

# Public intellectuals – past, present and future

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*A healthy culture accepts the affronts of its intellectuals, since it understands that evolving serious discriminations out of a nuanced description of a society demands attentiveness, passion, and lack of compromise.*

BARBARA MISTZAL

In this paper I will refer to the various roles intellectuals have played in culture and society along the times and to the issue of the public intellectuals' position in democratic societies in the twenty-first century and in the future. To attain that objective one has to consider what it means to be a "public intellectual", that is, how we define and which idea we have of an intellectual. One of the first questions raised in that context is whether intellectuals are an empowered elite or a vestigial organ of modernity with no function in a commodity-driven social order that no longer requires the regulative work of representation and legitimation that intellectuals once performed.

We can also inquire if they still have authority and prerogatives and, if so, which are the sources of their intellectual power. Related to this, and as another reflection connected to the previous points, we have the issue of the nowadays so often referred "decline and fall" of public intellectuals and the fact that they have

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even been considered as “an endangered species”. For several years now voices have been raised variously suggesting that a renewal of the history of the intellectual requires a comparative social history which is obviously a vast enterprise which raises some arduous methodological problems as the field of cultural transfer and international cultural relationships is equally considerable. On the other hand, when we consider the popular perception of public intellectuals at the present time, we have what has been designated as a new type of intellectual or the “media intellectual”, whose authority is only temporarily stable – thus losing its exceptional character – and whose most recent manifestation is in the role of celebrity star. As a final theme, I’ll refer to the future of public intellectuals and to the matter of how they shall situate themselves in these times of transformation of politics into “simulacral” effects and of dissolution of social interchange into cyberchat.

Following this plan, and considering the proposed task of attempting to define “public intellectual”, we see that the term is made to encompass everyone from Socrates to Susan Sontag and thus has little probative value left in it. We also conclude that an effective public intellectual is inevitably a moralist and a preacher especially in a modern democracy, where the education of public opinion is central to the system.

As is well known, the term intellectual arose during the Dreyfus affair, in France, although the phenomenon had been around since the Enlightenment. Intellectuals are a subset of the *intelligentsia* (specialized “head workers” in contrast to hand workers) and they have a relation to ideology – as a secular displacement of religion – producing, disseminating, and criticizing it. They move from specialized work (including that of writer or academic) to activity in the public sphere with political implications, even when that activity is confined to the published word.

According to Edward Shills (*Intellectuals and the Powers*, 1974, p. 3), an intellectual is “unusually sensitive to the sacred [with] an uncommon reflectiveness about the nature of the universe and the rules which govern their society”. But considering other well-known definitions, we see that Antonio Gramsci – for whom the intellectual served organized social and political interests in the here and now – described the intellectual as “the industrial technician, the political economist, the organizer of a new culture and a new law”. According to Gramsci, the “Organic intellectual” spoke for another in the interest of liberation, empowerment and democracy.

Nowadays, for Richard Posner, the author of *Public Intellectuals: A Study of Decline* (2002), an intellectual “is a person who, drawing on his intellectual resources, addresses a broad public on issues with a political or ideological dimension”. Posner concentrates on those figures who are result-oriented and who use the media to

comment on contemporary political issues (p. 170). On the other hand, Thomas Bender, in his work *Intellect and Public Life* (1993), considers that intellectuals are:

... men and women of ideas who work within a social matrix that constitutes an audience or public for them. Within this context they seek legitimacy and are supplied with the collective concepts, vocabulary of motives and the key questions that give shape to their work. These communities of discourse, which I am here calling culture of intellectual life, are historically constructed and are held together by mutual attachment to a cluster of shared meanings and intellectual purposes. (p. 4)

Bender speaks of the public culture which he sees as the product of an exceedingly complex interaction between speakers and hearers, writers and readers.

Among other acknowledged authors who also debated this topic, we see that Zygmunt Bauman (*Legislators and Interpreters – On Modernity, Post-Modernity and Intellectuals*, 1987) says that: “It is in community rather than the universal progress of mankind that the intellectuals of the West tend to seek the secure formations of their professional role.” He considers that they are the custodians of the nation’s future and the guardians of the nation’s truth and that “intellectuals are not only mirrors of society but leading indicators and catalysts for change”. Then again, Pierre Bourdieu, in his article “The Corporatism of the Universal – The Role of the Intellectual in Modern World” (*Telos*, 81, 1989, pp. 99-110), defines intellectuals as cultural producers who belong to an autonomous intellectual field, which is independent of religion, politics and economy or other powers.

After considering how intellectuals are seen nowadays, we will now reflect on their past. And we should begin by pondering how the concept developed in France, where it is now venerable enough to have a history of its own. After the French Revolution, tradition privileged the social duty of art, certainly inspired by the ideas of Diderot. There was what has been designated as *le sacre de l'écrivain* and painters and sculptors were glorified and art was seen as a religious vocation and the artist as a reincarnation of the priest. Due to these circumstances, privileging the personality of the artist is now considered as a characteristic of the first half of the nineteenth century in France, as we can see in Balzac’s well-known words: “The artist is the apostle of some truth, the organ of the Almighty who makes use of him.”

As is of common knowledge, in the Dreyfus affair, intellectual was a fighting word, not a simple description. Anti-Dreyfusards attacked intellectuals as meddlers, and Dreyfusards took up the challenge and defended the role of intellectuals in affirming individual justice as the foundation of modern democracies. Durkheim,

in his contribution to the Dreyfus case, saw the intellectual as emerging from the academic or literary and artistic world and contributing to debates affecting public values and political issues. In both specific and universalistic conceptions of the intellectual, an expert (or what Sartre designated as the subaltern functionary of the superstructures) moves beyond the realm of specialized knowledge and practice to engage issues that are not amenable to technical solutions.

Considering the evolution of the concept in France, we should bear in mind that, in December 1824, a small tract in the form of a dialogue appeared in Paris that was to mark an important phase in the development of the modern conception of the artist and his social status. This pamphlet entitled “L’artiste, le savant et l’industriel” was published in the collection “Opinions littéraires, philosophiques et industrielles” and the text was the work of a former aristocrat, Claude-Henri de Rouvroy, comte de Saint-Simon. For twenty years, Saint-Simon had devoted himself to elaborating a political system that would reconcile material progress and social order while at the same time ensuring the welfare of the most disadvantaged classes. The transformation of his philosophy toward a mystical humanism was accompanied by a privileging of the arts that reached its highest expression in the year of 1824. Saint-Simon portrayed the representatives of the three classes that were to be granted the leadership of the society he foresaw for the future: the scientist, whose intellectual abilities ensure the rational organization of the community; the industrialist, who exploits natural resources and searches for scientific innovations; and the artist, who, according to Saint-Simon, sums up his own duties in addressing his two other interlocutors in the following words:

It is we artists who will serve as your vanguard; the power of the arts is indeed most immediate and the quickest. We possess arms of all kinds: when we want to spread new ideas among men, we inscribe them upon marble or upon a canvas; we popularize them through poetry and through song; we employ by turns the lyre and the flute, the ode and the song, the story and the novel; the dramatic stage is spread out before us, and it is there that we exert a galvanizing and triumphant influence. We address ourselves to man’s imagination and to his sentiments. We therefore ought always to exert the most lively and decisive action. And while today our role seems nonexistent or at least quite secondary that is because the arts are missing what is essential to their energy and to their success, a shared impulse and a general idea.

For Saint-Simon, the artist therefore accomplishes the role of an intermediary who can decode his partners’ abstract conceptions into a language likely to touch and to mobilize all sectors of society. Understood in this way, art can influence public opinion and even, ultimately, people’s behavior through the force of the sentiment it exerts over minds that are themselves incapable of responding to the appeals to

reason. By conceiving the role of the arts as being that of “dashing ahead of all the intellectual faculties”, Saint-Simon was outlining a program of social engagement for the artist that would later be worked out in detail by his followers who claimed that the transformational potentialities of art and the psychological process of aesthetic reception contributed to the mechanisms of peaceful social change.

Other theorists of the period following the French Revolution inherited this tradition that privileged the social duty of art and that had its roots in the Ancien Régime, especially in the work of Diderot. They conceived the social role of art and assigned a function to the artist in society. Already in Saint-Simon, the distinction between the artist, the scientist, and the industrialist reflected the new psychophysiological theories that were being heralded around 1800 and a profusion of radical movements played a decisive role in privileging the personality of the artist so characteristic of the first half of the nineteenth century. The term artist became the object of unprecedented attention in the Romantic era and surpassed its professional connotations to designate a creator with transcendent powers. And, as journalists said at the time, art turned into almost a form of worship, it was like a new religion that arrived when God and kings were dying. Thus the notion of art as a religious vocation and of the artist as a reincarnation of the priest was then widely debated.

It was Saint-Simon, and especially his followers, who most fully developed the notion of art as a priesthood. The elevation of the artist to the summit of spiritual power in future society follows the transformation of the movement designated as Saint-Simonianism from a political to a religious system. While Saint-Simon had foreseen a positive power, a true priesthood for artists, this promise was expanded and they were now endowed with a real influence whereby they became “tutors of humanity”. Thus the artist becomes – often without being aware of it – a powerful critic of the disorder that disrupts society or an instinctive prophet of the joys of a world, that is, what we would designate as public intellectual.

One hundred and fifty years later, the cultural regime that characterizes modern society contains a number of elements that could actually be characterized as “Saint-Simonian”. From the technological standpoint, the profusion of audiovisual media we have inherited from the twentieth century goes far beyond the wildest dreams of Saint-Simon and his disciples.

From the early 1980s, the development of the concept signaled the end of the heroic age of the French intellectual and the beginning of a critical review of his activity, hitherto overshadowed by a history of ideas discredited for being predisposed towards abstraction and idealism. Debray, Bourdieu, Hamon, Rotman and others have profusely written about what they ironically designated as the beauty

of the intellectual “corpse”. At the beginning of the decade, the tragic fading of the revolutionary adventure, the bitter retreat into a recrudescing professionalism and the surrender to the perceived invasion of mass culture were together bringing about fundamental changes in intellectual attitudes and created a new set of circumstances.

Thus to talk of the rituals of the intellectual “tribe, with its initiations, its temples and its gurus”, was no mere ironical metaphor but a genuine theme of social history, now with overtones of ethnology. In France, partly thanks to media attention, it enjoyed a certain public success fuelled by nostalgia, which was fed in its turn by a yearning for a lost national power and a crisis of identity. For better or for worse, the history of the intellectual, like that of the Third Republic, was bent to serve purposes that can hardly be described as scientific and the great French intellectual became a sort of synecdoche for the great nation that had produced him. Nonetheless, several wide-ranging approaches developed. The first was a typically French kind of symbolic history which interpreted the intellectual as an affective pillar of collective memory, nowadays, perhaps reduced to a lonely bastion of a modern age (extending from the eighteenth century to the end of the twentieth) which, to a certain extent, has passed away.

This was the approach of Paul Bénichou in some chapters of his renowned work *Les lieux de mémoire*. It was followed by a view of the intellectual which focused on his commitment and enshrined him in political history with some enrichment from culture. In his other work *Le sacre de l'écrivain*, Paul Bénichou made a monumental study of the emergence of a writer liberating himself from religious and other doctrines to assume in turn a quasi-religious status as “consecrated”. Bénichou tells us that, while the Enlightenment worshipped the man of letters, the nineteenth century witnessed the consecration of *le poète-penseur*, “an inspired bearer of modern Enlightenment as well as of mystery”. The Romantic consecration of the writer provides the inescapable ground for all subsequent self-reflection on the part of *la classe intellectuelle*. In his study, this author traces what one might term the progress of the writer, a process in which he usurps traditional powers, religious in particular, to assume a consecrated role in literature and in society. It begins by historicizing the notion of the intellectual, returning, before that term was used, to the previous designation of *gens de lettres* out of which it developed and, with it, to a category of author, who is “In Quest of Secular Ministry”, as the title to the first chapter puts it. All through the work, Bénichou follows the uncertain status of the author. Emphasizing that, in the eighteenth century, the term literature was much broader than it is today, and included fields such as philosophy and politics, he also considers in some detail the place of poetry in the

Enlightenment. He focuses the history of the idea of the writer, following the aesthetic tradition from Kant and idealism to Benjamin and beyond.

Another parallel methodology was the micro-social analysis, which studied the intellectual through his political culture via his preferred locations or milieus – where he acquired, or sought after, ideas and prejudices – such as journals, circles of acquaintances, committees, publishers or anywhere where intellectuals could gather. On the other hand, the macro-social approach, which applies Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of intellectual and literary "fields", analyses their relationships with the political domain and tries to unpack the places, processes and institutions through which intellectuals were recognised or, as it were, consecrated. This approach, heavily marked by Bourdieu's sociological vocabulary, confers the advantage of being able to study the interaction between intellectuals and the rest of society, particularly other elites. From a sociological perspective, according to Alvin Gouldner (p. 21) the intellectuals are a "flawed universal class as a new cultural bourgeoisie whose capital is not its money but its control over valuable culture".

The importance of political commitment in the canonical definition of the intellectual has been considered somewhat relevant of late, and this has restored interest in an approach that takes account of their acquaintanceships and further refines the interaction between the locale, the mode of production and the creation of values and ideologies. More recently, it was Foucault who revolutionized the post Enlightenment idea of the intellectual. He undercut its epistemological foundation by disallowing the possibility of shaping the political will of the other, as he tells us, through the formulaic rhetoric of prefabricated theory that congeals conflict between master and rebel. Challenging the validity of the progressive intellectual as a beacon for social change, Foucault rejected universal reason and asked that he should cease to be a subject representing an oppressed consciousness (and living what he termed "the indignity of speaking for others"). Instead the intellectual was to examine the relation of theory to practice in more localized settings where the analysis of political technologies could uncover how knowledge is transformed into power. And, as is common knowledge, according to Foucault there is no value that is untouched by power. He stresses the importance of the specific intellectual, who begins with an intimate knowledge of a relatively specialized area, addresses problems bearing on it, and broadens his, or her, horizon of activity and concern without totalizing it. Foucault (1977) replaces the traditional intellectual (who, according to the long-established French vision defended by Thomas Benda, stands up for universal values and aspires to be a spiritual leader of mankind) by the expert specialist, who engages in and articulates the interest within his, or

her, field of specialization. For Foucault, the task of the intellectual should be: “To struggle against the forms of power that would transform him into its object and instrument by appropriating the tools of the intellectual, that is, knowledge, truth or discourse” (p. 208).

Having in mind Foucault’s words, and considering the cultural regime that characterizes our society, we see that from the technological standpoint, the profusion of audiovisual media we have inherited from the twentieth century has facilitated a penetration of our physical and psychological being by what has already been designated as hidden persuaders. More than by art, as conceived in its narrow nineteenth-century sense, we are today surrounded by a vast and stifling mass culture that has colonized traditional forms of expression and adapted innovative styles to its own ends. Of course, our consumer society has its own norms and types of behavior that are solicited and legitimized by our popular culture; its messages are all the more effective as they reject direct moralism and appeal instead to our senses of pleasure, sensuality, and material well-being. Promoting an individualism that cultivates the illusion of autonomous judgment and action, postmodern culture has usurped the dreams of happiness of the old utopias in order to delude us with what has been designated as dreams that money can buy.

Thus when we consider the role of the intellectuals in contemporary society, we see that now according to continuous changes in its nature and in the composition of the intellectual group, and in the context of increasingly egalitarian attitudes, wider access to higher education, decline in the deference accorded to academics and the above mentioned prominence of ‘celebrity cult’, intellectuals can no longer be conceptualized as a class or caste. These new sociological conceptualizations tend to define intellectuals through their membership of an intellectual field (Ron Eyerman, (pp. 30; 241-2). Alternatively, the notion of intellectuals as experts is viewed with suspicion by Ron Eyerman (p. 190-5) who criticizes the fact that they serve either as advisers to power or manipulators of public opinion. This expansion of the traditional role leads to the development of intellectuals at individual instrumental and strategic orientation as their knowledge becomes a resource for those holding political power. Eyerman considers the role of the intellectual as an activist in social movements and, as social movements today are becoming increasingly institutionalized and incorporated into the state, intellectuals of this type seem less visible.

As to what concerns the future of the public intellectuals, I anticipate that they will be driven deeper into a type of monkish retreat from the “desiccated life” of the “dead souls” around them. This removal from the Debordian society of the spectacle will be deemed bizarre, but, in a curious twist, the result will not be the



final dismissal of the intellectual as a cultural force. On the contrary, paradoxically there is already evidence of the elevation of the intellectual into a secular god.

I think the possibility of democratic mass education is the pertinent issue in the debate on the future of intellectuals. The dream of democratic mass education has been to make intellectual culture the possession of every citizen, not just of an elite, ending with a culture in which intellectual is still often synonymous with snob or elitist and developments over the last generation seem indeed to have given intellectuality a new respectability.

Even as the market for college teachers seems to have collapsed, intellectual skills have become more widely marketable in an information economy that turns certain forms of critical thinking into the “cultural capital” Bourdieu speaks about. Although, to be sure, it is often the intellectuality of technocrats, computer wizards, and policy “wonks” that in the end gets rewarded, yet the current success of academic public intellectuals in the media suggests that the intellectuality of the cultural critic is coming into demand as well.

Concerning this topic, Régis Debray, in *Le pouvoir intellectuel en France*, attacks what he designates as the “intellectuel terminal”, and claims that:

... le siècle glorieusement inauguré par le *J'accuse* d'Emile Zola (1898) se termine en eau de boudin avec la transformation de l'intellectuel des origines (*I.O.*), courageux, travailleur, ami du peuple et frotté de littérature, en un être abject, l'intellectuel terminal (*I.T.*), paresseux, versatile, vendu aux puissants et courant d'un plateau de télévision à une page “Débats” du *Monde*, sans autre souci que sa notoriété. *L'I.T.* ne vit même plus à la petite semaine, il fonctionne à l'heure, voire à la minute. La recherche des faits, sans même parler de la vérité, n'est pas son but. Il “résonne” infiniment plus qu'il ne “raisonne”. Bref, il est servile, moutonnier, veule et influençable.

Relating to this debate and again according to Bourdieu, intellectuals in the future, in order to be an autonomous collective force, need to draw on their “intellectual capital”. This specific capital enables them to claim autonomy vis-à-vis the political authorities. For this author, such a request by intellectuals for a privileged status within society is justified (Bourdieu 1989, p. 103) because by “defending them as a whole they defend the universal”.

The above referred notion of the Bourdieuan intellectual field (p. 20) is understood as a contested terrain upon which the struggles for recognition as an intellectual occur. Therefore, its analysis focuses our attention on a configuration of relationships, interdependencies among intellectuals and their fights with one another and with various audiences to establish their legitimacy and credibility. To speak about the intellectual field as a social space made up of agents taking up various positions is to break with the idea that intellectuals form a uniform,

homogeneous group and to observe a universe of competition for the monopoly of the legitimate handling of “intellectual goods” (pp. 44-6).

By the end of 20th century, after what has been deemed the tragic fading of the revolutionary adventure, there was a bitter retreat into professionalism and an admission of defeat to the perceived invasion of mass culture, which brought fundamental changes in intellectual attitudes and created a new set of circumstances. The intellectuals were distinguished not by their status as a class but by their quality, knowledge and strategies. The once collective identity, emerging in the non-institutionalized interactions of a group, was now seen as rooted within the individual, as a personal quality and a social role.

And that role is considered to have two dimensions: creativity and courage. Creativity was the essential part of all definitions. It is the activity of scholars who aim at the creation of a world of relative truth, infinite in potential wealth, admirable in its trendy perfection, knowledge being the foundation of their critical power and also one of their sources of authority. Creativity is the most important characteristic as the true intellectual possesses qualities that can hardly be ascribed to the average academic. Intellectuals who “elicit, guide and form the expressive disposition within society” are by definition culturally creative and possess “an uncommon reflexiveness about the nature of their universe and the rules that govern their society” (p. 5). Creativity is perceived as a primary obligation to intellectual and it is the crucial element in the definition of public intellectual as it raises the status of scholars as they gain recognition in their exercise of the right to intervene in the public sphere on matters in which they have competency. Zvaniecki (p. 165) proposes to metaphorically call intellectuals “explorers” as they “are seeking in the domain of knowledge new ways into the unknown. They specialise, so to speak, in doing the unexpected” (p. 165). He also says (p. 198) that the scientist-explorer is a creator whose work, a unique and irreducible link between the past and the future, enters as “a dynamic component into the total, ever increasing knowledge of mankind”. The concept of creativity – an activity of a scholar who aims at the creation of a world of “relative truth, infinite in potential wealth, admirable in its trendy perfection” (p. 199) overcomes the bias inherent in the romantic model of creativity, which associates creativity solely with cultural innovators and artistic spirits. The importance of creativity is its ability to elevate the intellectual above the professor into the “supra professorial community”, as Saïd, Shills, Szacki, Bauman, Bourdieu tell us when they reflect on this topic. Assuming creativity to be the main characteristic of the intellectual permits us to argue that knowledge is the source of his critical power and to conclude that public intellectuals are indeed of crucial importance for the quality of life in democratic societies.

Thus we overcome what some consider the partiality of the tradition of the humanities which perceives intellectuals as mainly members of a broad humanistic discipline rather than those in the area of the natural sciences and which thus tends to confine the term “creative” to the humanistic side of culture. As a matter of fact, Bourdieu (2004, p. 113) recognizes the role of the “creative imagination” as one of the foundations of the intellectual’s competence and as one of the factors that make intellectual life something closer to the artist’s life than to the routine of the university. Contrary to the functionalistic vision of the scientific world as a legitimate regulatory institution in which the rewards system orients the most productive towards the most industrious channels, Bourdieu (2004, p. 38), actually recalling Polanyi (1951 p. 57), states that scientific research is an art and therefore creative and uses the complexity of both crafts as the foundation for drawing an analogy between the artistic and scientific practice.

As a matter of fact, intellectual creativity is one of the main sources of the public intellectual’s authority because it provides him, or her, with the reputation of being able to speak out on broader issues and this is one of the essential preconditions for an intellectual’s contribution to the public sphere. Thus we deviate from a rather narrow perception of the function of the public intellectual as people who simply inform the public and begin to view their task as one of enhancing political thinking, a process that, according to some theorists, can be liberating. The significance of the intellectual’s creativity relates to the fact that it constitutes the essential feature of a public intellectual’s authority and therefore of their input into public life. Intellectual creativity is also important because the public rely on the intellectual’s creative ideas to expand their understanding of reality and to improve social well-being. For those intellectuals for whom the crucial terrain of action is the public sphere, creativity in this area is also obviously important. The significance of creativity both in science and in the arts and in the public sphere (H. Arendt, 1958) lies in its role in the implicated struggles. Since the polis is a space where citizens can be involved in the free creative process (Arendt, 1961 p. 155), creativity in this realm is crucial for the expansion of creativity in politics in general (Bernard Bailyn, 2003). Creative political imagination can be seen as an ability to remodel the world power, to conceptualize reality in new and original ways and to reformulate the structure of the public agent and the accepted form of governance. Consequently, creative imagination is an indispensable ingredient for a successful commitment in the public arena and through it intellectuals contribute to the democratic project with the creation in their specific fields, and with their democratic sensibility and their imagination thus stimulating their knowledge of a given area and also their democratic values. The engagement of public intellectuals

with community issues depends upon their civic concern with justice and other matters of human importance and upon their democratic imagination which filters new information about politics and the social world around them and which increases their repertoire of strategies and their respective political judgment. Their specialized knowledge endorses their involvement in the public sphere as concerned citizens as well as their decisions to get implicated, and on what side, choosing the risk and uncertainty of the public arena over the security and safety of their professional fields.

Passing value judgments means being answerable for the ideas behind these assessments, and we all know that the role of public intellectual demands courage as Socrates so evidently taught us. Then again, courage, or better, civil courage, resistance or rebellion, is the risky and disinterested action required to bring about social and cultural change and it is a vital social function, for, as Hannah Arendt so clearly told us, in 1961, “the very nature of the public realm demands courage”.

Now, considering the role of the intellectual in our postmodern times, we can see that, as mass culture has ‘colonized’ traditional forms of expression and adapted innovative styles to its own ends, and its messages seem to be effective, there is a deconstruction of the concept of intellectual as prophet, philosopher or artist. As we have said, the postmodern world no longer requires the representation the intellectuals once performed. Their status remains confused, although they must write and act, take positions and make polemics. There is, at the present, a different idea of the public intellectual due to the connection between politics and culture, public life and philosophy, intellectual life and society. The action of factors like computers, media and information in the economy changed the character and social role of intellectual life. And although public intellectuals establish a relation between ideas and events, thought and action, reason and history, they have been designated as a class of hybrid beings, standing with one foot in the contemplative world and the other in the political, a rather late arising western phenomenon that has been changing and may even be disappearing.

We thus come to the issue of the decline of the public intellectual. As a matter of fact, it is undeniable that the authority and influence of the intellectuals are in decline and that the so-called technologists became the predominant intellectual type. This ascendancy of the technocratic intellectual seems to have come with the industrial development and the rationalization of social life and thus technocrats become an elite of specialists and bureaucrats who fulfill the former functions of the traditional intellectual.

Several analysts have discussed this topic. Among them, I would distinguish Russell Jacoby, who, in his study entitled *The Last Intellectuals*, says that the com-

forts of academia have undermined the independence of non-academic writers and thinkers who address an educated general public. Edward Saïd, in *Representations of the Intellectual – The Reith Lectures* (1996), also refers to this topic saying that there are three negative consequences of professionalism: the pressures of the profession, the cult of certified experts and the drift towards power and authority, because they kill the sense of excitement and discovery. He thinks that the university, despite many pressures, can still offer “the intellectual a quasi-utopian space in which reflection and research can go on” (p. 55).

Although, according to some theorists, in 1995, the public intellectual, considered a vanishing species, suddenly appeared to repopulate the public sphere, it is irrefutable that in post modernity there were announcements of the intellectual’s death and popular elegies for the last intellectual. In spite of discordant voices, such as Richard Posner who is against Saïd’s and Jacoby’s admiration of the Sartrean critical and oppositional “total intellectual”, and praises the university as the proper place for intellectual activity, others like Barbara Mistral (*Intellectuals and the Public Good*) also claim that the main danger to the public intellectual is not academization but professionalism and “thinking of your work as an intellectual as something you do for a living between the hours of 0 to 5 with one eye in the clock and another cocked at what is considered to be proper professional behavior”.

We can also conclude that there is a major transformation in the role of the intellectual, which is connected with the growing importance of his celebrity status. This development implies that talent for publicity rather than quality of their work can constitute the “media intellectual”, that we mentioned above, as the media transformed public life into entertainment, sterilizing the political as they colonized the world that once belonged to intellectuals.

On the other hand, regarding the importance of blogging, many perceive blogs as evidence of a scholar’s lack of seriousness and ask if he shouldn’t be putting more time into scholarship, and less into his blog. And they also ask, if a blogger does have something serious to say, why he is presenting it in such a superficial medium, rather than in a peer-reviewed journal. But this is a topic that deserves further investigation in another location.

Proceeding with our consideration of the future of the public intellectual, we see that with the collapse of state ideologies and the spread of consumerism to all spheres of social life, the distinction between center and margins – which had previously defined the eccentricity of the intellectual – is no longer meaningful, except perhaps in theory. To rethink the concept of the intellectual in its European, particularly French, ancestry is equally urgent in order to see how he will situate himself in this new world.

Then again, the public interest in the culture wars over gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality and in the attendant conflicts over social philosophies have made the ability to formulate cultural arguments and analyses a crucial skill for work in journalism, public policy, and the corporate world, and academics, although used to feeling despised and marginalized, may notice that there is a sudden demand for the kind of intellectuality they represent. Notwithstanding, some intellectuals today, in the midst of the “technomania” and social-status display – astonishing a society whose experts arrive at conclusions immediately – continue to resist what they consider stultifying trends and remain altruistic within a therapeutic culture that has largely replaced a thoughtful and polemic ethos.

We can say that they remain in what Lionel Trilling designated as “adversarial culture” (*The Opposing Self: Nine Essays in Criticism*, 1959). But no one knows how long they can resist. For, as Trilling so clearly told us, an adversarial culture, after all, needs a public culture against which to express itself. And, in our third millennium, the “technology of withdrawal” – with its computers, gated communities, cellular phones and automobiles – has assuaged the public realm and therefore the intellectual’s withdrawal from the world is philosophical and tactical. We can, however, consider that intellectual culture includes diverse skills and forms of knowledge, but for my purposes it can be reduced to the ability to argue, to reflect, to analyze, to criticize, to formulate and contest ideas. Everyone exercises these “intellectual” capacities in some way. But, as Michael Oakeshott, in his essay “The Role of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind” so originally taught us, it takes a command of intellectual discourse and its generalizing vocabularies to implement them effectively enough to intervene in the conversation of one’s culture as public intellectuals should do.

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