristled with intellectual charm, as if to reduce everyone in sight to an alert discipleship', recalled Irving Howe: 'Rarely have I met a writer with so acute an awareness of the power to overwhelm'.<sup>22</sup>

Arendt documented, in a metaphysical as much as a historical sense, the destructive wake of the decline of the national state, the rise of imperialism and, finally, how totalitarianism offered to resolve the state of chronic loneliness of modern men and women. In the end, the specific interpretations and the sweeping structure of the argument were less important to post-war American intellectuals than the nightmarish, numbing vision that Arendt painted on her canvas. The category of class, once so central to the social theories of intellectuals, had been demolished by the alienation of individuals from their own class and by the power of the totalitarian state to transcend class boundaries. Appeals to class were now viewed as divisive and counter-productive, helping to create the orgies of destruction that made the totalitarian turn all the more confounding and frightful.<sup>23</sup>

Historian Wilfred McClay is certainly on target when he notes that 'For American thinkers, the disturbing postwar vision of totalitarianism [as developed by Arendt, as well as by Erich Fromm] disclosed some of the anxieties and projections of the free-floating intellectual trying to find his way in a democratic social order'.<sup>24</sup> Alienation, loneliness, the atomized individual, superfluity, are the figures of expression that stalk the barren landscape, seared by the horrors of totalitarianism. Not surprisingly, while Arendt used these images to explain the plight of modern man in the mass society, intellectuals would employ these same terms to define their own status. Thus, when intellectuals interrogated the implications of mass culture, they were also looking inside themselves and pondering their own fates.<sup>25</sup> Thus, Arendt bequeathed to post-war intellectuals a heightened fear of the seductive and pervasive power of mass culture. She strikingly detailed

how the elite and mob coalesced in totalitarian movements to 'destroy respectability'.<sup>26</sup> As Greenberg had noted with kitsch, so too did Arendt consider the massification of society to topple the solidity of tradition and the high ideals of European culture. Her analysis of the power of propaganda in the hands of the totalitarian state drove home, as did Orwell's *1984*, the ability of dictatorial regimes to manufacture truth and to disseminate it to the masses, who were all too eager to accept falsehood and absurdity so long as it was cloaked in the cape of authority and fantasy. Even more frightening, perhaps, Arendt demonstrated that avant-garde culture's attack on 'all traditional values and propositions' had served the forces of reaction. Thus, ironically, 'the only political result of Brecht's "revolution" was to encourage everyone to discard the uncomfortable mask of hypocrisy and to accept openly the standards of the mob'.<sup>27</sup>

The outlines of the post-war intellectuals' critique of mass culture are sufficiently familiar and consistently blurry. Raised most persistently by Dwight Macdonald in a series of essays published over a ten-year period, mass culture was conceived of as an 'infection [that] cannot be localized'.<sup>28</sup> Macdonald compared popular culture (he would later come to prefer the term 'mass culture') with fascism. In the competition for the hearts, minds and tastes of the mass, kitsch art and fascism proved too formidable for the producers of high culture. But equally disconcerting, popular culture refused to allow high culture to maintain its own sphere of influence and dominance. 'Good art competes with kitsch, serious ideas compete with commercialized formulae'. The serious producer of art finds his or her services suddenly in demand by the organs of mass culture. This led to what Macdonald called 'phoney-Avant-Gardism' which 'is not a raising of the level of Popular Culture, as it might superficially appear to be, but rather a corruption of High Culture. There is nothing more vulgar, in fact, than sophisticated kitsch', said Macdonald, simply repeating Greenberg's earlier formulation.<sup>29</sup>

Macdonald and his allies lamented that 'If there were a clearly defined cultural *elite*, then the masses could have their *kitsch* and the *elite* could have its High Culture, with everybody happy'. Macdonald failed to recognize how impossible was the task of having a clearly defined intellectual elite since the lines between high and low culture are by nature shifting, constructed rather than pre-existent. Especially troublesome to Macdonald was the imperialistic nature of mass culture and kitsch, as opposed, presumably, to the benign attributes of high culture. The political, as much as the aesthetic, dangers of this were apparent to many post-war intellectuals. Bernard Rosenberg, one of two editors of an influential volume on mass culture published in 1957, proclaimed that 'At its worst, mass culture threatens not merely to cretinize our taste, but to brutalize our senses while paving the way to totalitarianism'. Mass culture produced likely specimens for totalitarianism by cheapening life, by denying to human beings 'any really satisfying experience'. Kitsch arose, Rosenberg stressed, in the tradition of Greenberg, out of industrialization and increased literacy,

along with the decline of the aristocracy and the rise of democracy. Little hope for avoiding the infection of mass culture and kitsch appeared on the horizon, only greater dehumanization of the individual, deadening of sympathies, and objectification of men into kitsch.<sup>30</sup>

Intellectuals, whether radical or conservative in their personal politics, came together on few issues as much as on mass culture. Radical Irving Howe, borrowing imagery from the Frankfurt School, went so far as to announce that Donald Duck was 'a frustrated little monster who has something of the SS man in him and whom we, also having something of the SS man in us, naturally find quite charming'.<sup>31</sup> Conservative Ernest Van Den Haag emphasized the 'invasion' of popular on high culture. Middlebrow culture, which attempted to make available to the masses predigested versions of great works of art and literature, was assured popular acclaim but was doomed to ultimate aesthetic failure. 'Bach candied by Stokowski, Bizet coarsened by Rodgers and Hammerstein... Shakespeare spliced and made into a treacly musical comedy.' Nor should apostles of mass education take succour in the ideal that through this type of initiation into 'high' culture might the masses flock to encounter the 'real thing'. Quite the contrary. 'Even if a predigested version were to lead to the original work, the public would be confronted with ideas and tropes which in their adulterated form have become counterfeit.' In the end, all high culture, under the weight of mass production, is reduced to 'familiar clichés'.<sup>32</sup> But 'familiar clichés', more than a willingness to discriminate and evaluate the mass culture of the 1950s, became the note that post-war intellectuals sounded all too often. In playing this song over and over again, intellectuals were demarcating their territory and attempting to establish their own credentials as the guardians of what might be valuable in culture. 'No intellectual life', wrote Niebuhr, 'can be at ease with the massive spiritual, moral, and cultural crudities, which seek to make themselves normative in a civilization'. The intellectual, warned Niebuhr, must not allow such 'crudities' and 'the synthetic and sentimentalized art of Hollywood or even the lower depths' of television to become normative.<sup>33</sup>

To be sure, not all intellectuals in America faced mass culture with abject fear and trembling. While mass culture had, as Arendt clearly indicated, aided totalitarianism, American social scientists emphasized that such a state would not happen here because of the pluralistic, group-centred nature of American life. Daniel Bell even questioned the heuristic value of the notion of mass society as 'very slippery. Ideal types, like the shadows in Plato's cave, generally never give us more than a silhouette'. Bell found that Arendt's description of the modern age of the masses failed to account for 'the complex, rightly striated social relations of the real world'.<sup>34</sup> For Bell, as much as for sociologists David Riesman and Edward Shils, the structures of American society - family, church, neighbourhood, trade unions - served as buffers against massification. Riesman proclaimed that 'I see no evidence of the alleged increasing power of the mass media producers... American

culture constantly outdistances its interpreters'.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, Riesman stressed, mass cultural productions while powerful, were not passively encountered by their intended audiences. All works of popular culture, no less than high art, were reinterpreted by the individual. In his 'Listening to popular music' (1947), Riesman demonstrated that the presumed 'mass' of teenagers listening to popular music were divided in allegiances and tastes. This 'training' in choosing what type of music they liked, argued Riesman, allowed teenagers to express 'consumer preferences' and, in unsophisticated form, to both 'talk about music' and 'to talk about other things'. Thus the concluding theme of *The Lonely Crowd*, autonomy through the ability to make conscious choices, was not undermined so much by mass culture as made possible by it.<sup>36</sup>

However, Bell and Riesman did worry about the negative effects of middlebrow and mass culture on high culture. Although calling for more study of mass culture's limiting stereotypes, Riesman admitted 'that there is a lot to be said for the position held by the critic Clement Greenberg and many others that the social mobility of the middlebrow... has damaged and deranged high culture'.<sup>37</sup> And historian Howard Brick notes that Daniel Bell, especially in the 1940s, 'worried over the totalitarian propensities of frustrated masses' and mass culture. Ours is 'a time', Bell wrote, 'when our emotions are drained from us by the repetitiveness of horror and their place is pumped in the euphoric sentimentalism of the standardized entertainments'.<sup>38</sup> Although art critic Harold Rosenberg found Dwight Macdonald's assault on mass culture to be a bit too earnest and hysterical, a case of 'the intellectualization of kitsch', he refused to become a cheerleader for kitsch. 'There is only one way to quarantine kitsch', wrote Rosenberg, and that is 'by being too busy with art'.<sup>39</sup> While conservative sociologist Edward Shils pooh-poohed his fellow intellectuals' denigration of kitsch, he admitted that 'it would, of course, be frivolous to deny the aesthetic, moral, and intellectual unsatisfactoriness of much of popular culture or to claim that it shows the human race in its best light'.<sup>40</sup>

Perhaps the most important subtext for discussions of mass culture in the 1940s and 1950s revolved around the implications of mass culture for the status and function of the intellectual. In this dialogue, post-war American intellectuals were engaging in one of the proper enterprises of the intellectual, the examination of his or her own *raison d'être*. Discussion began well before the end of the Second World War and continued into the 1950s, as American thinkers fretted about what, C. Wright Mills asked, should be 'The social role of the intellectual'? Intellectuals, in Mills's analysis, were threatened by bureaucratic co-optation and tragic inwardness. Bureaucratic society increasingly 'dwarfed' the individual and drew the thinker into its powerful grip, thus limiting expression and independence. Yet the response of some intellectuals to this encroachment on the ideal of the intellectual as critic or outsider, had also been mistaken, resulting in an impotent idealization of a politics of distance. Emphasis on

the tragic view of life sanctioned personal escape and estrangement over social commitment. The cult of alienation, Mills prophesied, would only grow stronger; while valuable 'in the pursuit of truths', alienation must not become 'a political fetish'.<sup>41</sup> But if Mills was strong on the problems confronting the intellectual in the dawn of the post-war world, his essay was less forthcoming about what the specific role of the intellectual should be, or at least how the intellectual might achieve the ideal of critical independence without sacrificing a radical politics of commitment. Despite all the print that was spilled on this issue in the late 1940s and 1950s, no one really resolved the issue.

After the war, Mills and a host of other American intellectuals constantly returned to examine the social role and future of the intellectual. Irving Howe's highly influential essay, 'This age of conformity' (1954), considered the 'whole position and status of intellectuals', finding them, in the face of a mass society, sadly 'responsible and moderate. And tame'. An intellectual edge traditionally had been provided by Bohemia and the avant-garde, which 'at least in America, is becoming extinct'.<sup>42</sup> Two years later, in 1956, historian H. Stuart Hughes wondered 'Is the intellectual obsolete?' For Hughes, the pull of academic conservatism and the continuation of anti-intellectualism in America conspired to undermine the ideal function of the intellectual as a 'freely speculating mind'. While Hughes concluded that intellectuals were not obsolete just yet, they faced at best 'a dubious future', marked by a critical public and 'subtle pressures' to conform 'to the role of a mental technician'.<sup>43</sup> At the heart of the intense fascination and fear of mass culture on the part of intellectuals, literary critic Leslie Fiedler noted, was that 'fear of the vulgar is the obverse of the fear of excellence, and both are aspects of the fear of difference'.<sup>44</sup> This fear reflected intellectuals' own uncertainty about their place in an American society that appeared to be increasingly given to mass education and popular entertainments. In many ways, Irving Howe captured these concerns in his criticism of kitsch and conformity while also indicating how the critical perspective of post-war intellectuals became ossified and problematic, thereby undermining their ability to be attuned to shifts in American culture and made their cultural capital deflationary by the mid-1960s.

Howe is an intriguing figure in these debates about the status of intellectuals and the question of mass culture, in part, because he was, at least in retrospect, his own best critic. Writing in 1970 about the prevalent post-war critique of mass culture, Howe noted that it 'was tightly drawn, almost an intellectual and analytical cul-de-sac'. Moreover, Howe recognized, that for many intellectuals the critique of mass culture had replaced an earlier critique of capitalism, only this time the masses were blamed for the failure of socialism in America: 'If you couldn't stir the Proletariat to action, you could denounce Madison Avenue in comfort'.<sup>45</sup>

Post-war intellectuals, through the critique of mass culture, as Howe understood, were attempting to define themselves in the face of greater

security and acceptance in America. As noted earlier, Howe believed that by the mid-1950s intellectuals had become too tame in their criticism, too connected to institutions of power or conservatism. Academe forced intellectuals 'not only to lose their traditional rebelliousness but to one extent or another *they cease to function as intellectuals*'.<sup>46</sup> The critique of mass culture helped to define the programme of intellectuals, allowed them to remain 'outsiders' without politically stigmatizing them as leftists.

Howe, a professed anti-Stalinist radical, believed that intellectuals needed to be alienated from mass culture. This did not negate their ability to accept, in general, American society, certainly in comparison with other available systems; but it did not excuse the intellectual from criticizing the society. For Howe, the intellectual was, by definition, alienated from any society, not from oneself. This constituted the honourable tradition of the intellectual. Alienation, it seemed, promised to offset the dangerously seductive and corrupting power of middlebrow and mass culture on the intellectual and to blunt the barbs of McCarthyite anti-intellectualism. Such an attitude of alienation, when tied to the ideals of complexity and nuance and to the social and political reading of literature, promised Howe the tools with which to resist conformity.<sup>47</sup>

When Howe surveyed the academic mind in the 1950s, he found too much highbrow conformity. Conformity in concerns and methods had, in the hands of the New Critics, resulted in an orthodoxy riven with 'ideological motifs' that served to hermetically separate literature from society.<sup>48</sup> The few scholars who had escaped the orthodoxy of the New Critics and the antiquarianism of academic criticism, tumbled into another mode of conformity, an emphasis on Original Sin that promised, for literary men, the chance to 'relish disenchantment' and to revel in a 'sense of profundity and depth'. Divorced from society, enchanted with his or her own disenchantment, the scholar had moved too comfortably into a stance of estrangement and political impotence.<sup>49</sup> Alienation had come to the intellectuals, but not with the bite that Howe had imagined or desired.

Howe desperately dreamed of a new avant-garde, working 'in behalf of critical intransigence'. While Howe might attempt to realize this ideal, without having to have any truck with middlebrow or popular culture, his own ideal of an avant-garde was problematic. In essence, his committed brand of criticism, anchored in his social reading of literature and the admittedly decaying ideals of modernism, was a mode of exercising intellectual authority, of creating canons of interpretation, 'perspectives of observation'.<sup>50</sup>

In a famous essay discussing African-American writers – Richard Wright, James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison – Howe attempted to force his political and aesthetic values on Ellison. The naturalistic power of Wright, Howe opined, was in his ability to make 'his readers confront the disease of our culture' – racism.<sup>51</sup> This was not central to Ellison's work. Certainly Howe appreciated Ellison's imaginative skills in *Invisible Man* (1952). Ellison 'is

richly, wildly inventive; his scenes rise and dip with tension, his people bleed, his language sings. No other writer has captured so much of the hidden gloom and surface gaiety of Negro life.' But, Ellison fails on political grounds; he is guilty of a 'sudden, unprepared and implausible assertion of unconditioned freedom'<sup>52</sup> Given the social reality of blacks in racist America, Howe found this a dangerous illusion, a complacent concept. Freedom must be fought for, it cannot be proclaimed in a novel. Thus, Howe condemned Ellison for creatively positing existential freedom for a black man in a society which, according to Howe, prevented that very possibility from being realized. His social reading of the creative spaces of the novel was unrelentingly narrow and harshly blind to the greatness of the work as a work of art. In this sense, Howe was reducing Ellison to a formula, itself an act of kitsch criticism.

Ellison did not appreciate Howe's political scolding. In contrast to Howe, Ellison was compulsively and proudly a creative writer, without a hint of highbrow antagonism to mass culture. Comfortable in his role as an intellectual and artist, Ellison did not need to make a fetish of his alienation, race or politics – although all spoke in his artwork. He gyrated marvellously between a blues idiom and knowing political and philosophical commentary. The need to distinguish himself as a thinker, to assert himself in terms of practical politics or sociological analysis, was not present in Ellison as it was in Howe and other post-war, anti-Stalinist intellectuals. Ellison refused to be a representative for the Negro condition. As an African-American trying to be a creative artist and thinker, Ellison consciously cultivated his own voice and freedom. Surely the black writer functions in conditions not of his own choosing, wrote Ellison, but 'He is no mere product of his socio-political predicament'. The black writer, proclaimed Ellison, 'in a limited way, is his own creation'.<sup>53</sup>

If Howe's comprehension of the function of the intellectual as politically engaged dissenter and his ideal of the social construction of literature were somewhat limiting, so too were his aesthetic ideals unable to cope with new forms of art and mass culture. While Howe enjoyed baseball because of its leisurely manner and the ability of fans present at the game to interact with one another, he damned the darkened chambers of the movie theatre as isolating and dangerous – productive of a fascist mentality.<sup>54</sup> By the late 1960s and early 1970s, Howe had wrapped himself in the ideals of complexity, 'nuance and ambiguity', distanced reason and the necessity of tragedy to attack the culture of the New Left, which Howe found rent with 'relaxed pleasures and surface hedonism' Howe thus railed against the threat of mass culture and the 'high priests' of 'neo-primitivism' Norman Brown, Herbert Marcuse, Marshall McLuhan, Allen Ginsberg and Norman Mailer. The new culture, in Howe's estimate, 'devalues the word. . . favors monochromatic cartoons, companionate grunts and glimpses of the ineffable in popular ditties. It has humor, but not much wit. Of the tragic it knows next to nothing. . . it arms itself with the

paraphernalia of post-industrial technique and crash-dives into a Typee of neo-primitivism'.<sup>55</sup>

Howe's impassioned complaints captured the danger inherent in the intellectual enterprise – the problem of needing to delimit the 'proper' scope of the life of the mind to categories of acceptable and non-acceptable. The process may be necessary but it promotes – as in Howe's reaction to Ellison and Ginsberg – a type of stagnation and close-mindedness.<sup>56</sup> Howe was hardly alone in these qualities, the challenge of the 1960s counter-culture also brought forth the ire of Diana Trilling as well as Norman Podhoretz's famous attack on the Beat writers. Writing in the *Partisan Review*, Podhoretz found the Bohemianism of the 1950s to be 'hostile to civilization; it worships primitivism, instinct, energy, "blood"'. In the end, the Beats were condemned not only as anti-intellectual, but also as suffering 'from a pathetic poverty of feeling as well'. Podhoretz found an adolescent, 'suppressed cry' in Kerouac's books that shouted: 'Kill the intellectuals who can talk coherently.' On the one side, then, stood the primitivism and anti-intellectualism of the Beats, on the other side were arrayed the faithful guardians of civilization, the intellectuals. In sum, the dispute, according to Podhoretz, was about 'being for or against intelligence itself'.<sup>57</sup>

The battle lines were drawn around both political views and intellectual styles. Especially central was the desire of the post-war intellectuals to maintain their distinction as intellectuals by excluding those who did not seem to warrant inclusion, according to preconceived criteria of high versus low culture. In the end, the walls of the post-war intellectual world toppled in the 1960s. Norman Mailer, Susan Sontag, and even Dwight Macdonald defected, and with the rise of a new set of thinkers associated with the founding of *The New York Review of Books* in 1963 and with the counter-cultural style of the New Left, the fear of mass culture and the prerogatives of the older group of intellectuals faded into the sunset.

If, by the 1960s, the post-war intellectuals were in a well-deserved state of anxiety about the counter-cultural assault, this was hardly a new position for them to occupy, indeed, it might be said that they had long been accustomed to manning the barricades of high culture against the unruly mass. What made the assault of the New Left so painful to the post-war intellectuals was that many intellectuals seemed to be acting in the name of anti-intellectualism. This stance not only challenged the cherished ideals of Howe and his compatriots, but it wreaked havoc with their sense of the function of the intellectual. Certainly post-war intellectuals had grown self-satisfied, secure in their positions as the arbiters of highbrow taste and culture. Although they had denounced the seductiveness of academic positions, even Howe, within a year of his famous critique of academe in 1954, was teaching at Brandeis University. But, in fairness to the post-war intellectuals, they had from the outset placed themselves in a no-win position. Try as they might to define the function of the intellectual, they failed to find any resting place. They were stymied not simply by the inability

of abstract ideas to resist changing social conditions, but also by their own conflicting views about what it meant to achieve success in American society. They craved adulation and respect, but shivered when it came from middlebrow culture.

The silent disease of acceptance, as much as antagonism from mass culture or hippies, frightened post-war intellectuals. Although Hofstadter documented many instances of anti-intellectualism in the McCarthy Red Scare era and throughout American history, he realized that anti-intellectualism was a given in an egalitarian, democratic society. But popular antipathy to the life of the mind in America was generally accompanied by the intellectuals' own gnawing fear of being accepted with open arms into the American mainstream. As Hofstadter remarked, intellectuals were caught in an essential paradox. 'while they do resent evidences of anti-intellectualism, and take it as a token of a serious weakness in our society, they are troubled and divided in a more profound way by their acceptance'.<sup>58</sup>

The two sides of this equal fear of acceptance and of alienation are displayed in intellectuals' reaction to middlebrow representations of intellectuals in the 1950s. To be sure, during the McCarthy years, anti-intellectualism was rife and debilitating. Intellectuals, although often in the forefront of anti-Stalinism and pro-Americanism, nevertheless were viewed by the public as fostering a questioning attitude that aided subversive activities or weakened the resolve to fight Communism. And intellectual questioning undermined the moral fibre of America, according to evangelist Billy Graham, by promoting 'reason, rationalism, mind culture, science worship, the working power of government, Freudianism, naturalism, humanism, behaviorism, positivism, materialism and idealism', ending in the view 'that morality is relative – that there is no norm or absolute standard'.<sup>59</sup>

Yet, it must be noted, the early years of the 1950s were also salad days for American intellectuals, the time when they began to achieve greater status and influence. Whether such a change was good or bad was discussed regularly, but all agreed that improved status was undeniable. Lionel Trilling, who thought it a good thing for intellectuals to be connected with the wealthy classes, and especially vice versa, noted that in America 'Intellect has associated itself with power as never before in history, and is now conceded to be itself a kind of power'.<sup>60</sup> This formulation, of intellectuals as an interest group within American society, became part of the general theory of group interest and pluralism that dominated sociological thought throughout the 1950s.<sup>61</sup>

Fears of success are more intriguing than anxiety about rejection. Even before the Soviet launching of Sputnik put a premium on the power of intellectuals and scientists in the Cold War, the image of the intellectual in the popular culture of early-1950s America was hardly a nightmare vision of narrow-minded populist bigots ranting and raving about the sins of intellectuals. Even the designation that at first seemed to most denigrate the

intellectual – the egghead – underwent a series of subtle transformations that reveal the increasing status and acceptance of the intellectual in this period.

Intellectuals, despite their obvious ability to wield ideas, create images and prepare narratives, do not control their own image. The cultivation of an image is a bottom or middle-up, quite as much as a top-down, enterprise. In 1952, at the same moment when the ‘Our Country and Our Culture’ symposium was trumpeting the intellectuals’ appreciation of America, signs were also present that America was not quite so enthused by the intellectuals. Louis Bromfield, in the rabidly anti-communist journal of opinion *The Freeman*, defined an ‘Egghead’ as:

A person of spurious intellectual pretensions, often a professor or the protégé of a professor. Fundamentally superficial. Over-emotional and feminine in reactions to any problem. Supercilious and surfeited with conceit and contempt for the experience of more sound and able men . . . A self-conscious prig, so given to examining all sides of a question that he becomes thoroughly addled while remaining always in the same spot. An anemic bleeding heart.

Such ‘eggheads’, Bromfield further proclaimed, had supported traitors like Alger Hiss, allowed Stalinism to thrive in America, and appeased Communism abroad.<sup>62</sup>

While Bromfield attempted to use the term ‘egghead’ to condemn intellectuals, the notion was not always scrambled in that manner. Egghead entered the American political lexicon during the presidential contest of 1952, which pitted Democrat Adlai Stevenson, Governor of Illinois, against Republican Dwight D. Eisenhower. As numerous reporters noted, Stevenson’s well-crafted and intelligently nuanced speeches had gained him a reputation for intellectuality. A good number of college-educated Americans, and certainly many intellectuals, came to identify with Stevenson, perceiving his candidacy, in the words of Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr, as a vehicle ‘not to attain public objectives or even to affect public policy, but to affirm an interior sense of admiration and of belief’.<sup>63</sup> As both Republican and Democratic intellectuals flocked to support Stevenson, pro-Eisenhower forces recognized the defection of intellectuals, but without especial worry. Following a particularly strong Stevenson speech on the complicated issue of atomic energy, an Eisenhower stalwart admitted that intellectuals were drawn to Stevenson: ‘But how many egg-heads do you think there are?’<sup>64</sup> Eisenhower’s smashing victory in the 1952 election drove home the obvious fact that intellectuals were not a significant portion of the electorate.

Defeat for the intellectuals and their sainted candidate turned into bitterness, as they felt themselves buffeted about by populists, McCarthyites and anti-intellectuals of all stripes. In a particularly heated observation, Schlesinger moaned that ‘the word “egghead” seemed to detonate the pent-up ferocity of twenty years of impotence’ on the part of the business

interests. The Babbitts of America had arisen and smote down the intellectuals, repudiating the hope and image that intellectuals might continue to contribute their expertise to the national government, as they had done under the New Deal and wartime administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt. While Schlesinger admitted that Eisenhower was not an anti-intellectual himself – he had after all served as president of Columbia University – many leading Republicans ‘were less admiring of the life of the mind’ and were attempting ‘to convert the Democratic defeat into an egghead rout by tracking the intellectual down to his final stronghold, the university’.<sup>65</sup>

What makes this statement appear so much of a tempest in a teapot is that it perfectly captures the anomalous position of the intellectual. Under attack, the intellectuals cried out that they were in danger – but in danger of what? Of losing jobs to the forces of reaction? To be sure that happened; all too often. But what Schlesinger failed to acknowledge, as Irving Howe and C. Wright Mills perfectly comprehended, was that acceptance by the public was not unproblematic. Success also brought difficulties and anxieties, albeit of a different kind, to the intellectual. The allure of power, the seduction of status threatened intellectuals in a manner that Schlesinger in 1952 failed to countenance. Thus, the danger of antagonism on the part of the populace to the intellectual represented an ironic flip side to the dangerous celebration of the intellectual on the part of the populace.

In 1954, *Time* magazine, a proudly middlebrow publication, decided to address the status of the intellectual in American society. Only a couple of years after the Stevenson débâcle, and while the stench of McCarthyism still filled the air, *Time* magazine pictured on its cover a bona fide intellectual, David Riesman. The article was largely an accessible consideration of the American character, a synopsis of the inner and other directed concept of the individual that Riesman had written about in his *The Lonely Crowd* and that he returned to in 1954 with the publication of *Individualism Reconsidered*.<sup>66</sup> In typical *Time* fashion, the essential ideas of personality types developed by Riesman were glibly laid out. Faced with the dilemma that Riesman had grappled with in his concluding chapter of *The Lonely Crowd* about how to achieve autonomy in a culture that was organized to stress getting along and manipulation rather than to rely on the gyroscope of the self-sufficient, autonomous individual, *Time* turned to Riesman for advice. More play and expertise as a consumer of the arts would aid the individual to focus on what might be potentially important to him. This need not necessarily lead the intellectual or average citizen away from politics; it would grant both a larger, more energetic perspective. Moreover, Riesman advised his fellow intellectuals to stop being so prissy in their antagonism to mass culture, and ‘to stop worrying about whether their judgments are approved in the market place or the ballot box, to pursue truth as independent men, affecting society as models of autonomy, not as victors on this public issue or that’.<sup>67</sup>

As important as the ideas that Riesman presumed to communicate for *Time*, was the image that he was given by middlebrow culture. In an information box entitled 'An Autonomous Man', the magazine offered biographical information that highlighted Riesman's breadth of knowledge, the non-specialized 'lingo' of his prose, and his refusal to rise in the hot air balloon of pure theory. Riesman became the intellectual as Everyman, comfortable with his large and active family, living in Chicago with two servants and summering on a Brattleboro, Vermont dairy farm. He was also a 'vigorous, competent' tennis player, a man attuned to clothing, food, good wine and a fan of movies ('but not "message" movies, because movies' proper message is the "enrichment of fantasy"').<sup>68</sup> Indeed, the *Time* profile had transformed the alienated intellectual into a parallel version of the then emerging 'Playboy' male, but softened by a pinch of the ideal father, for better consumption and appreciation by middle-class readers.<sup>69</sup>

By 1956, again before Sputnik had been launched, the reformation of the image of the intellectual was well under way. Articles appeared in two exemplary middlebrow publications that announced the intellectual a major, positive force in American cultural and political life. A *Newsweek* cover depicted an egg wearing a pair of dark-framed glasses. The accompanying story found that intellectuals – affectionately viewed as eggheads – were now 'in the limelight, and somewhat favorably so'. In fact, even President Eisenhower, when a reporter noticed that he had a Latin motto on his desk, was able to joke, 'That proves I'm an egghead'. Not only could Eisenhower now claim egghead status, but as *Newsweek* clearly indicated, eggheads were powerful forces within both parties, picturing Republican intellectuals 'on the firing line' and important Democratic thinkers, including Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr and John Kenneth Galbraith.<sup>70</sup>

In the same year, *Time* magazine chipped in with a cover story entitled 'America and the Intellectual: The Reconciliation', with Columbia University cultural historian Jacques Barzun and the flame of knowledge burning brightly on the cover. The upshot of this story, mimicking the emphasis of the symposium 'Our Country and Our Culture', was that America's important intellectuals – Barzun, Niebuhr, Walter Lippmann, Trilling, Sidney Hook and Paul Tillich – had moved from 'protest' to 'affirmation'. Equally important, intellectuals, in embracing America, were discovering that America was more than willing to hug them in return. The intellectual is, concluded *Time*, closer than ever before to assuming the role he originally played in America: 'the critical but sympathetic – and wholly indispensable – bearer of America's message'. Barzun characterized the essential property of this message, borrowing a phrase from F. Scott Fitzgerald, as 'a willingness of the heart'.<sup>71</sup>

One would presume that American intellectuals, as presented by *Time* and *Newsweek*, would at last rest comfortably with their ideal function of connected critics, 'critical but sympathetic'. After all, wasn't that precisely what Schlesinger had bemoaned with the defeat of Stevenson and the turn

against the intellectuals in 1952? Yet the intellectual response to this newfound celebration of the intellectual, by Schlesinger and others, was agitated rather than excited. Schlesinger found the recent articles on intellectuals to be too strong on reconciliation and insufficiently appreciative of the responsibility of intellectuals to criticize at the drop of the hat. Thus, Schlesinger announced the need (one that the popular journals had underplayed) of recognizing the variety of functions and views of intellectuals. Different functions were required at different historical moments. Presently most in need, according to Schlesinger, was 'the Intellectual as Gadfly'. Echoing the ideas of Howe, with whom Schlesinger shared strongly anti-Stalinist feelings but relatively little else, Schlesinger proclaimed that in an age of conformity and complacency 'the grouch and the grumbler, the sour puss and the curmudgeon, the non-constructive critic, the voice of dissent and the voice of protest' were most necessary. Strange musings coming from a Stevenson confidant and intellectual, who had a few years earlier published a book that attempted to revitalize liberalism as *The Vital Center* (1949). Apparently Schlesinger wanted to be wanted, as much as he desired the electorate to have had the sense to elect Stevenson. But when the middlebrow public started to 'affirm' the value of intellectuals not unlike Schlesinger, albeit as affirmers more than dissenters, Schlesinger quickly distanced himself. Similarly, in the 1960s, the self-proclaimed apostle of the avant-garde, Irving Howe, had sheltered himself from the avant-gardism of the counter-cultural generation.<sup>72</sup>

Today we have travelled a considerable distance from the anxieties about status, distinctions between cultural forms, and fear of mass culture that defined the post-war intellectuals. Now, it is a given that the lines between high and low culture are artificial constructs, matters of fluid relations rather than fixed categories. If the post-war intellectuals used the figure of mass culture as a bogeyman, as something vague but dangerous, in order to define themselves as intellectuals engaged in worthy pursuits, the intellectual of today occupies no such position of antagonism or anxiety. Now we find intellectuals as respectful of the blood drenched 'oeuvre' of Quentin Tarantino as of the novels of James Joyce, of the lyrics of Killdozer as of the music of Mahler. And, not surprisingly, we encounter Princeton University professor of literature Elaine Showalter talking about 'Benign dysfunction and unrequited love in the all-male household' of the latest Batman movie in a *TLS* review.<sup>73</sup>

What, then, distinguishes the intellectual of today? In what vault does his or her intellectual capital reside? The ability to navigate between levels of culture, without worrying to distinguish between them, appears to be the mark that defines the function of the 'postmodern' intellectual, both within and outside academe. The primary imperative of the intellectual is to engage in brilliant flights of interpretation of whatever strikes his or her fancy. The condemnation that Harold Rosenberg once uttered against Dwight Macdonald, that he was a 'kitsch' critic because he spent so much time

grubbing around kitsch artefacts has lost its sting.<sup>74</sup> Today the intellectual brings the equipment of interpretation wherever he or she travels.

Yet it should not be presumed that the anxiety of success that plagued post-war intellectuals has vanished, although it may now express itself in a form different from the 'tragic predicament' that Hofstadter posited. Often secure in their academic bailiwicks, relatively well off financially, the current generation of successful academic intellectuals wander with their tools of interpretation throughout the cultural landscape, the mountains as well as the valleys, but they remain concerned that such treks be politically relevant, fully concentrated critiques of power. If academic intellectuals increasingly seem incapable of taking pleasure in the text of great works of art, they seem also to be increasingly concerned about the danger of enjoying popular culture too uncritically. This leads to a new version of Rosenberg's 'slumming' about in popular culture with the purpose of demonstrating brilliantly and at tiresome length its negative aspects, or at least, its dialectical propensities.

As for the anxiety of the successful intellectual in search of relevance, that enterprise is expressed in the current fascination with being a 'public intellectual', with speaking to a wider audience, with making a difference both within and outside the academy. This is a new version of the intellectuals' search for authority. Thus have academic intellectuals in the last decade in America transformed themselves into warriors for political correctness and diversity. Of course it is better to be correct than incorrect, diverse rather than monolithic. But in their zeal to prove their worth, to question the very institutional forum that has allowed them a modicum of success and comfort, many academic intellectuals risk falling into line as a 'herd of independent minds', without a deliciously developed sense of the irony, angst and distance that helped to define post-war intellectuals. Perhaps, in time, the post-war intellectuals' non-absolutist but authoritative discourse, deifying the ideals of the modernist avant-garde, upholding the transformative power of great literature against barriers of class, race and gender, and speaking in terms of traditions of criticism and alienation might make a comeback. If so, then the tensions and concerns that the post-war intellectuals exemplified may prove to be productive, if their stale descent into a deeply dug interpretive ditch can be avoided.

## NOTES

- 1 N. Podhoretz, *Making It*, New York, Random House, 1964, p.xi.
- 2 Although the post-war situation in Paris was quite different from New York, or the United States in general, Bourdieu's concept of distinction and intellectual field are powerfully conveyed in Anna Boschetti, *The Intellectual Enterprise. Sartre and Les Temps Modernes* trans. Richard C. McCleary, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1987
- 3 R. Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, New York, Alfred A Knopf, 1963, p. 417 In even stronger fashion, Christopher Lasch found

- 'fantasies of omnipotence' along with 'fears of hostility and persecution' as the dualities in the frame of mind of intellectuals in America, leading to 'the isolation of American intellectuals, as a class, from the main currents of American life' C Lasch, *The New Radicalism in America, 1889-1963: The Intellectual as a Social Type*, New York, Alfred A Knopf, 1966, p. 349
- 4 Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism*, p. 417
  - 5 *Ibid.*, p. 419
  - 6 M Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1987, pp. 36-40 A less impressive consideration of this issue is in Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1994.
  - 7 I Howe, 'The New York intellectuals', in I Howe, *Decline of the New*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and World, 1970, p. 240
  - 8 In contrast, thinkers who practise currently in the field of cultural studies, are blessed (or damned) with highly specialized vocabularies and theoretical constructs which permit them to maintain their status as intellectuals. No matter how much time a cultural studies scholar spends analysing, and valorizing, popular culture, there is never any danger of he or she being considered as anything but an intellectual
  - 9 S. Sontag, 'Notes on "Camp"', (1964) in *Against Interpretation*, New York, Delta, 1966, pp. 286-7
  - 10 Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideals in the Fifties*, revised edition, New York, Free Press, 1962, p. 300.
  - 11 The term is used to title a section of his book, *The Tradition of the New*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1960.
  - 11a This term has come to designate a form of inexpensive, uniform mass housing (eds)
  - 11b The so-called GI Bill approved government funding for war veterans designed to provide university education (eds)
  - 12 These connections between concern with status and the rise of mass culture are reductionistically offered in Herbert J. Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture: An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste*, New York, Basic Books, 1974.
  - 13 On the relation between anti-Stalinism, Popular Front ideology and the critique of mass culture, see Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture*, New York and London, Routledge, 1989, pp. 15-64.
  - 14 On the symposium and the mixed legacy of the post-war intellectuals, see Richard Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s*, New York, Harper and Row, 1985 For hints on how post-war New York intellectuals attempted to redefine the nature of the term intellectual, based largely on anti-Stalinist precepts, see Neil Jumonville, *Critical Crossings: The New York Intellectuals in Post-war America*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991 Also helpful are Alexander Bloom, *Prodigal Sons: The New York Intellectuals and Their World*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1986; Alan M Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left From the 1930s to the 1980s*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1987; Terry A. Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals: Partisan Review and Its Circle, 1934-1945*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1986 Trilling called liberalism 'the sole intellectual tradition' in America, Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society*, New York, Viking Press, 1950, p. ix On the centrality of this text, see Thomas Bender, 'Lionel Trilling and American culture', *American Quarterly* 42 (June 1990), pp. 324-47
  - 15 R Niebuhr in 'Our country and our culture', *Partisan Review* 19, n. 3, (May-June 1952), p. 301
  - 16 'Editorial statement', in 'Our country', p. 282

- 17 Especially helpful on Trilling's later ambivalent relationship to modernism's adversarial culture is Mark Krupnick, *Lionel Trilling and the Fate of Cultural Criticism*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1986, pp. 135–54.
- 18 C. Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism. Perceptions and Judgments, 1939–1944*, John O'Brien (ed.), Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1986; H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Cleveland, Meridian Books, 1962. A third critical text for post-war intellectuals should be noted. *Escape From Authority* by Erich Fromm (New York, Rinehart, 1941). This work, with its emphasis on the alienated mind and anxious individual in search of meaning and community (alas, too often found in totalitarian movements) deeply influenced both Daniel Bell and David Riesman. But Fromm played, on the whole, less of a central role in the formulations of post-war intellectuals, especially those in New York. For a first-rate analysis of Fromm's influence, see Wilfred M. McClay, *The Masterless. Self and Society in Modern America*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1994, pp. 253–8.
- 19 C. Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, op. cit., pp. 8–9
- 20 *Ibid.*, pp. 12–21
- 21 A. Kazin, *New York Jew*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1978, p. 195.
- 22 I. Howe, *A Margin of Hope. An Intellectual Autobiography*, San Diego, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982, p. 270.
- 23 On Arendt, see Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt. For Love of the World*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1984, pp. 220–1. Young-Bruehl is excellent on noting some of David Riesman's hesitations about Arendt's thesis, pp. 252–6. On the metaphysical aspects of Arendt's analysis, see Jeffrey C. Isaac, *Arendt, Camus, and Modern Rebellion*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1992, p. 60.
- 24 McClay, *The Masterless*, p. 263
- 25 This is not to limit the scope of Arendt's influence. Her work on the ideology and form of totalitarianism influenced the 'end of ideology' debate; Daniel Bell and other social scientists – drawing upon their own leftist anti-Stalinist backgrounds and from European theory – detailed the dangers of the mind prone toward absolutes.
- 26 H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, op. cit., p. 333.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 335.
- 28 The language employed by Macdonald and other post-war critics of mass culture bears a striking similarity, it must be admitted, to the anti-Communist rhetoric that was central to Cold War America, especially in its use of the terms infection, invasion, virus – all of which must be contained. On the culture of the Cold War and its language, see Ross, *No Respect*, op. cit., pp. 42–64; Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War*, New York, Basic Books, 1988.
- 29 D. Macdonald, 'A theory of "popular culture"', *Politics* 1 (February 1944), pp. 20–2. Also see Macdonald, 'A theory of mass culture', (1953) reprinted in *Mass Culture. The Popular Arts in America*, Glencoe, Illinois, Free Press, 1957, pp. 59–73; 'Masscult and Midcult', *Partisan Review* 27 (Spring 1960), pp. 203–33 and (Fall 1960), pp. 589–631. On Macdonald and Mass Culture, see Barry D. Riccio, 'Popular culture and high culture: Dwight Macdonald, his critics, and the ideal of cultural hierarchy in modern America', *Journal of American Culture* 16 (Winter 1993), pp. 7–18; Michael Wreszin, *A Rebel in Defense of Tradition. A Life and Politics of Dwight Macdonald*, New York, Basic Books, 1994, Ch. 12.
- 30 Bernard Rosenberg, 'Mass culture in America', in *Mass Culture*, op. cit., pp. 3–12.
- 31 I. Howe, 'Notes on mass culture', (1948) in *Mass Culture*, p. 499.

- 32 E. Van Den Haag, 'Of happiness and despair we have no measure', in *Mass Culture*, pp. 524-5
- 33 Niebuhr, 'Our country and our culture', op. cit., pp. 302-3
- 34 Bell, *The End of Ideology*, op. cit., pp. 22, 25
- 35 Riesman, 'Our country and our culture', op. cit., pp. 312-13.
- 36 D. Riesman, 'Listening to popular music', in *Individualism Reconsidered*, Glencoe, Illinois, Free Press, 1954, pp. 183-93
- 37 D. Riesman, 'Culture: popular and unpopular', in *Individualism Reconsidered*, pp. 180-1 For a finely modulated analysis of the benefits and debits of middlebrow culture, see Joan Shelley Rubin, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1992.
- 38 Howard Brick, *Daniel Bell and the Decline of Intellectual Radicalism. Social Theory and Political Reconciliation in the 1940s*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1986, p. 139
- 39 H. Rosenberg, 'Pop culture: kitsch criticism', in Rosenberg, *The Tradition of the New*, op. cit., p. 263.
- 40 E. Shils, 'Daydreams and nightmares' reflections on the criticism of mass culture', (1957) in *The Intellectuals and the Powers and Other Essays*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1972, p. 261
- 41 C. Wright Mills, 'The social role of the intellectual', in *Power, Politics and People The Collected Essays of C. Wright Mills*, Irving Louis Horowitz (ed.), New York, Oxford University Press, 1963, pp. 295, 301
- 42 I. Howe, 'This age of conformity', *Partisan Review* 21 (January-February 1954), pp. 8, 9. Howe followed publication of his essay by founding a new journal, aptly called *Dissent*, dedicated to the spirit of protest and organized against the complacency and conformism of 1950s culture.
- 43 H. S. Hughes, 'Is the intellectual obsolete? The freely speculating mind in America', *Commentary* 22 (1956), pp. 318, 319
- 44 L. Fiedler, 'The middle against both ends', (1955) in *Mass Culture*, op. cit., p. 547.
- 45 I. Howe, 'The New York Intellectuals', op. cit., pp. 226-7
- 46 Howe, 'This age of conformity', op. cit., p. 13.
- 47 Howard Brick brilliantly demonstrates how alienation and estrangement served as essentials in 'the process of deradicalization' and political impotency. See Brick, *Daniel Bell*, op. cit., p. 13.
- 48 Howe, 'This age of conformity', p. 21 For a later, similar evaluation of the ideological character of Cold War criticism, see Tobin Siebers, *Cold War Criticism and the Politics of Skepticism*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1993, pp. 29-70
- 49 Howe, 'This age of conformity', pp. 23-5
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