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***Between Identity and Practice:
The Narratives of the Intellectual in
the Twentieth-Century***

by

Stephen Palmer BA, MSc

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Contents

Prologue: The Dialectics of Intellectual Practice	i
Chapter One: From the Realm of the Spirit to the 'laboratory of actual life': Karl Mannheim's Changing Intellectual	1
Chapter Two: The Intellectual in Extremis: Critical Theory, Pessimism and the Loss of Agency	48
Chapter Three: Ideas in Action: Gramsci and the Creation of Conviction	90
Chapter Four: 'A School of Awkwardness': the Uses of Experience in E.P. Thompson and C. Wright Mills	130
Chapter Five: 'Living in Truth': the Intellectual as Existential Praxis	168
Chapter Six: Symbolic Exchanges? The Intellectual in Everyday Life	214
Bibliography	260

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Summary

This thesis is a text-based analysis of conceptions of the intellectual in relation to the political sphere. The specific instances studied relate, positively and negatively, to the socialist tradition in politics and culture. They are drawn from a variety of academic disciplinary contexts and also from the contexts of political organisations and social movements. One of the principal dilemmas faced by the intellectual in this century, as this thesis sets out to make clear, has been that of trying to bridge the divide between these two spheres.

This investigation is centred upon statements made by intellectuals reflecting upon the typical role or function of the intellectual within society and politics. My contention is that such self-reflection is a necessary condition of the intellectual's coming into being. Intellectuals are realised in specific identities, in a process of self-identification. The force of intellectual practice is dependent upon elements of personal commitment, moral or political, and the enactment of an experiential dimension. But, at the same time, as a practice that has a transcendent orientation, the intellectual seeks to go beyond the subjective in pursuit of the objective, the extra-personal, the unsituated.

My thesis offers itself as an identification of a tradition, as the relation of a narrative of the intellectual, which also recognises its own particularity. As such, it is not a work of synthesis, but a reflexive narrative. Narrative is an appropriate concept with regards to the intellectual; it may thus be seen as a creative process drawing upon particular events and characters. Such a view, involving both commitment to and distance from the intellectual, is not common within prevailing accounts, which have tended to be either sociological-objective or normative-subjective. I have tried to see the intellectual as reflexively situated between these positions, as between an interested identity and disinterested practice, and not just in a purely "objective" fashion but acknowledging my own involvement within such a view.

'And now the tempter whispers 'But you also
Have the slave-owner's mind,
Would like to sleep on a mattress of easy profits,
To snap your fingers or a whip and find
Servants or houris ready to wince and flatter
And build with their degradation your self-esteem;
What you want is not a world of the free in function
But a niche at the top, the skimmings of the cream.'
And I answer that this is largely so for habit makes me
Think victory for one implies another's defeat,
That freedom means the power to order, and that in order
To preserve the values dear to the élite
The élite must remain a few. It is so hard to imagine
A world where the many would have their chance without
A fall in the standard of intellectual living
And nothing that the highbrow cared about.
Which fears must be suppressed. There is no reason for
thinking
That, if you give a chance to people to think or live,
The arts of thought or life will suffer and become rougher
And not return more than you could ever give.'

Louis Macneice, *Autumn Journal* III

Prologue: The Dialectics of Intellectual Practice

'[I]n approaching the question of the intellectuals one is confronted not just with alternative definitions or theories, or even bodies of empirical evidence, but with alternative historical narratives with profound political resonances.' (Nicholas Garnham, 1995: 365)

Problems of a Definition

Conventionally studies of the intellectual begin with a definition. In accordance with sound academic practice, the object of analysis is, first, identified, and then, proposals offered and conclusions drawn as to the exact nature of that object both in relation to specific empirical phenomena and to a set of statements which already define it.

To the extent that the coherence of a piece of research is dependent upon the identification of a discrete object upon which a methodological and conceptual apparatus may be brought to bear, it may be said that I, too, follow conventional practice. However, at the same time, I would argue that it is necessary to assert the special character of the intellectual with regard to the question of a definition. For the intellectual necessarily exhibits a high degree of self-reflexivity, and central to intellectual practice is the act of *self-definition*. One may say, indeed, that talking about what it means to be an intellectual is *not* the same as being one, but, this being acknowledged, an essential part of being an intellectual *is* to talk about what it means to be one.

To embark upon a study of the intellectual is to enter into a discourse that demands participation, in the sense of requiring the researcher to participate in a contradictory relationship between his or her scholarly practice and the identity within which that practice is realised. To reflect in a any serious and extended way upon the nature of the intellectual requires one, at least, to register the dialectic of universality and particularity which has been key to its successive

conceptions. As such, it is to recognise that the practice of knowledge has both an inward and an outward orientation, is constitutive of both subject and object, which stand in a contradictory relation with one another. The intellectual is the name given to that reflexive moment within knowledge where it realises itself in a particular identity and simultaneously attempts to overcome the specificity of that manifestation. The intellectual, as Sartre stated, is that which uncovers the tension between the limitless promise of rational knowledge and its cramped and limited realisation in specific individual and collective forms.

My own discussion of the intellectual, then, is marked by a contradiction: it is driven by the imperative to define its object, to find a universal, disinterested and permanent definition of *the* intellectual, while being aware that no such object exists, only its manifestation in *particular intellectuals* existing in specific situations. However, those intellectuals through acts of self-definition themselves have attempted to identify just such an "objective" entity as part of their function as intellectuals, while at the same time acknowledging the limits and contradictory character of that endeavour. The contradiction that characterises this thesis thus constitutes an extension of that contradiction between subject and object, universality and particularity, commitment and distance that has, by turns, been repressed, regretted and celebrated in succeeding conceptions of the intellectual but which may be said to be at its heart.

Narratives

As such, therefore, this thesis does not purport to give an impartial overview of the intellectual, nor does it seek to offer an encompassing synthesis that

enables the observer to go away with a comprehensive taxonomy of "types". It constitutes, rather, something more indeterminate in character: an attempt to elaborate a narrative of the intellectual which makes no claims to objective truth but instead is an active making of a tradition that is also a recognition of that tradition's heterogeneous and self-contradictory nature. This attempt has therefore its own narrative "truth", that is, it is true in that it articulates the character of the tradition of the active, self-making intellectual.

This thesis forms a single linear narrative insofar as it represents an effort to tell one story, starting, roughly, in 1910 and ending in the present day, against a unified background of events and characters, that of European revolution and counter-revolution, Cold War, the Communist Party, academic institutions and counter-hegemonic cultural and political formations. But this general narrative is realised through a number of micro-narratives, which may be said to exist in other than chronological relationship. This mode of narration is appropriate insofar as the intellectual does not exist, as stated above, in a "pure" form as a discrete autonomous entity but in particular conceptions elaborated out of specific political, cultural and social contexts that are the products of the attempt to relate to a wider, non-specific, *traditional* context.

In this respect, one can see the relevance here of Bourdieu's description of the intellectual as characterised by an '*intention of autonomy*' (1996: 343); the pure, autonomous intellectual is that which is *aspired to*, rather than being what has been already achieved.¹ In present circumstances, intellectuals are divided by 'conjunctural and epiphenomenal oppositions' (1996: 343) arising out of specific situations. (Bourdieu uses the example of Habermas and Foucault to illustrate his

¹ For Bourdieu, see chapter six below.

point; each aspires to autonomy, but due to prevailing specific circumstances of tradition, each saw the other as an opponent.)

In this way, the narrative of the intellectual is *aspirational*, is concerned with escaping the limits of identity and condition into the pure realm of autonomy. Articulated in such a narrative, therefore, are both dependence and independence. Hence, in his argument for a "corporatism of the universal", Bourdieu identifies the intellectual's specific aspirational function as requiring a dialectical interaction with the limits which seek always to impose themselves upon the specific intellectual, with institutional limits in particular. Without these limits, the intellectual would *achieve* a pure autonomy, would achieve a disembodied, asocial existence, which outcome Bourdieu, with his materialist social analysis, can not accept. Without the constant need for the re-telling of the narrative of the intellectual, according to changing conditions and conventions, there would no longer be a need for a storyteller. The dialectic would thus come to an end.

In the last chapter of this thesis I have identified the contemporary political/cultural conjuncture as one where the limits upon the aspiration of the intellectual have been accepted, leading to the cancellation of the autonomous intention. The contemporary crises of the intelligentsia so often commented upon may be said to be a crisis of its own making. Those in the position which formerly would have been that from which the narrative of the intellectual would be re-told, who would have reclaimed and continued the tradition of the intellectual by identifying themselves with it, no longer do so. We have been witness in recent years to the so-called "end of meta-narratives", to the bonfire of universalist traditions that aspire to transcend local traditions and micro-narratives. This conflagration has accounted for the intellectual, as just such a

transcendent narrative. We can no longer lift ourselves above the level of particularity, it is not only that all the moves have already been made in the "games" of politics, philosophy and culture, but the fact that they are revealed as games that discredits their claims to seriousness, to an aspiration really to uncover the way of things and to change them. All that is left for us, *a la* Lyotard and Baudrillard, is the 'refusal to mourn' (Callinicos, 1989: 17) their passing, and to engage at the level of everyday life in "symbolic exchanges" – that is, in the circulation of various particular representations of fragments of reality in order to accrue to ourselves symbolic "surplus value".

But, the intellectual can not simply be placed at the level of meta-narrative; my argument is that, realised in specific identities, it has been engaged in a dialectic between general, and generalising, narratives – grand theories, foundational accounts, moral and political schemata – and those that are particular and local in character. The production of the former has involved the production of the latter; the creation of ideals, objective and extra-personal conceptual or institutional structures has also necessitated the creation of a personal identity, of a certain subjectivity in a particular time and place. Moreover, this dual movement is contradictory, insofar as it constitutes the *localising of the universal*, making it the "property" of a particular individual or group, and simultaneously, the *universalising of the particular*, whereby the values and conceptions of specific individuals become generalised characteristics.

Intellectuals and Socialism

The specific instances of the intellectual chosen for study in this thesis are drawn largely, though not exclusively, from the Left. It is within the universe of Left politics and culture that the key problems and issues with regard to the

constitution of the intellectual have been brought most sharply into focus. With its orientation upon universal transformation and upon the realisation of theory in practice, socialism has provided a conceptual context that has had a deep appeal for intellectuals. However, in its practical realisation in the party and its subsidiary organisations, it has also provided an institutional context that has placed *limits* upon intellectual practice. The "classic" dilemmas of the intellectual in the twentieth-century have been those between commitment and distance, affiliation and non-affiliation, centrality and marginality, and it is within – or, without – the mass organisations of the Left that those dilemmas have been lived through and reflected upon.

Indeed, one may say that the conceptions of the intellectual featured in the following chapters are to a large extent the products of the effort to resolve these dilemmas. Thus, in his idea of the *freischwebende Intelligenz* Mannheim proposed a paradoxical figure whose social "commitment" rested upon his or her comprehensive synthesis of, or, distance from, all particular ideological positions. And for Critical Theorists such as Horkheimer and Adorno, the very marginality of the critical intellectual, his or her complete detachment from concrete political practice, constituted his or her *centrality*, insofar as the intellectual was thereby enabled to "identify" him- or herself with the negative totality that in their very partial and fragmentary character the phenomena of the present did not represent.

For his part, Gramsci's "organic intellectual" can be seen as, amongst other things, the result of his effort to overcome the opposition between individual and collective intellectual and cultural development. The elaboration of such intellectuals out of the ranks of the working-class, rather than representing the

debasement of "High culture" at the hands of "mass culture", would in fact be both the proof and the guarantee of that class's cultural and moral maturity.

In the cases of Mills' and Thompson's re-assertion of the value of the moral-experiential dimension, there may be seen an attempt to re-moralise, to "personalise" the public political sphere in the teeth of a complete loss of legitimacy on the part of the official Left. The imaginative "craftsmanship" of Mills and the emphasis of Thompson upon the value of an "organic" educational practice represented the blurring of divisions between political and academic practice, where each would become (*must* become) both the subject of commitment and the object of distanced analysis.

Sartre, endeavouring to combine Marxism with existentialism and thereby reclaim the former as a vital, creative force in everyday life, argued for the intellectual to be seen as committed in his or her very *existence*. It was thus possible for him or her to play a central role in the class struggle without necessarily submitting to the discipline of the party, without necessarily *demonstrating* commitment to the cause. As we will see, in the aftermath of the May Events in France Sartre sought to adapt this position, to bring into line with a new conviction of the necessity and efficacy of direct political action. However, I would argue that his perception of the intellectual's contradictory position – which awareness he made a constitutive element of the intellectual itself – was not only valid but also not easily overcome, indeed, Sartre may be said ultimately to have adopted a position where the dialectic of commitment and distance, constraint and aspiration became a strict *division* between the two sides.

Havel's conception of an existential dissidence, unlike the other instances of the intellectual featured in this thesis, originated in the context of *state* socialism. For Havel, in this context there was a necessity to distinguish between the

morally compromised “utopian” political intellectuals whom he held responsible for perpetuating the “fantasy” of human perfectibility through social engineering and those responsible “moral” intellectuals who preserved the idea of a sphere of *transcendent* truth above the merely political. According to Havel, Communism had transformed unthinking dependence into independent thought, commitment and membership into the ritualised acts of the unfree. It was the dissident’s task – his or her moral obligation – to reclaim these and to reaffirm autonomy as that which had yet to be achieved.

However, and this leads us into the final chapter of our narrative, the experience of state socialism, and its collapse, has led Havel and many others to view not only socialism itself but *politics as a whole* (a politics *of* the whole) as no longer the main sphere in or the appropriate means by which such an end can be achieved. It is my contention, however, that with the disappearance of a belief in the possibility or desirability of a universalising politics one may also lose the aspiration that has been both its product and that by which such a politics may be held to account.

Chapter One

***From the Realm of the Spirit to 'the
laboratory of actual life': Karl
Mannheim's Changing Intellectual***

Introduction

The significance of the intellectual for Karl Mannheim was as that which served to bridge the gap between experience (the experiential totality) and theory, between systemic thought and the living phenomena of which it purported to give an account. Mannheim made the intellectual, or the reflective consciousness, central first to his philosophy of history and culture, and later to his sociology and social theory, in order to show that the knower was necessarily a part of what is known, that knowing was itself an *act*, a moment of doing. Thus, for Mannheim, thought and action were part of one another.

The problem with which Mannheim was preoccupied was that of converting the global unity of cultural life into a conceptual unity accessible to thought. He attempted to develop comprehensive categories that allowed the thinker to know, if only provisionally, the obscure totality of culture and the cultural process. Initially, in wartime Budapest, this was seen by Mannheim as a matter of cultivating, through the apprehension of cultural objects, the "soul" – specifically, the collective, generational consciousness of the "European intellectual". The intellectual, by taking upon him- or herself the tasks of cultural renewal, would achieve an *ethical knowledge* of the cultural totality – a hermeneutic understanding of the whole through an active assimilation and articulation of its parts.

During the period when Mannheim began to work out a systematic sociology of knowledge, having left Hungary after the counter-revolution of 1919, he began to focus upon a more strictly *methodological* emphasis and orientation with regard to the experiential/cultural totality. In Weimar Germany he sought to

elaborate theoretical concepts and a scientific methodology which would provide the means whereby a-theoretical phenomena such as those of political and ethical life could be made accessible to rational reflection. The famous *freischwebende Intelligenz*, or, "free-floating intellectual", made its entrance at this point, as one possessed of a synthetic consciousness which enables him or her to be both part of and distanced from the cultural process. The intellectual was still seen by Mannheim as necessarily a participant, as one who had to consider him- or herself as part of that which he or she was attempting to understand, but this now became a *methodological* consideration – that is, not a basis for a collective corporate consciousness and identity but that which provided the conditions for a new scientific objectivity.

Mannheim's attempt to develop a sociological analysis which encompassed both theoretical and practical dimensions, and which offered an account of the objective facts of the social world and the interior articulation of those facts as values and as specific forms of consciousness, eventually foundered on the facts of historical experience in the Europe of the 1930s. In his later emphasis upon the need for *planning* in social and political life can be seen an abandonment of the idea of a "dynamic synthesis" of competing historico-social points-of-view or modes of thought and the acceptance of the necessity for the imposition of a natural-scientific paradigm of knowledge upon all other forms of thought. This development is readily evident in the division that took place within the intellectual. On the one side there now stood the active planner devising concrete programmes and policies, a Deweyan pragmatic social reformer who based his or her proposals and conclusions upon a sound base of scientific knowledge, on the other was the marginal figure of the critical intellectual who should be allowed a

position from which he or she could reflect upon the functioning of society and envisage future possibilities. The two functions would be structurally related, but they had become, precisely, *functions* – there was no longer seriously presented the possibility of wholesale social and cultural renewal. Spirit had become that which had to be *managed*.

Theoretical Resources

Mannheim's thought drew heavily upon German social and cultural philosophy and sociologies of knowledge and culture. As such, it had its roots in the hermeneutics and *Weltanschauungslehre* of Dilthey, in the *Lebensphilosophie* of Georg Simmel, in historicist thinking, and in Scheler's and Max Weber's sociologies of value. In their different ways these approaches shared a common concern with the subjective conditions of knowledge and with the interdependence of fact and value. Their emphasis was with the contextual or conditional character of knowledge, its roots within specific concrete contexts, conceived either experientially, phenomenologically, or socio-historically. The subject and object of knowledge could not be assumed to be separate, and thus knowledge had to be seen as not knowledge *of* objects for a disembodied, disinterested consciousness but as knowledge *for* subjects with specific purposes. To know should be seen as participating within particular social or existential processes; and the truth of particular "objective" propositions and claims could not be detached from their meaning within those processes.

Chief among these influences, one should place the figure of Georg Lukács. It was Lukács who in Budapest provided the focus for the so-called "Sunday Circle"

which met to discuss metaphysical and idealist philosophies and 'antirational phenomena' (Gluck, 1985: 156) which asserted the importance of "spirit" and subjectivity in the face of the optimistic positivism prevalent amongst the Hungarian progressive intelligentsia. Lukács had connections with Weber and his circle, and with Simmel, and the Sunday Circle provided a context and a forum for the self-consciously marginalised intellectual. However, Lukács was also important to Mannheim as the author of *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), which was itself the product of the union of historical materialism, philosophical idealism and Weberian sociology (see Kettler, 1967 for an account of this). In that work Lukács affirmed the class consciousness of the proletariat, as the collective subject of history, as not merely the reflexive by-product of determinant material forces but as itself the essential factor in revolutionary transformation, as the dialectical realisation of its historical agency (Lukács, 1971: 70-71).

Though Mannheim never accepted the 'marxist account of the proletarian mission' (Kettler, 1967: 421), he did, like Lukács, and in *Ideology and Utopia* (1936) particularly, theorise a connection between consciousness and political agency. But for Mannheim the subject of that agency came to be the *individual intellectual* (though it has been argued that Lukács' 'Hegelianised Marxism', with its philosophic bent, amounted to the same thing (see, most recently, Harding, 1997)). Ultimately, the sociology of knowledge was conceived of not merely as a way of thinking about the relationship between the object and the subject of knowledge, between thought and its origins in particular experiential contexts, but sought to realise itself by seeking actively, through the agency of the intellectual, *to reflect itself back into those contexts*. These two moments, the theoretical-conceptual and the practical, were seen as inseparable. As such, the sociology of

knowledge appeared to stand in a positive relation to Marxist theory. However, Mannheim was concerned with appropriating that theory for non-revolutionary ends; ultimately he sought a new, "dynamic" objectivity, rather than a revolutionary, class science, upon which the intellectual's activity could be founded. The synthetic consciousness of the intellectual could provide the possibility of a rational politics of progressive cultivation.

Thus, drawing upon such an individualist conception of the intellectual, it became possible for Mannheim to posit the achievement of *self*-consciousness as the individualised intellectual's principle activity. An autonomous subjectivity, one might say, was the intellectual's characteristic work, and the means by which he or she became socially and politically significant. The paradox of Mannheim's sociology of knowledge was that though it sought to identify knowledge as part of wider social processes, and to see the contents and structures of subjective consciousnesses as themselves objective, it was only able to achieve this at one remove from real practical contexts and conditions. This paradox has been noted by a number of commentators, and in the next chapter I outline the objections of Critical Theorists such as Horkheimer and Adorno made from this position. David Frisby, for example, writes:

On the one hand there is evidence to suggest that the sociology of knowledge is a response to crises in German society and that the key figures who developed [it] saw its concrete practical aims as every bit as important as the theoretical aims. On the other hand, there is nowhere a concrete analysis of the crises of German society. This suggests that, in

fact, the perception of these crises is largely in theoretical terms. (Frisby, 1992: 24)

Frisby goes on to refer to Mannheim's statement in the original German version of *Ideology and Utopia* that 'this book is itself conscious of an intellectual crisis situation.' For Mannheim, as for his fellow sociologists of knowledge, '[t]he crisis is a crisis for intellectuals'; it is a crisis which 'arises out of the conflict and struggle between systems of world-views, ideologies and forms of life', but 'any delineation of these forms of life... is largely absent.' (Frisby, 1992: 25, 24) Such a crisis, moreover, might be viewed, optimistically, as more open to resolution than the concrete social and political antagonisms which that crisis supposedly expressed. As we shall see in the next chapter, it was precisely this criticism - of a facile, essentially idealist optimism - that was levelled at Mannheim early on by members of the Institute for Social Research.

At the same time, it should be pointed out that the persistence of such a distance between experiential reality and theoretical conceptualisations is precisely that which the sociology of knowledge was supposed to address. Mannheim hoped to locate in the consciousness of the intellectual the possibility of a synthesis (albeit a dynamic synthesis) and the resources for cultural renewal. But in so doing, I would argue, he undermined the validity of such a synthesis, and thus the characteristic effectivity of the intellectual as a political agent for which he had argued. Because, for Mannheim, the intellectual him- or herself, as a *specific, individuated subject*, was identified with the dynamic socio-historical process of, he or she was necessarily aligned with no existing collective social or

political force, and *as an intellectual* (though not necessarily as an individual active within a particular profession or occupation) could not be so aligned. However, this meant that with the advent of fascism in Germany, when irrationalism threatened to end the possibility of any sort of progressive synthesis, Mannheim was forced effectively to abandon the synthesising intellectual grounded in the historicist sociology of knowledge.

The prospects for wholesale cultural renewal arising purely out of the realm of spirit and impelled by the spontaneous dynamic of becoming had been destroyed; indeed, it could be said (see, for instance, Marcuse, 1968: 124-125) to be spirit or culture itself, now embodied in the intangible, irreducible essence of race and nation, which constituted the gravest threat to progressive pluralist culture. Thus, in the face of the crisis which fascism represented, Mannheim in his later work exchanged the idea of the dynamic and open-ended synthesis for that of planning. Whereas previously the future could be left to itself - or rather, to the progressive unfolding of an intellectually inspired history - now it had to be brought scientifically into being. And in the process of this exchange the intellectual, as the agent of a spontaneous transformative critical practice, was itself "rationalised" and subordinated to existing social and political conceptions and priorities. The 'optimism' of the *freischwebende intelligenz* seeking a transcendent objectivity in the synthetic operations of consciousness eventually was supplanted by the hard-edged, scientific objectivity of the planner attempting to stem the tide of irrationalism.

I shall now seek to explore more closely some of the critical conceptual and historical forces and contexts referred to above which led Mannheim early on to

place great emphasis upon the dependent relation between knowledge and the living situation, between thought and action, and thus to represent the intellectual as an especially significant category in social development. In the process we will see his early emphasis upon the effectivity of a primarily cultural praxis. The first important location for Mannheim's elaboration of the intellectual is Budapest in the first two decades of this century.

Social and Cultural Renewal

I shall not rehearse at length the political and social circumstances of Hungary at this time, other than to say that they were marked by a keen sense amongst the Budapest-based intellectuals of the need for a radical transformation of Hungarian society - a transformation of what was seen as a near feudal social and economic system, and of an antiquated and undemocratic political system which revolved around privilege and corruption. The most significant organisation for those intellectuals in this context was the Sociological Society, which was founded in 1900. Dismayed with the backwardness of Hungarian society, the Sociological Society espoused a Western outlook (looking, as Mary Gluck points out, especially to Britain and France (Gluck, 1985: 85-6)) and endorsed the cause of social progress; it was, according to one of its leaders, 'for a generation the bridge of communication with Western progress' (Jászi, 1969: 25). The Society compared itself approvingly with the Fabian Society in Britain, and shared the latter's belief in the value of applying a positivistic scientific method to social problems and issues. (The first issue of what became the Society's journal, *Huszadik Század* (*Twentieth Century*)) carried a letter of greeting and endorsement

from Herbert Spencer (Gluck, 1985: 88)). Like the Fabians - and like the slightly later *Deutsche Hochschule für Politik* (see Gay, 1968: 38-40) - the Sociological Society sought the development of a rational polity through the provision of public education in social and political science. To this end, it mounted a programme of open lectures and Free Schools (the institutional strategy par excellence of reforming intelligentsias in the early part of this century) which aimed to familiarise 'the elite of every social layer, irrespective of age and sex...with the most important tenets, methods, and achievements of modern sociology.' (Gustáv Gralz, cited in Gluck, 1985: 87-88)

In 1905, in the wake of the so-called "Somló Affair", a controversy centred on the claims made for the social and political implications of science (Gluck, 1985: 98-9), the Society split into radical and conservative sections, and the latter eventually seceded. After this, there was a movement on the part of those left towards an outright political and critical stance. According to Jászi, sociology became a 'battle cry', a 'dividing agent which separated Hungarian middle-class society into a progressive and a reactionary section.' (cited in Gluck, 1985: 101) 'Gradually', writes Gluck, 'the claims of scholarship gave way to those of politics, and by 1907 there seemed to be little doubt in Jászi's mind about the underlying political goals of radicalism.' (Gluck, 1985: 99) A strongly Platonic notion of the intellectual as philosopher providing guidance in public affairs and thus grounding public conduct in reason developed 'Guidance for the ideal politician', proclaimed Jászi, 'can only come from the Platonic ideal: an age is to come when public life is controlled by philosophers, when men of complete theoretical knowledge and complete moral purity take on the leadership' (cited in Kettler,

1971: 47). Jászi made this pronouncement at the foundation of the Radical Party in 1914, which sought actively to institute just this rationalisation of Hungarian politics and public affairs. Furthermore, he himself played a leading part in the bourgeois revolution of October 1918, and sat on the National Council which ushered in the Károlyi régime. The October Revolution represented, as far as Jászi was concerned, an attempt to establish the fundamental principle of 'the sovereignty of the industrious masses of peasants and town workers in the State, under the guidance of the genuinely creative intelligenzia [sic.]' (Jászi, 1969: 36)

Thus, as represented by the Sociological Society and the Radical Party, a large section of the Budapest intelligentsia endorsed the civilising, rationalising and modernising responsibility of the intellectual. In this, of course, they placed themselves within the Enlightenment current of the "man of ideas" resisting the forces of irrationalism and of tradition. Intellectuals such as Jászi sought to employ science upon the "material" of society and politics, and in the process aimed to bring about social renewal. As we shall see, in the long term this proved to be method and the aim of Mannheim's scientific practice. However, in Budapest during the First World War he identified himself more closely with other methods and aims, in his involvement with the Sunday Circle gathered round Georg Lukács.

The Sunday Circle

The Sunday Circle was culturally modernist and philosophically idealist in orientation. It exhibited a commitment to the modern in art (a commitment which Lukács had demonstrated early on with the foundation of the Thalia Theatre in

Budapest in 1904, which put on performances of, amongst others, Ibsen, Strindberg and Wedekind); however, this was part of a more general commitment to culture as that which kept alive the possibility of a wholesale transformation of the contemporary order. Their commitment was to *culture* first and foremost, and the Circle was characterised, at least before the communist revolution of 1919, by its focus upon the need for 'cultural rebirth' (Gluck, 1985: 9) and for an essentially "spiritual" solution to the contemporary political and cultural crisis. Indeed, in the words of one of its members, Anna Lesznai, the group 'had a closer resemblance to a religious gathering than to a political club' (cited in Gluck, 1985: 24).

As such, therefore, in contrast to the scientism and rationalism of the Sociological Society, the members of the Sunday Circle were interested in mysticism and the antirational for their capacity to gesture at possibilities as yet unrealised, worlds yet in the making, and in such "obscure" phenomena of spirit as love and the forms and practices of folk culture. As David Kettler points out, '[t]he guardian saints of the group in [its] early times were Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky' (Kettler, 1971: 59fn), strong heroes of an individualist philosophy of inwardness. Moreover, the Circle situated itself within the orbit of German philosophy and thought. Lukács, Mannheim and the poet Béla Balázs all studied with Simmel in Berlin. The group valued the *Lebensphilosophie* of the latter and the *Geisteswissenschaften* of Wilhelm Dilthey, as well as the thought of Weber and Nietzsche, as leading the way for an understanding of the objective world which went beyond understanding it as a dead object. However, they criticised the older generation of thinkers for not following up the metaphysical consequences

of their thought (see Gluck, 1985: 145ff). They saw a need for *transcendence* in the modern world, and sought to trace the shadow of futurity as it fell upon the present. Hence, it was with the culture of the future rather than the politics of the present that the Circle was explicitly concerned.

But, even with such a metaphysical emphasis the Circle was yet allied with the rationalist and positivist radical intellectuals against the Hungarian régime. Looking back upon the period in 1967, Lukács summed up their position thus:

Our [the Sunday Circle's] common standpoint was that we were absolutely opposed to the growing Hungarian reaction, and in this respect we were in complete alliance with *Huszadik Század*, but in the realm of philosophy, we were in sharp opposition to their free-thinking positivism (cited in Gluck, 1985: 94).

Similarly, Bálaazs, writing to Lukács in 1911, expressed an awareness of being caught between two apparently contradictory impulses:

Whenever I read an article by a radical or even a socialist, I always feel a violent opposition or antipathy toward their superficial enlightenment and antimetaphysical rationalism... On the other hand, whenever I read conservative, religious writings, then I realize that in spite of everything, I am a man of the Enlightenment; that I find their outlook narrow, ignorant, inhumane (cited in Gluck, 1985: 95).

The ambivalent and dualistic outlook of the Circle meant that the metaphysical and transcendent were seen not as existentially realisable in the present but as no

more than obscurely figuring some far distant future, and this found expression in Mannheim's conception of the intellectual. As Gluck writes:

For the Lukács group, antirational phenomena such as mysticism, erotic love, and the world of fairy tails were merely oblique symbols of metaphysical possibilities in some far-off future, rather than genuine options and solutions for the present. They in fact stated quite explicitly that neither art nor mysticism nor love could provide a lasting resolution of the cultural crisis they experienced as a generation. (Gluck, 1985: 156)

The Circle thought that a *lasting* solution to the present crisis would only be found in a future which was itself deeply uncertain. Such as it was, therefore, that solution would not be found through social or political means and action, but was the task of the culturally minded intellectual. However, the intellectual could only keep alive the possibility of a perfect future by committing herself to and working within an imperfect present. The cultural tasks of the intellectual, therefore, necessitated a mode of participation within the present which required the recognition that those tasks might never be completed.

It was with such a consciousness of the present tasks of cultural renewal that the Circle organised a series of lectures and seminars under the aegis of the Free School for *Geisteswissenschaften* in 1917-18 for which Mannheim prepared what Frisby describes as 'a programmatic statement of the group's intentions.' (Frisby, 1992: 110). In this lecture, later published as *Soul and Culture (Lélek és Kultúra)*, Mannheim tried to give an overview of the group's central philosophical concerns and orientation, and in so doing sought to articulate a *generational*

consciousness, to foment an awareness amongst his audience of a shared ethical purpose. The alienation of intellectuals from society and culture was in fact a crucial aspect of the distancing of culture from itself. Due to this distancing, Mannheim claimed, 'the inner structure of the cultural world has become transparent to us'; the outsider status of the intellectual *as* intellectual allowed his or her insight into the deeper recesses of the structure and functioning of culture as a whole. Moreover, it is in such periods of estrangement or marginality, he went on, that 'critical thinking becomes primary: logic, aesthetics, the philosophy of history come to the fore in scholarly works', as it had in the historicist and humanistic scholarship which had developed in Germany. It is worth quoting the rest of the passage here:

I believe that the most valuable task of today's intellectual generation lies in this direction...It is on the basis of this unique intellectual perspective of ours that I would wish to indicate our particular historic mission as a generation. And if we accept this mission, the outlines of the solution already become clear (cited in Gluck, 1985: 75).

Mannheim's conception of the tasks of the intellectual had a strong flavour of what Lukács, writing of his own position, was later to dismiss as 'revolutionary messianism.' (Lukács, 1971: xv) The 'novel type of European intellectual' that Mannheim considered had come into being might never get to see and to experience 'the new contents embodied in the clarity of new cultural forms'; however, he or she would have 'prepared the way for the new culture by making the old one comprehensible.' (cited in Gluck, 1985: 182, 170) Such an intellectual would not seek to anticipate history by imposing inflexible "scientific"

solutions upon the future, but rather would be content with working in the here-and-now. The way toward the new culture is through the existing 'products' of the old, which have to be made understandable not as independent objects apprehended by an instrumental rationality but through their active appropriation by the "soul".

The influence of Georg Simmel was strong upon Mannheim at this point; it was from Simmel that he took the idea of a contemporary 'tragedy' of cultural alienation which was manifested in the opposition between 'objective' and 'subjective' cultures. According to Simmel,

[p]articularly in periods of social complexity and an extensive division of labor, the accomplishments of culture come to constitute an autonomous realm, so to speak. Things become more perfected, more intellectual, and to some degree more controlled by an internal, objective logic tied to their instrumentality; but the supreme cultivation, that of subjects, does not increase proportionately. (Simmel, 1971: 234)

Mannheim mirrored this conception in his description of objective culture as an 'independent leviathan' which may overwhelm us and grow 'beyond our grasp' if we are unable to enter into a transformative relationship with it in which subjective and objective cultures become mutually dependent (cited in Frisby, 1992: 110). Cultural regeneration is seen not as a matter of producing more and more perfect - more perfectly rational - objects but of bringing culture to *life*, of reuniting 'the totality of the objectifications of the mind' (cited in Frisby, 1992: 111) with the mind that created them. Writing only a few years before Mannheim,

Simmel gave clear expression to this idea of the transformation of objects: 'all objectivity, the object of all knowledge, must be transformed into life. Thus the process of cognition, now interpreted as a function of life, is confronted with an object which it can completely penetrate since it is equal in its essence.' (Simmel, 1971: 387) The appropriation of objects is simultaneously an extension of the subject; we no longer "possess" knowledge of things apart from ourselves, but instead knowledge is part of a total process of life, thinking an extension of living.

Within the Simmelian vision spelt out in *Soul and Culture* Mannheim presented the intellectual not as an agent of social and political enlightenment, not as one who provides *guidance* to a benighted society, but as one who through reflective thought enacts or articulates a *cultural dialectic*. In terms of that dialectic the subjectivity of the intellectual (the "novel type of European intellectual") – the soul – becomes his or her principal work as an intellectual. Through reflection the intellectual makes possible the synthesis of object and subject, each becoming part of the other in the living process of knowledge. Thus, in the context of what Kettler has called the Sunday Circle's 'revolutionary culturism' (Kettler, 1971: 36), that is, its insistence upon the need for comprehensive cultural renovation, Mannheim developed a conception of the intellectual as not simply a figure possessed of a stock of knowledge which she places at society's disposal in accordance with the dictates of reason or conscience, but as one for whom life and thought are inseparable, and whose intellectualism *resides in overcoming the conflict between the two*. This context was removed with the success of the counter-revolution in Hungary, however, Mannheim went on to elaborate his

ideas about the particular cultural-social significance of the intellectual within the context of the sociology of knowledge in Weimar Germany.

The Renewal of Science

Mannheim moved to Germany in the wake of the counter-revolution and the establishment of the Horthy régime in Hungary. Though not forced immediately into exile like many others, his Jewishness and his willingness to work under the Soviet régime (Mannheim was appointed by Lukács, then the commissar for education, to a post at the university in Budapest (Woldring, 1986: 16-17)) ultimately counted against him. The revolutionary and counter-revolutionary events of 1918-19 had made the taking of sides unavoidable. Mannheim, along with other members of the Circle, had come out onto the streets to demonstrate his support for the bourgeois October revolution. (Gluck, 1985: 198) Furthermore, as events progressed, Lukács and many of the Circle, though not Mannheim, joined the Communist Party. Though Lukács framed this participation initially in familiar ethical and "transcendent" terms, referring to it as a sacrifice which had to be undertaken at the behest of the 'imperative of the world-historical situation', and as 'a historico-philosophical mission' (Lukács, 1972: 10) to install a new cultural, moral and spiritual order (Jászi, 1969: 144), within the context of the Communists' ascent to power and the establishment and defence of the Soviet Republic Lukács' and the Circle's adherence to a transcendent metaphysics was inevitably greatly modified, if not abandoned altogether. Thus, when Mannheim applied for readmission to the Circle, now reassembled in exile in Vienna, in 1921

he was denied on the grounds of his political unsuitability - to wit, his lack of revolutionary conviction. (Kettler, Meja, Stehr, 1984: 38)

With the politicisation and subsequent dispersal of the Sunday Circle Mannheim lost the immediate, and metaphysical, context and focus of his conception of the "mission" of the new European intellectual. However, re-location in Germany (Mannheim ended up in Heidelberg in 1921) exposed him to sustained and frequent contact with leading figures in sociological and historicist thinking through his participation in the Weber Group. (Woldring, 1986: 20-21) As Kettler, Meja, Stehr point out, such participation seems at first surprising given that also active in Heidelberg at the time was the Stefan George Circle, which was primarily a literary group involved in spiritual explorations much like the Lukács' group in Budapest (Kettler, Meja, Stehr, 1984: 38-39, for the George *Kreis*, see Gay, 1968: ch.3). However, in this new context Mannheim dismissed 'the George community' as too wrapped up in itself, deluding itself with notions of its own significance and effectiveness: '[t]hey deceive themselves with the feeling of having ground under their feet. They have drawn inward, covering themselves with a blanket of culture, leaving the world out and becoming lost in themselves' (cited in Kettler, Meja, Stehr, 1984: 39).

The crucial issues for Mannheim and his cohorts in Budapest had been the possibility of cultural renewal and the necessary participation of the intellectual in that historical process. As such, the European intellectual was, or should be, engaged on an ethical mission to save culture, to salvage that which had to survive from it for the sake of its renewal. In Heidelberg he turned to sociology as offering the best chance for 'historical understanding and practical development.'

(Kettler, Meja, Stehr, 1984: 40) In investigations in cultural sociology and then the sociology of knowledge Mannheim sought for ways of making cultural phenomena - phenomena of the spirit - the objects of science without objectifying them in a negative sense, and thus making possible the renewal of science as no longer opposed to the inner 'spiritual structures' of culture. (Kettler, Meja, Stehr, 1984: 40) The focus of his intellectual activity – his activity as an intellectual – on the one hand became *more* practical, that is, became concerned with the empirical data of everyday life, with the material substrata of ideas and modes of thought. On the other hand, Mannheim's removal from the Hungarian political and cultural context represented a *disengagement* from a situation in which the intellectual was forced to engage in the practical, ethico-political life of a nation. One could say that as German culture represented Mannheim's intellectual "home" (this being the most important sort of home to him), and, moreover, that as one concerned with the new type of *European* intellectual specific national contexts would be relatively unimportant to him. But this re-location led to the distancing of Mannheim, referred to by Frisby, from precisely those practical phenomena and situations which he went on to theorise as inseparable from the structures and processes of thought.

Science in Ferment

In an essay written in 1921-22, "On the Interpretation of *Weltanschauung*", Mannheim expressed his belief in an essential change having taken place in the realm of science. The 'mechanistic method' of the natural sciences seemed about to be displaced by methods concerned more with treating their objects holistically, and as part of this, with attempting to give an account of 'higher-level phenomena

of meaning.' (Mannheim, 1952: 82) The *meaning* - the what and the why - of objects had begun to become the concern of science:

Modern nominalism seems to be supplanted by a realism which recognises universals (such as, for example, 'spirit'), if only as methodologically warranted constructs. The concept of 'substance', which had practically been ousted by that of 'function', is again coming to the fore, and we no longer ask only about the How of things but also for a definition of What they are. (Mannheim, 1952: 82)

This new methodological direction and emphasis in science constituted a movement away from the sort of positivism, the systematic tone deafness 'to the nuances of the inner life' (Lukács, cited in Gluck, 1985: 92), which Mannheim and his cohorts had seen as characterising sociology in Budapest. Mannheim considered this transformation in science to be part 'of a much more far-reaching cultural transformation.' The conditions had arisen whereby science and culture were no longer necessarily in opposition to one another, they could now be seen as part of the same process, that of history.

In his essay "The Crisis of Historicism" Ernst Troeltsch, himself part of the Weber circle, wrote of 'the historicisation of our whole knowledge and experience of the intellectual world', and of everything having entered 'the flux of becoming' (cited in Frisby, 1992: 14). Similarly, in his cultural sociology Mannheim saw history taking centre-stage.

The fact that natural science had to restore to history its rightful autonomy, that there is a dawning understanding of the distinctive nature

of the mental and historical, that we are striving after a synthesis and would like to draw the meaning and form of pre-theoretical date within the orbit of science - all this is a sign that science along with all our whole intellectual life is in ferment; and although we see the trend of this process, we cannot anticipate its final outcome. History never repeats itself literally. (Mannheim, 1952: 82-83)

By this reckoning, science, caught up in the contemporary "ferment", is no longer divorced from other, pre-theoretical elements within life, but is united, upon the ground of history, with them. "Cultural science", properly so-called, is part of the process which it seeks to investigate and to comprehend, and no longer stands over against it. It is just such a cultural science that Mannheim was interested in, or rather, he was interested in determining the methodological profile of such a science. For, as indicated in the citation above, the turn toward synthesis was seen by Mannheim as having had already taken place, and he was concerned only with bringing that change to light, with making that change conscious. The specialised disciplines in the study of culture had begun to manifest an interest in 'questions of the philosophy of history.' Mannheim, 1952: 37) This interest, according to Mannheim, 'manifests itself by a growing need to fit particular findings into some global historical scheme, and by the readiness to use unorthodox methods', such as attempting to correlate the previously isolated objects of 'abstractive procedures' with one another. (Mannheim, 1952: 37, 36) The process whereby individual disciplines address themselves to the problems situated at their margins - problems which revolve around 'a difficulty of procedure which makes the investigator stop and reflect' (Mannheim, 1953: 35) -

was considered by Mannheim to be well advanced in the contemporary intellectual ferment. His methodological investigations sought 'but to make explicit in logical terms what is *de facto* going on in living research.' (Mannheim, 1952: 37)

In his essay on the *Weltanschauung* Mannheim suggested that in the study of culture we come up repeatedly against the fundamental problem of conducting a theoretical investigation into an essentially a-theoretical phenomenon - the given totality of 'the global unity of culture.' (Mannheim, 1952: 39) As Martin Jay points out, Mannheim at this point was making use of an 'irrationalist' conception of totality derived specifically from art history. (Jay, 1985: 65) Such a totality is fundamentally resistant to conversion into theoretical terms, theory being itself part of it. But if we are confronted, time and again, with the seeming impossibility of the task, why do we persist in attempting it? The answer to this question, according to Mannheim, lies in the irreducibly plural and heterogeneous character of the human being: '[i]t is because it touches upon a fundamental property of human life and mind... This fundamental trait is that man is the citizen of several worlds at the same time.' (Mannheim, 1952: 40) The mind is essentially heterogeneous and open to the totality of cultural experience. 'The life of the mind', Mannheim tells us, 'is a constant flux, oscillating between the theoretical and a-theoretical pole', and thus mental life involves 'a constant intermingling and re-arranging of the most disparate categories of many different origins' (Mannheim, 1952: 40), in short, is a process of (re-)interpretation and translation.

From the perspective of the cultural study of the *Weltanschauung*, the two poles of rationality and irrationality, experience and theory, even object and subject cannot be easily separated out from one another, but must be seen as

interpenetrated. As a consequence of this, according to Mannheim, the *activity* of theorising - to the extent, that is, that theorising *is* an activity - should not be viewed as beginning and ending in science, but rather, we should recognise that 'everyday experience is shot through with bits of theory.' (Mannheim, 1952: 40)

We are, then, impelled to theorise because theoretical awareness is itself an element in our concrete existence, or of our cultural experience, the two being regarded by Mannheim, as Frisby points out (Frisby, 1992: 127), as the same thing. The difference between theoretical as opposed to other categories of experience (ethical, religious, or aesthetic, for example) is that the former seeks to impose its own particular pattern of rationality upon those others, and in the process becomes (self-)reflexive. Thus "theory" attempts to dominate the whole of our fundamentally plural experience, ultimately forcing upon it a false unity and coherence according to which only the theoretical is recognised as valid and objective (the latter becoming the prime measure of validity), and which works continuously to legitimate its own principles and methodology. Construed in this way, Mannheim's methodological pluralism constituted the continuation of a mission to renew culture:

our task now is to define the methodological departure to characterise the decisive step by which a cultural objectification can be looked at, as it were, from a new side, and, pointing beyond itself, can be seen as part of a new totality beyond the cultural objectification level. (Mannheim, 1952: 42)

Significantly, however, the shadow of the future cultural order was now cast more strictly *methodologically*, rather than in terms of the *critical-moral* stance and perspective of the marginalised intellectual. Or, more accurately, the ethical dimension of intellectual activity - the messianic tasks of the spirit - was incorporated within the activity of methodological innovation.

Documentary Meaning

Mannheim's attempt at constituting a methodology adequate to the tasks of a truly cultural science centred upon the idea of the *Weltanschauung*, as the totality of the heterogeneous cultural life of an epoch, being comprehended through hermeneutic 'documentary' understanding or interpretation. Such interpretation is worked up from cultural traces and fragments (evidence), though it is concerned not with the reconstruction of objects as they have really existed in any particular period, or as they were experienced as meanings by those who created or originated them, but with the more than temporal. Documentary meaning, according to Mannheim, 'is a matter, not of temporal process in which certain experiences become actualized, but of the character, the essential nature, the 'ethos' of the subject which manifests itself in artistic creation.' (Mannheim, 1952: 55)¹ Documentary interpretation does not seek to re-live a unique past experience, nor is it a method of simply reading off the signs visible upon or inherent within the object, rather, it is a *subjective act* of the realisation of *essence*. Mannheim was in accord at this point with the phenomenological sociology of Max Scheler, for, like Scheler, his concern was with allowing the *ethos*, the whole complex of meanings and values of the historical subject -

obscure to that subject - to emerge through the subjective participation of the present 'participant observer', the latter thus attaining a species of sympathetic 'ethical knowledge'.²

In his chapter on Mannheim in *Hermeneutics and the Social Sciences* (1978) Zygmunt Bauman describes documentary meaning as

an analytical concept; an 'extraneous' meaning imputed to action not by its subject, but by an objective observer who remains permanently 'outside'...Through documentary understanding, the student of culture can grasp meanings of which actors of cultural drama are unaware. (Bauman, 1978: 91-92)

Documentary meaning may be said to have something in common with Lukács' notion, continued by Goldmann, of a revolutionary consciousness that can be 'imputed' to the proletariat, a revolutionary-theoretical consciousness which has no necessary present empirical counterpart (Lukács, 1971). In this way, Mannheim exhibited the roots in idealism, hermeneutics and historicism he shared with Lukács, which he, however, developed in a non-revolutionary direction. The meaning gathered through the documentary method cannot be intended by the subject, but rather, 'is a wholly unintentional, unconscious by-product' (Mannheim, 1952: 55), and exists, Bauman states, 'nowhere but in the scholar's discourse.' (Bauman, 1978: 92) There is no empirical subject corresponding to the "collective spirit" which is the object of documentary interpretation. Therefore, because such an interpretation cannot be reduced to concrete

¹ See above (p.22) for the art historical context of Mannheim's essay.

collective subjects, it cannot be refuted by reference to empirical sociological or anthropological categories. Such an interpretation enjoys an 'empirical immunity' (Bauman, 1978: 94); elements of documentary meaning can only be corroborated by other such elements.

As Mannheim saw it, there opens up a 'discrepancy' between these two kinds of subject – 'the subject of collective spirit...and the anthropological or sociological subject' – which makes it necessary 'to interpolate an intermediate field of concepts capable of mediating between these two extremes.' (Mannheim 1952: 60) Whereas Lukács saw it as the function of the Party, as the concrete organisation of revolutionary consciousness, to fill the gap between empirical reality and the "ideal type" of revolutionary subjectivity, Mannheim sought to identify "an intermediate field of concepts" articulated within the synthetic consciousness the individual intellectual to bridge that divide. What was for Lukács a problem of making the ideal material, for Mannheim was a matter of accounting for the deficit in materiality in ideal terms.

Existing in an apparent state of a-temporal autonomy sealed off from the possibility of empirical verification or control, the *Weltanschauung* posits a view of historical development as fundamentally a succession of rationally unaccountable epochal cultural "states of mind". Depending upon the particular aspect of culture we choose to focus upon (in Mannheim's case, the aesthetic), history becomes a phenomenological-ethical succession of one 'ideal essence' (Mannheim, 1952: 59) after another – from "classic spirit" to "renaissance spirit",

² For a recent elaboration of the concept of 'ethical knowledge' (*phronesis*) in the context of political philosophy, see Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (1993)

and so on. On the other hand, the dominant positivism of the empirical sciences yields a wholly objectivised subject which appears to stand outside of the stream of history. In both instances, history is lost. What Mannheim proposed was that in order to regain the consciousness of historical situatedness it was necessary for the cultural sciences to pursue 'a third way.' (Mannheim, 1952: 72) This would involve such a science fixing upon the reflective, theoretical moments within the *Gestalt* of immediate experience. The effect of this would be to give those proto-theoretical elements 'a firm profile' and thus 'to stabilize them' (Mannheim, 1952: 72) as theoretical phenomena, but as phenomena which retain their a-theoretical particularity. By these means, it would be possible to constitute a new scientific subject between the realms of spirit and empirical science, this subject being part of a more than theoretical whole, but because of that very fact, allowing that whole to become part of that which can be studied scientifically.

For Mannheim, the re-situation of science within history was not the end of its validity but rather represented its extension into the realm of the 'dynamically changing.' (Mannheim, 1952: 62) Science becomes more important and more relevant, not less so, when it is able to draw into its orbit the data of everyday existence and when it can develop methods of analysis which enable it to approach the totality of culture, understood as a structure of meanings, formerly ignored by science or considered inimical to its essential functioning. By extension - and of essential relevance to this discussion - the individual scientists who participate in this analytical enterprise are *in themselves* absolutely central figures. For cultural science, as historical science, depends upon the subjectivity of the analytical observer for the knowledge it produces. The content of that knowledge,

according to Mannheim, is bound up with 'the nature of the subject...and some aspects of the object to be interpreted are accessible *only to certain types of mind*' (Mannheim, 1952: 61; my emphasis). This can be explained by the fact that, unlike the 'timeless' knowledge of mathematics or the natural sciences, that which is yielded in historical understanding is 'itself shaped by the historic process in philosophical self-reflection.' (Mannheim, 1952: 61-62)

Bauman attributes this emphasis upon the part played by subjective consciousness to Mannheim's 'umbilical' attachment to the '“sympathetic magic” of Dilthey's empathy' (Bauman, 1978: 95), that is, to the latter's insistence upon the interdependence of the individual life and history (see Dilthey, 1961: ch.2). One can, in turn, also look back to Mannheim's adoption of Simmel's idea of the division of culture into subjective and objective moments. For Mannheim seems to have transposed this idea into the sphere of science, seeking to re-vitalise both in the process. Undoubtedly, continued in his scientific articulation of the situation was the stress upon the essentially obscure and distanced character of culture as a whole which can only be reflected upon, and thus overcome, by “certain types of mind” entering into the cultural process, though now this was through the practice of a *cultural science*.

The Politics of Reflection

Throughout the time he spent in Weimar Germany Mannheim deepened his adherence to sociology. In 1930 he was appointed to the post of Professor of Sociology at Frankfurt in a specially established College of Sociology. His ideas

continued to revolve around a central conception of mind and thought as part of a larger process. However, as he extended his sociological study, Mannheim fixed more definitely his ideas about the exact character of that "intermediate field of concepts" called for in his "*Weltanschauung*" essay. He was led to propose the sociological consciousness as the latest (and fullest) stage of cultural development. To this end, in a study of the intelligentsia, Mannheim declared that 'the ground for the self-interpretation of man has shifted once more. No longer does he see himself in the mirror of a personal God, reason, history, or a *Weltgeist*, but in the perspective of his social pursuits.' (Mannheim, 1956: 94) Mannheim identified in sociology both a new "ethos" and also the means by which that ethos might be comprehended. Sociology enabled self-clarification; in the facts of his or her social life the individual is able to come to a surer, a 'more inclusive and basic' (Mannheim, 1956: 94) knowledge of him- or herself and of the world in which he or she lives. Indeed, in sociology, knowledge of the self and knowledge of the world beyond the self become part of one another. Mannheim, like Sartre (see chapter five), made this interdependence central to his conception of the intellectual, though Sartre sought to maintain the possibility of a materialist philosophy in doing so, while for Mannheim philosophy was transcended by sociology.

The basic claim of the sociology of knowledge as developed by Mannheim was that thought had to be placed 'in the concrete setting of an historical-social situation' (Mannheim, 1954: 2), if individuals were to be able to 'find [their] bearings in the present state of affairs.' (Mannheim, 1956: 95) The dynamic character of modern societies requires individuals to develop 'a continuous

awareness of social change'; they can no longer depend upon established ways of thinking, but must foster an 'independent judgement free from conventional or mythological delusions.' (Mannheim, 1956: 99) However, such independent judgement only initially evolves individually, for, as it is fundamentally a capacity to identify material interests, it soon takes on a *collective* character. According to Mannheim, independent judgement arose when individuals were forced to make *economic* choices. The bourgeois entrepreneurs, 'who must live by [their] wits and seize [their] opportunities' (Mannheim, 1956: 99), were thus required to determine their best interest and then "had to direct and organize economic units according to their own more or less rational interpretation of the course of events.' (Mannheim, 1940: 59).

Thus, for Mannheim (in common with Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*), independent judgement originated in the eminently practical context of economic decision and rationalisation. Furthermore, as an essential part of this activity, the new competitive economic environment not only provided the conditions for the individuation of interest and judgement but also, simultaneously, made the conscious identification of interests and judgements necessary, in new collectivities, for the sake of survival. Individuals located in similar economic situations were able 'to discover the common elements in their position and arrive at a common definition of their roles.' (Mannheim, 1956: 99)

It is these "common definitions" that Mannheim termed "ideologies", the particular *Weltanschauungen* of social collectivities which, though rooted in the real concrete conditions and interests of those latter groups, systematically appear as *disinterested* and abstracted products of a universal and independent

judgement. Though apparently united in the (bourgeois) individual, judgement and interest are divorced from one another in the context of the collectivity. And it is precisely this *systematic* and reflexive misrepresentation which constitutes the specifically *modern* nature of ideology. For as Mannheim maintained in *Ideology and Utopia*³, ideology in the shape of 'unconscious collective motivations...[has] always guided the direction of thought' (Mannheim, 1954: 35), but such "motivations" never appeared to themselves as self-legitimizing universal principles. However, according to Mannheim, in the modern period it has become possible not only for irrational motivations to *misrepresent* themselves but also to be *represented rationally* to thought. This act of representation revolves around politics. For, Mannheim maintained, once politics becomes part of 'everyday experience' for an ever increasing number of individuals, then it becomes possible for them to see how much of that experience is shaped by politics because it *is* an everyday affair. (Mannheim, 1954: 35,55) That which previously may have been centred on religious conflict, 'around which the differences in both the fundamental attitudes and the *Weltanschauungen* of various social groups' (Mannheim, 1953: 83) might develop, now is focused upon political struggle. But, two important differences are factors in the latter, modern context; firstly, it is now possible to uncover the *real*, the *social* basis of values and ideas, and, secondly, the observing subject can no longer place him- or herself outside of the social. The methodological innovation championed and developed by Mannheim, which distinguished social from natural sciences, and which required the former to

³ As Kettler, Meja, Stehr (1984), amongst others, point out, there are significant differences between the original, German edition of *Ideology and Utopia* and the later, English version. However, I feel that as our principal concern is with Mannheim's emphasis upon the intellectual's political functioning, which appears in both, one can to a certain extent minimise these differences.

account for the subject in its formulations and conclusions, meant that self-understanding and understanding of the world about one could not be separated. It is only by recognising our own 'participation in the living context of social life' that we can come to an 'understanding of the inner structure of this living context.' (Mannheim, 1954: 42)

The sociological consciousness was thus not merely constituted in an awareness of social factors and determinants from a position *beyond* the social but rather was a form of consciousness constituted *within* the bounds of the social. It was itself a social phenomenon. In this one sees the continuation of Mannheim's attempt to bridge the gap between an all-encompassing realm of spirit which constituted the object of knowledge and the plurality of individual subjects with their apparently diverse and partial knowledges of that object. It is significant that the *Weltanschauung* at this point was transformed from the transcendent and irrational totality of cultural experience and production, into the partial and definitely empirically rooted representations of that totality, representations which may be rationally synthesised.

This journey between totalities, I would argue, marked Mannheim's passage from culture to politics, a passage which could only be completed, however, *by making politics itself into an element within culture*. If in its previous incarnation the *Weltanschauung* had only a "methodologically warranted" and a priori existence as a "global unity of culture", it had now become a socio-political category. Whereas previously it had been a transcendent concept derived from *Geisteswissenschaften* and cultural studies used to invigorate science, now it was employed in the service of a scientific politics. However, there is a continuity

between the earlier and later uses, insofar as, in both cases, the *Weltanschauung* is that which, as an obscure and unexamined, atheoretical layer of reality, must be made visible in and to scientific theory. The main difference lies in the fact that such theory (the sociology of knowledge) was now proposed as a firm and reliable basis for both knowledge and action. At the end of his earlier essay, Mannheim assured his readers that 'science and spirit go their own way' (Mannheim, 1952: 83), one could but attempt to decipher such traces as remained and adapt one's methodological apparatus accordingly. By the time Mannheim had fully developed his sociology of knowledge, he adopted a more assertive attitude toward the *Weltanschauung*, he saw it, one might say, as distorting our knowledge of the world, and as something which could be controlled. Such a sociological consciousness identified elements in our thinking derived from *Weltanschauungen* as necessarily narrowing our vision and blinding us to our own best interests as members of society as a whole.

The advent of a sociology of knowledge makes a truly scientific politics for the first time possible, for it enables partial and conflicting *Weltanschauungen* to be *synthesised* into a new whole. Mannheim made clear his belief in a new state of affairs in *Ideology and Utopia*:

Just because today we are in a position to see with increasing clarity that mutually opposing views and theories are not infinite in number and are not products of arbitrary will but are mutually complementary and derive from specific social situations, politics as a science is for the first time possible. The present structure of society makes possible a political science which will not be merely a party science, but a science of the

whole. Political sociology, as the science which comprehends the whole political sphere, thus attains the stage of realization. (Mannheim, 1954: 132)

The science of political sociology was not offered as an entirely independent sphere purified of all ideological elements of dependency and interest, rather, such a science was to be achieved by working through ideology. Weber's famous dictum that 'politics is out of place in the lecture-room', on the basis of there being an essential division between 'tak[ing] a practical political stand' and 'analyz[ing] political structures and party positions' (1948: 145), was not rejected outright by Mannheim. Indeed, we find him speaking in similarly dichotomous terms in *Ideology and Utopia*, where he states that '[i]t is one thing to aim at a schematically ordered bird's eye view; it is quite another thing to seek a concrete orientation to action.' (Mannheim, 1954: 155) However, Mannheim did seek to re-constitute the relationship between the two sides of this dichotomy. Thus, for Frisby, '[Mannheim's] theory of ideology also posits the development of a value-free concept of ideology. But, much more than Weber, Mannheim [was] concerned to advance beyond the separation of theory and practice.' (1992: 19)

The sociology of knowledge had made available '[a] new type of objectivity in the social sciences.' (Mannheim, 1954: 2) It was no longer the case that science had to sever its connections with society and politics, had to choose between evaluation and freedom from value in order to function objectively. Instead, precisely because it recognised that all political positions and knowledge are limited and partisan, the sociology of knowledge allowed a new type of political practice to take shape. Mannheim held firm with Weber in rejecting the sort of

practical politics which is achieved only through closing one's mind to alternatives and which is based on unexamined partial assumptions. But, he also saw the sociological consciousness as offering up a mode of political practice which allows for its own continuous transformation and which is oriented upon the continuously changing conditions in which political decisions are made. Contemplating such a scientific politics, Mannheim asked:

Must it be assumed that only that is politics which is preparation for an insurrection? Is not the continual transformation of conditions and men also action?...Is it to be assumed that there is no tradition and form of education corresponding to precisely those interests seeking to establish a dynamic equilibrium, and which are oriented to the whole? Would it not be in the true interest of the whole to set up more centres from which radiate those political interests imbued with the vitality of a critical point of view? (Mannheim, 1954: 163-164)

Mannheim's vision of a scientific politics was one in which the individual holds the pre-eminent position. Like Weber and Scheler, his emphasis was upon the value and efficacy of individual social action. (Frisby, 1992: 16) Scientific politics was a matter, first and foremost, of equipping the individual with the intellectual wherewithal for making rational political decisions. In its open-endedness and orientation upon the whole, such a politics was necessarily resistant to the constraints and limits which supposedly characterise ideological collectivist politics. Moreover, 'in a realm [i.e., the political] in which everything is in the process of becoming', the demand by science 'for an absolute, permanent synthesis would...mean a relapse into the static world view of [bourgeois]

intellectualism.' (Mannheim, 1954: 135) Mannheim was concerned, above all, with clearing a space for the reflexive (self-)consciousness of the individual in the socio-political process. In this he was continuing his earlier Simmelian emphasis (itself derived from Hegel) upon the need for a certain type of subjectivity to produce itself by appropriating the objectified products of consciousness. In relation to politics, the task of the intellectual, as intellectual, was now declared to be to achieve the synthesis of conflicting ideological positions which, in their absoluteness and illusory distance from their concrete social origins, threaten to overwhelm the individual.

For, as Richard Ashcraft points out, Mannheim believed that '[t]he very existence of ideological conflict...had qualitatively altered the nature of political life.' (Ashcraft, 1981: 39) Rooted in ideology, modern politics had become a matter not only of seeking 'to be in the right' but also of attempting 'to demolish the basis of [one's] opponent's social and intellectual existence.' (Mannheim, 1954: 34) As ideological in nature, in Mannheim's formulation politics has become "objective culture", in that it had become a collective way of life which reached down to the very roots of the individual's existence and identity from "outside", as it were, and did not appear to issue from within that existence. In this context of the alienation of the individual Mannheim located the intellectual in the interstices between classes and collectivities so that he or she could occupy a position from which political participation could be carried on *on an individual basis*, opening up the possibility of a 'dynamic mediation' (Mannheim, 1954: 140) between collectivities. *The intellectual became the subject of politics by making subjectivity itself the 'object' of politics.* Mannheim's sociological intellectual

could attain a structural point of view (and thus transcend him- or herself) only by working through the limiting ideological conditions of concrete existence and identity.⁴

From Intellectual Synthesis to Social Planning

There is an obvious development in Mannheim's assessment of the political functioning of intellectuals. At one stage in his career in Weimar Germany the participation of intellectuals was identified as crucial to the conduct of a new kind of rational politics, and Mannheim stressed the need for the latter to achieve a species of collective consciousness grounded in the sociology of knowledge. However, by 1932 at least, Mannheim felt it necessary to express an extreme wariness of the possibility of intellectuals' collective sense manifesting itself in a *specific politics* of intellectuals. In a lecture of that year he made his unease plain:

Anyone who believes that a party of intellectuals is necessary has gotten the diagnosis of intellectuals wrong. It would be a complete accident if anything at all reasonable came of this. And that can hardly be the basis for gaining consciousness. Above all, it has to be recognized that there is no group that is as divided internally (bank director, professor, yellow journalist, bohemian), and that this division is a division according to

⁴ The idea of the intellectual as functioning through a process of overcoming biographical-ideological constraints was also taken up by Sartre in his conception of the intellectual. In the latter instance, however, as I show below, the intellectual was existentially alienated from society and thus incapable of reconciling him- or herself to it. A similar idea of the intellectual's irreconcilable nature was developed within Critical Theory, as we shall see in the following chapter.

classes. More than that: the formation of a party of intellectuals would inevitably lead to fascism (cited in Kettler, Meja, Stehr, 1984: 69).

The advent of fascism, I would argue, ultimately made it necessary for Mannheim to re-think the position of intellectuals in relationship to politics, principally because he saw fascism itself as 'the ideology of a stratum of intellectuals who are "outsiders"' (Kettler, Meja, Stehr, 1984: 69), intellectuals who were also transfixed by irrational manifestations of spirit.

The development of the sociology of knowledge, and of sociology in general in Germany, was related by Mannheim to the experience of crisis and reorganisation in the Weimar Republic. '*German sociology*', he wrote from England after the Nazis had come to power, '*is the product of one of the greatest social dissolutions and reorganizations, accompanied by the highest form of self-consciousness and of self-criticism*' (Mannheim, 1953: 210; original emphasis). That critical experience made possible the accomplishment of a radical self-consciousness, enabling certain types of mind, who drew also upon the nineteenth-century legacy of German philosophy and social thought, to connect facts and concepts horizontally and vertically, socially and historically. 'The import of a period of radical social dissolution', according to Mannheim, is that it makes visible 'the variability and interdependence of social phenomena.' (Mannheim, 1953: 211) Though negative from one perspective, the political and ideological fragmentation of a society in upheaval was seen by Mannheim to be a positive process to the degree that it enabled the development of the most advanced synthetic consciousness. Thus the "social dissolution" experienced during the Weimar period itself produced the sociological, synthetic intellectual.

Such an intellectual arose directly out of the sphere of the ideological, the irrational and the experiential, and made possible the (self-)transcendence of limits and constraints by reflecting upon them.

However, as Mannheim saw it, such a period of social instability could lead in two, opposed directions: either, toward the development of a social self-consciousness and an awareness of the 'relational' character of norms and values which would enable the achievement of a higher rationalism; or, toward the re-affirmation of old values and norms and the apotheosis of action as revealing the authentic character of a people. It was this second route which was taken in Germany. Irrationalism was seen by Mannheim to have triumphed. Once this had happened, the focus of his hopes and of his theoretical endeavours shifted. Mannheim showed himself increasingly conscious of the difficulty of gaining control over modern mass society. The irrationalism (the ideological or unexamined elements in thinking) which he had seen earlier as that which could be worked through in a process of dynamic mediation became a structural flaw to be overcome and a real force to be resisted. Irrationality now entered into every corner of society and every social relation:

If today we often have the impression that in times of crisis mass-psychoses rule the world, it is not because in the past there was less irrationality, but rather because hitherto it had found an outlet in narrower social circles and in private life, only to-day, as a result of the general momentum brought about by industrial society, it is forcing its way into the arena of public life and even at times dominating that arena. (Mannheim, 1940: 45)

Moreover, Mannheim explicitly identified an alteration in the fortunes of rationality:

It once looked as if the intensifying conflict of interests in the world to-day might culminate in an integration of interests, which, although originally antagonistic, could be led to a rational compromise or fitted into a rational form of organization. But now it seems as though the irrational is to prevail after all. (Mannheim, 1940: 45)

As Kettler, Meja, Stehr observe, as a consequence of this new assessment of the irrational Mannheim broke science off from everyday life and experience, now positing 'a stark contrast between scientifically grounded social knowledge and all other opinion.' (Kettler, Meja, Stehr, 1984: 75) This was important because it meant that he would no longer hope to ground theoretical reflection in experience, or find a synthesis of competing modes of experientially rooted thought. Mannheim's emphasis was now upon *planning* rather than competition and synthesis, upon the identification within society of structural 'key positions' (Mannheim, 1940: 59, 1951: 69) rather than mediating experience. Becoming, we might say, became subsumed under being, the sphere of political contestation was ultimately subject to regulation. From the perspective of planning, society was objectified as an external structure.

The emphasis upon planning and social pragmatism in Mannheim's later work and thought, though, as Kettler points out, 'often ascribed to the influence of English common sense', may be seen as 'represent[ing] a return to his intellectual origins' (Kettler, 1971: 41), that is, to the Fabian scientism and liberalism of the

anglophilic Hungarian Radicals described above. Such an assessment is supported by Mannheim's own comments. In a note made in the mid-1930s Mannheim observed a '[d]isproportionate development between attitudes and thought: in my understanding I have discerned that liberalism is obsolete, but my attitudes are still at the liberal level' (cited in Kettler, Meja, Stehr, 1984: 18). In a letter to Oszkar Jászi Mannheim described himself as 'an old follower of yours', and spoke of how, in his opinion, 'both of us are "liberal" in our roots', the difference between them now being that Jászi had fallen back upon a 'noble defiance' of the age, whilst Mannheim sought still '[t]o carry liberal values forward with the help of the techniques of modern mass society' (cited in Kettler, Meja, Stehr, 1984: 18-19). With the advent of fascism and communism, Mannheim looked again to liberalism to provide the basis for social renewal, though in contemporary mass society such a liberalism required adaptation into social democratic form, had itself to be planned and to employ the sociological, educational and psychological techniques of mass society. Totalitarianism could not be defeated simply by opposing to it the *spirit of laissez-faire*, a "Third Way" had to be found whereby liberal values might be articulated, as C. Wright Mills was to put it some time after Mannheim, in the 'realities of modern social structure that might serve as the means of their realization.' (Mills, 1963: 189)

However, the search for concrete correlates in the existing social structure which might act as agents for the realisation of liberal values and thus for social renewal led to Mannheim's eventual position of buttressing the existing ruling class. In his later work Mannheim sought to recognise the strengths of the British ruling class especially, and argued for preserving 'the highest forms of cultural

achievement' (Mannheim, 1951: 103) of that class. The emphasis in that work fell now upon the *pedagogic* function, upon instructing the ruling élite in such a way as to encourage vision and the ability of the élite subject to adjust him- or herself to changing socio-historical conditions. The earlier sociology of knowledge had given way to a social and educational *psychology*.

Richard Ashcraft's observation that in *Ideology and Utopia* the political practice of intellectuals was conceived of in no 'hard' sociological or existential form (Ashcraft, 1981: 42-43) may be seen at one level as a recognition of Mannheim's chariness, as noted above, with regard to a politics and political instruments specific to intellectuals. However, in this "soft" or indefinite conception, the intellectual may be seen at this point as having been comprehended as a *practice*, as that which equates to a synthetic function, a mediation between ideological positions. The intellectual was thus conceived as an activity with an orientation upon the totality, in much the same way as Lukács conceived of the critical, because totalising, consciousness which he imputed to the proletariat in *History and Class Consciousness* (for this connection, see, amongst others, Jay, 1985: 64ff, Kadarkay, 1991: 293-294, Kettler, 1967: 421ff). However, for Mannheim, the intellectuals' function lay precisely in their *irreducibility*, their lack of any sort of inherent collective identity.⁵ His sociology of knowledge was dependent upon the central belief that it was possible to overcome the specific constraints that particular situations, as situations in which particular collective interests and viewpoints dominated, imposed upon

⁵ One may compare this with Régis Debray's later idea, expressed in his political sociology of French intellectuals, of intellectuals as a heterogeneous collectivity, each intellectual *qua* intellectual being irreducible to his or her neighbour (Debray, 1981: 22).

consciousness, by *certain types of mind working through them*. It was in the individualised subjectivity, or, at least, in the process of becoming a relatively autonomous subject capable of making relatively independent political judgements that the intellectual's political and historical agency inhered.

In positing the possibility of the synthetic agency of the intellectual under the 'organon' (see Kettler, Meja, Stehr, 1984) of the sociology of knowledge, Mannheim shared with Lukács and other Marxists the idea of history as immanently rational. It was possible to climb to a higher level of rationality *within* history. But with the advent within his thought of the organon of "planning for freedom" Mannheim began to argue for the possibility of the 'rational transcendence of history.' (Kettler, Meja, Stehr, 1984: 86) Though the individual's understanding at the stage of planning 'remains a product of the historical process which arose independently of him', he wrote in *Man and Society*, 'through his understanding of this determination the individual for the first time raises himself above the historical process - which now, more than ever before, becomes subject to his own power.' (Mannheim, 1940: 213)

It was the *supra-historical* figure of the planner who now took centre-stage in Mannheim's dynamic, transformative sociology, whose efficacy as one who could meet the demands of the 'conscious co-ordination of social processes' (Mannheim, 1951: 175) resided precisely in her ability not merely to bring history closer to a rational ideal but to *impose* rationality upon an utterly irrational history. The planner was the agent of *structure*. Mannheim talked of structure in a similar way as he had of the *Weltanschauung* and the dynamic synthesis of the totality of ideologies, describing it as 'the organizing principle of social reality

itself [...which] can never be directly observed because it is always more inclusive than any partial social situation' (Mannheim, 1940: 230), and thus appeared to maintain an anti-positivist and historicist perspective. But, structure was now that which enabled limits to be placed upon history by establishing itself as just such an all-inclusive, dynamic principle.

In the face of the intensification of irrational conflict in the 1930s Mannheim looked to the assertion of a mechanistic-positivistic rationalism. The terms in which he came to view society and social life are suggestive in this regard. For Mannheim writes of society as a 'mechanism' in need of scientific readjustment, of 'actual life' as a 'laboratory', and of 'history as a field for experiment and reform.' (Mannheim, 1940: 114, 109, 147) In general, life in mass society was regarded by Mannheim as pathological and thus in need of diagnosis and professional treatment. With this in mind, his further statement in *Man and Society*, ostensibly iterating the basic tenet of the sociology of knowledge, that '[t]he form and content of thought vary with the situation we are thinking about' (Mannheim, 1940: 149) masks the fact that as far as Mannheim was concerned the whole situation of social life had been determined as simultaneously the object and the practice of science. The fear of social transformation at the level of mass movements led to change itself being immured within an only *scientifically and conceptually* apprehended structure, precisely the difficulty which, as I have suggested, the sociology of knowledge was supposed to address and overcome.

Mannheim's attempt, central to his sociological investigations, to find a mezzanine layer of concepts between the sphere of the strictly empirically verifiable and the transcendent totality, and his corresponding assertion of the

inseparability of thought and action, was yet founded on the belief in the primacy of thought over action. Thus, as has been observed, '[o]nce Mannheim decided that the conduct of everyday life is oriented by destructive delusions...then the vocation of the seeker for knowledge once more appear[ed] simply and perhaps hopelessly as the task of Enlightenment.' (Kettler, Meja, Stehr, 1984: 76) With the perceived triumph of irrationalism Mannheim himself appeared to sanction precisely that form of "bourgeois intellectualism" which he had previously criticised as producing an abstract, formal, universalist consciousness which was oblivious to the particularity and conditional character of social and political reality

With the installation of planning as the central, connecting principle of social and political reflection and action, *critical* intellectuals were marginalised by Mannheim, just as they were in the Critical Theory of the Institute for Social Research, as I show in the next chapter (though in the latter case this occurred in different conceptual conditions and with other ends in view). In the planned society it would be necessary to plan criticism itself (Mannheim, 1940: 109). As Mannheim wrote in his final work:

One particular social group that should be preserved as a check against monotony and levelling tendencies in a planned culture is an independent intelligentsia...In the past, groups of independent intellectuals have produced a dynamic mentality that reached beyond the boundaries of what happened to exist. Their function would be hard to replace. Rather a democratic society should deliberately plan for careers outside the regular social and educational ladders. (Mannheim, 1951: 264-265)

The independent intellectuals, whose independence previously had been seen as consisting in their irreducibility, as a transcendent moment, were now to be *situated* at the planned margins of society. Such intellectuals would be established in 'oases' of rationalism for the purpose of 'test[ing] new ideas' (Mannheim, 1951: 265) in a "laboratory" environment 'in which absolutely free discussion may take place without being exposed to premature and unsatisfactory criticism by the broader public.' (Mannheim, 1940: 110-111)

One may detect in this concept of free critical spaces parallels with the *sociétés* and *salons*, the *Tischgesellschaften* and coffee-houses of the Enlightenment, in which, it has been argued (see, for example, Bauman, 1987; Habermas, 1989), the very principles of free criticism and the public legitimation of power originated. However, in the planned culture envisioned by Mannheim such spaces would exist directly under the aegis of the state rather than in opposition to it; their function ultimately would be *legitimizing* rather than de-legitimizing. In this context small groups of intellectuals (such as "The Moot" discussion group in which Mannheim participated, along with such cultural luminaries as T. S. Eliot, from the late 1930s until his death (see Kettler, Meja, Stehr, 1984: 129ff; Woldring, 1986: 59)) would act as engines for ideas, and their transformative power, such as it was understood by Mannheim, would be harnessed so as to enable the existing state to deal most effectively with the disruption and upheaval caused by critical social change.

In a planned society the independent intellectual was secured within a structure of social constraints paradoxically by being situated within a place provided for her 'outside the established social structure.' (Mannheim, 1951: 190-191)

Whereas in his earlier period of cultural radicalism Mannheim, saw the social marginality of the intellectual as the ground upon which the future might be built in the "bad present"- as the Critical Theorists also came to believe - he increasingly came to see that marginality as potentially a function of the existing whole. The sociology of knowledge might therefore be seen, in the final analysis, as progressively achieving a reconciliation between critical intellectuals and society by making critical reflection and the development of a certain type of critical subjectivity a necessary function of the reproduction of an equilibrated, optimally effective society. From this perspective, Mannheim's development of the idea of planning for freedom represented only the continuation of this tendency within his sociology, though at this later stage the marginality of the intellectual was to take a "hard" sociological form.

Chapter Two

The Intellectual in Extremis: Critical Theory, Pessimism and the Loss of Agency

'Materialism is the sworn enemy of every attempt to understand reality on the basis of some idealist paradise or of any purely intellectual order. After Marx, we are forbidden any such consolation about the world.' (Max Horkheimer, 1993: 139)

Introduction

As developed within the Institute for Social Research in Germany and the United States during the 1930s and '40s, Critical Theory¹ sought the preservation of critique in opposition to the "consolations" of social theory offered by Mannheim. The intellectual with which Critical Theory identified was apparently of a wholly different kind to that manifested in the sociology of knowledge and in other "activist" theories. This was an intellectual who claimed the margins, who, though he or she emerged out of the same context and conditions of political and intellectual crisis as had shaped the sociology of knowledge, was political and social in orientation without being socially or politically active. Critical Theory was a critical response that attempted to posit a fundamentally different intellectual attitude or stance to social and political conditions to that articulated in Mannheim's activist sociology. Thus, it resisted synthetic modes of thought, and sought to go beyond the adoption of an "external" position which allowed the theorist to totalise the sum of experience and reflection within his or her socio-philosophical conceptions - conceptions which then guaranteed the theorist's social or political interventions. However, ultimately Critical Theory seemed only able itself to offer the oppositional *purity* of the individual intellectual as the basis of resistance and as a resource for hope. The intellectual's ultimate foundation and justification was located in his or her *autonomous self*, a self that was sure in

its despair. Critical Theory's very marginality and lack of external, practical efficacy became the "proofs" of its objective value.

As specifically an academic-institutional theoretical formation (one, that is, which evolved within a different 'institutional setting' Coser, 1965: xiv) to revolutionary Marxism), Critical Theory was yet a collective articulation, but one broken off from a collective *agent* and context of realisation. Thus, by the early 1940s it had come to the position where revolutionary political praxis *per se* (as *organised, collective* praxis) came to be regarded with deep suspicion. Such praxis was itself part of a by now all-encompassing cultural crisis. The pessimistic perspective which, in focussing upon fundamental *material* social antagonisms that could not be solved on the basis of a realignment, no matter how radical, of a "purely intellectual" kind, had denied the intellectual "consolation", eventually included within its purview those very material social forces which had been identified by Marxism as the agent of the revolutionary abolition of those contradictions. Though Critical Theory originated in an attempt to continue and extend the Marxist tradition by making academic social theory dialectical - that is, by not allowing it to forget that society is riven by fundamentally material contradictions - it might be said that by questioning the possibility of large-scale social transformation Critical Theory effectively abstracted or even ontologised material antagonisms - that is, made them characteristic of a transhistorical "human condition". And within this context of ultimate irreconcilability, perhaps the only consolation for the theorist might be in the theoretical sustenance of one's own position outside of "false", *practical* reconciliations.

¹ Capitalisation is used here to distinguish the Critical Theory of the Institute for Social Research from critical theory as a generic description of sundry kinds of theoretical practice.

However, at this point I want to say a little more about the active political and intellectual background of the so-called "crisis of Marxism" which followed in the wake of the revolutionary period in Western Europe after the end of the First World War. Amongst these defeats, of course, that which occurred in Germany was felt most keenly by the Left, as that which had been key to the spread of international revolution, and as that which in the long run was to have the gravest consequences. That the Institute was established in 1923 at the end of this revolutionary period may therefore be seen as an attempt to resuscitate Marxist theory in the light of recent political experience. Key to this theoretical enterprise was the re-assertion of the importance of dialectics within Marxist thought, an attempt which amounted to an emphatic assertion of the value of *critical consciousness* within revolutionary praxis.

Critical Consciousness

Like many commentators, in his book *Critical Theory, Marxism and Modernity* (1989) Douglas Kellner places Critical Theory within the tradition of Western Marxism (see also Anderson, 1976; Therborn, 1996). For Kellner, such Marxist theorists articulated a concern with the subjective conditions of revolution. He writes:

although European civilization had been going through protracted crises of war, economic depression, political conflict and so on - which confirmed Marxian views concerning the recurrent crises of capitalism - the prospects for revolution in Europe and the advanced capitalist

countries did not seem bright, because revolutionary consciousness, culture and organization and a clear notion of socialism seemed to be lacking. (Kellner, 1989: 12)

The proletariat was considered to have been incapable of capitalising on such critical opportunities as had arisen in Europe due to its low level of critical political consciousness, its insufficient awareness of its specifically revolutionary subjectivity. This inadequacy, however, certainly as far as the Institute for Social Research and its associates were concerned, was largely attributable to the degeneration of Marxism into the "vulgarity" of the economism and evolutionism of the Second International. In this guise, it was argued, Marxism had been reduced to a species of positivistic theory, hypostatizing multi-faceted social and cultural phenomena into natural-scientific, objective "facts". Lukács had written of the vulgar materialism of Bernstein and others as transforming the concrete 'determinants of social life' into 'timeless, eternal categories valid for all social formations', and hence as seeking to propagate a 'thorough-going opportunistic theory' of social evolutionism according to which one could ascertain the 'laws' of social development. (Lukács, 1971: 9, 5) Similarly, for the Institute, such Marxism had severed the *dialectical* connection between consciousness and reality, between the individual subject and the total social process; it had dismissed any recognition of the importance of 'intellectual action.' (Korsch, 1970: 84)

The consequence of such a diminution of critical thought in favour of a mechanistic positivism was that the latter, though only one particular realisation of reason, was taken as representing reason *in toto* and then found wanting with regard to addressing fundamental social problems. In "Notes on Science and the

Crisis" (1932) published in the first issue of the Institute's *Zeitschrift* Max Horkheimer identified the dangers of this disregard for reason: '[t]he view is abroad that reason is a useful instrument only for purposes of everyday life, but must fall silent in the face of the great problems and give way to the more substantial powers of the soul.' (Horkheimer, 1989a: 53) If positivistic science refuses 'to handle in an appropriate way the problems connected with the social process' (Horkheimer, 1989a: 54), then metaphysics is ready to step into the breach, is ready, that is, to offer its own understanding of social problems and effect its own reconciliation between the individual and society.

The perceived inadequacy of Marxist *theory* - its reduction to a variety of scientific objectivity - could be seen to have led quite directly to the failure of revolution in Europe, and consequently, to have been responsible for the triumph of the forces of reaction who harnessed the 'substantial powers of the soul.' The optimism of the Marxist revisionists (Korsch, 1970: 78), who posited the achievement of socialism through the progressive control and gradual improvement of material conditions, had been rebuffed by the deeply racinated antagonisms which existed in capitalist society, which reached down into the constitution of *subjectivity* itself. There was, therefore, a need to reclaim dialectics for the Marxist tradition, and to become thereby more "negative". For indeed, the reclamation of the former was seen by dialectical theorists as leading quite "naturally" to the latter, precisely because it was concerned with re-connecting (theoretical) consciousness with objective reality. In the process of such a connection the theorist becomes conscious of the discord which characterises socio-historical reality, and becomes aware, furthermore, of his or her consciousness's own responsibility for that disharmony through the lack of

“fit” between concepts and the reality which they ostensibly apprehend. For Horkheimer, it was necessary to overcome “illusory” beliefs in the idea of history as a ‘meaningful whole’, of the world as possessed of ‘inherent meaning.’ (Horkheimer, 1993: 139, 157) For its part, in order to be ‘free from illusions’, a dialectical-materialist social theory ‘can only conceive of human purpose negatively, and reveals the inherent contradictions between the conditions of existence and everything that the great philosophers have postulated as a purpose.’ (Horkheimer, 1993: 156-157)

Thus, the re-introduction of dialectics into Marxist theoretical discourse necessitated an emphasis upon critical negativity - upon, that is, the development (or exacerbation) of an “unhappy consciousness” which refused to be reconciled with the world as it is, but which nevertheless saw itself as implicated in the (re-)production of that world. Such a consciousness, whilst finding and recognising itself within reality, negated that presence with visions of an absent reality, of the world other than it is. The key question which arose from this emphasis upon dialectical negativity (a question which was addressed most directly by Walter Benjamin, as will be seen below) was in what practical concrete form or forms, if at all, such negation might be expressed, how, that is, the dialectical theory of the intellectual could be related to, and articulate, the practical struggles of the working class. The critique of the vulgar optimism of the evolutionary brand of socialism might seem to point quite clearly to Leninism, which positioned the intellectual (or rather, the intellectual as professional revolutionary) in the vanguard of the working class, seeking to foment the latter’s discontent and harness its negative potential. For its part, as I will argue, Critical Theory did take on certain aspects of Leninism, but at the same time it followed a line of

development which took it far away from the latter's political orientation and practice.

However, I shall leave discussion of Critical Theory and Leninism and the vanguard to the end of this chapter, until, that is, we have gained a fuller picture of the intellectual as articulated in Critical Theory, as an intellectual of the *cultural* rather than the political vanguard. This can be done, in the first instance, by examining Critical Theory's critique of Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge and his conception of the "reconciled" intellectual.

The Critique of Mannheim

Mannheim was considered, by Horkheimer, Marcuse and Adorno, all of whom wrote essays on him, to have appropriated Marxist critical instruments for academic purposes, something which the Institute itself was seeking to do, and therefore might be regarded as a theoretical competitor - one, moreover, who described a theoretical trajectory uncomfortably close to its own (Frisby, 1992: 227)). However, as far as the members of the Institute were concerned, Mannheim's "philosophical anthropology" had drawn the critical teeth of Marx's concepts, prompting 'optimistic' ideas of social reconciliation and reconstruction. From the critique of Mannheim it is possible to gauge some of the fundamental and persistent preoccupations of Critical Theory (as expressed across two decades), and to make out a negative "definition" of the latter's conception of the intellectual.

In his 1930 critique of Mannheim's *Ideologie und Utopie* Horkheimer regarded his sociology of knowledge as a variety of idealist anthropology. He writes: '[f]or

Mannheim...genuine historical research is supposed to lead to knowledge of our own essence. Thus, like Dilthey's human science, Mannheim's sociology of knowledge reveals itself as an heir of classical idealist philosophy.' (Horkheimer, 1993: 136) As such, according to Horkheimer, that sociology rests upon an anthropological conception of history as the evolution of an essential human subject. History has, therefore, for Mannheim, an inherent meaning, and sociology 'pursues an ultimately philosophical intention' - that is, is concerned with getting at the kernel of that meaning, with the disclosure of the 'essence of things.' (Horkheimer, 1993: 134) Whereas 'Marx wanted to transform philosophy into positive science and praxis', Mannheim has gone in the opposite direction and sought to make the problem of absolute truth and the metaphysical concerns of a transcendental historicism matters for sociological investigation (Horkheimer, 1993: 134). Thus, Horkheimer's charge against Mannheim echoed that made by Karl Korsch, at one point a close associate of the Institute, against Hegel that the latter 'inserted the world into philosophy far more than he did philosophy into the world.' (Korsch, 1970: 81)

In his 1953² essay on Mannheim's *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction*, Adorno continued these basic themes of Horkheimer's critique. Mannheim was found guilty of a positivism which leads him to hypostatise facts and hence to abstract them from the social process which is ostensibly his object of study. According to Adorno, echoing Lukács' criticism of vulgar materialism, 'social phenomena are taken "as such" and then classified according to general concepts. In the process, social antagonisms invariably tend to be glossed over.'

(Adorno, 1978: 453) Again, in this way sociological positivism and metaphysics are seen as joining hands behind the back of a dialectical materialism according to which social analysis must always be rooted in the fundamentally antagonistic nature of capitalist class society. For Adorno, Mannheim's sociology of knowledge 'is based on the somewhat transcendental presupposition of a harmony between society and the individual'; however, it is precisely '[t]he absence of such harmony [which] forms one of the most urgent objects of critical theory.' (Adorno, 1978: 457) As in Horkheimer's critique, Mannheim was seen as finding an inherent order and meaning within an historical process which is understood as being 'guided by an inherently univocal subject embodying the whole of society.' (Adorno, 1978: 458)

Like Horkheimer, Adorno saw Mannheim as neutralising formerly critical concepts and categories (although by 1953 explicit references to Marx had been dropped by Adorno). Like existentialism and other forms of "anthropology", the sociology of knowledge 'calls everything into question and criticizes nothing', 'it employs the terminology of social criticism while removing its sting.' (Adorno, 1978: 453, 454) As such, dialectical concepts, which are centred upon the reality of class antagonisms, are 'translat[ed]...into classificatory ones', which results in the resolution of social classes into neutral logical-conceptual classifications (Adorno, 1978: 458). Thus, according to Adorno, Mannheim's analysis ultimately provides only a superficial and abstract picture of society which represents the 'stubborn facts' of that society as 'mere differentiations' which may be collected under formal 'general units' of logical classification and, importantly, may be then

² Published a little after the 'classic' phase of Critical Theory which is our focus, this essay yet exhibits the latter's characteristic preoccupations with respect to Mannheim and the sociology of

employed as 'laws' in accordance with which society is organised and may be re-organised (Adorno, 1978: 460). This formalism, whereby real divisions and differences are compelled to conform within an abstract conceptual scheme, leads Mannheim 'to overestimate the significance of ideologies as opposed to what they represent.' (Adorno, 1978: 463) Moreover, and again importantly, it results in an *optimistic overestimation of intellectual agency*. That is to say, with the abstraction of social conflict into an irrational struggle of ideas, it becomes possible to entertain the idea of ending that conflict, as Mannheim did, through the rational planning or organisation of the putative epochal consciousness - the optimum consciousness of the "Man of the age".

This, of course, would be carried out by the intellectual organisers. And, for Adorno, this revealed the contemporary appeal of the sociology of knowledge: '[t]he real attraction of the sociology of knowledge can be sought only in the fact that those changes in consciousness, as achievements of "planning reason", are linked directly to the reasoning of today's planners.' (Adorno, 1978: 464) Mannheim provides intellectuals with a theoretical basis and justification for effective social action, whilst at the same time ensuring that that action serves the interests of those who already control the means by which society is "rationally" dominated.³ In a concluding ringing judgement upon Mannheim's position, Adorno dismisses the sociology of knowledge as enabling the 'homeless intelligentsia' to 'forget itself' by making it believe that its positivist, ideological 'conformism' is in actuality the practice of criticism (Adorno, 1978: 465, 463).

knowledge.

³ Compare C. Wright Mills's similar criticism of planning in chapter four.

Adorno was concerned directly with Mannheim's *freischwebende Intelligenz*, whilst Horkheimer in his earlier essay did not refer to the latter directly. However, in both cases Mannheim's theory is considered to be idealist in character, working from ideas and ideologies "downward" into social reality. Moreover, Mannheim is criticised for his optimistic conception of the power of a rational, synthetic consciousness to effect fundamental social change and integrate social antagonisms. One may summarise some of the key conceptions and emphases of Critical Theory that may be drawn out from this critique:

- (i) Such a theory seeks the dialectical transformation of existing conditions rather than their superficial harmonisation or rationalisation.
- (ii) Theory is consistently opposed to the idea of inherent historical meaning and to philosophical abstractly realised totalities.
- (iii) Consequently, it is also opposed to abstract intellectual integration, to illusions of an end to "homelessness" in finding a purely "idealist paradise". The fundamentally antagonistic nature of material social reality forbids this.
- (iv) As an intellectual (or, more properly, as a *theorist*) it is necessary to maintain one's distance apart from such false solutions. The theorist is a marginal and pessimistic figure.
- (v) Thus, one may conclude, there is no decisive place for intellectuals as intellectuals in concrete political struggles. The progressive *engagé* intellectual (of which France and Germany especially had provided many examples) is put into doubt by Critical Theory. Its statements become explicitly opposed to a particular variety of political intellectual.

(vi) However, and paradoxically, one may see that Critical Theory articulates philosophy's continuing need for practical-social realisation and supersession (*Aufhebung*) (though the *possibility* of this is increasingly considered unlikely by most Critical Theorists). A social science which maintains "metaphysics" in the shape of positivism, and which, consequently, remains purely idealist in character, is rejected.

Having given this brief outline of some of the more significant features of Critical Theory, I will now go on to give a fuller account of its conception of the position of the intellectual and the role of theory in relation to social and political praxis.

The Marginal Intellectual

The maintenance of distance from concrete political struggles was made a central tenet of Critical Theory. The Institute for Social Research was itself founded upon such a distance. Phil Slater reports that the Institute's benefactor, Felix Weil, would have been happy for it to have been called the Institute for Marxism, 'but that this title was sacrificed in the interest of formal academic recognition.' (Slater, 1977: fn.149) And in his inaugural address, the Institute's first director, Carl Grünberg, made this position clear, when he announced 'that when I speak of Marxism here I do not mean it in a party-political sense, but in a purely scientific one, as a term for an economic system complete in itself, for a particular ideology and for a clearly delineated research methodology' (cited in Wiggershaus, 1994: 26). The Institute's concern was not to intervene in 'day-to-

day politics' but to explore Marxism's theoretical-methodological potential (Slater, 1977: 3-4). And although under Horkheimer's directorship the Institute shifted in the direction of confronting science with "philosophy" and raised its theoretical constructions to a higher level of complexity, it remained the case that *theory* - theory as an *academic* activity - was its prime object of attention (see Wiggershaus, 1994: 133-134, 210).

The Institute was a wholly academic body, and as such, its organisational structures, priorities and problems were different to those of the revolutionary party. (On the academisation of Marxism, see Anderson, 1976: 32-34, 49; Debray, 1981: 59.) To say this is not just to make a moral point (though such points are important in the discussion of intellectuals, because moral considerations have been central to the ways that intellectuals have been constructed). Rather, it is to point out that institutional locations set certain parameters or horizons to action and expectation; they work to suggest the viability of some modes of action and agencies over others. This institutional dimension will be returned to in the following chapters, and, in the next chapter, as a counter-example to that of the Institute, I will show how Gramsci kept practical political problems at the heart of his political theory and theory of the intellectual.

For Helmut Dubiel, the self-marginalisation of the critical intellectual by the later 1930s had become essential to the adequacy of Critical Theory. He writes: '[t]he argument that the segregation, isolation, and marginalization of a group of intellectuals not only does not restrict but rather confirms the validity of its theoretical work appears in the years from 1937 to 1940 in all of the theoretical texts and in numerous letters.' (Dubiel, 1985: 52) By 1937, according to Dubiel,

Horkheimer - to whom I shall return below - 'maintains repeatedly that, for the sake of the adequacy of the theory, the critical intellectual must be able to endure marginalization from the addressee of his theoretical work.' (Dubiel, 1985: 53) And as Marcuse declared in his essay "Philosophy and Critical Theory" (1937), it was not the task of the "philosopher" *as* philosopher to bring about social change; '[t]he philosopher can only participate in social struggles insofar as he is not a professional philosopher.' (Marcuse, 1989: 66) It is, seemingly, only a collective historical-social agent that can effect social transformation. However, in the process of divesting the left of its illusory optimism, Critical Theory also put the proletariat as just such a collective subject into question. If a concrete agent was needed to perform the deed of social transformation, there seemed to be no actually existing force adequate to the task.⁴ History appeared no longer able to answer the questions it had set itself.

For Marcuse, Critical Theory aimed at overcoming 'the pseudo-philosophical concreteness that condescends to social struggles.' (Marcuse, 1989: 66) Underlying such patronising participation was an "identity theory", which, in Martin Jay's definition, entailed 'the belief that the ultimate oneness of subject and object, essence and appearance, particular and universal underlies the contradictions of the apparent world either inherently or potentially.' (Jay, 1985: 21) Such a theory enabled its proponents to imagine, amongst other things, a unity of ideas and material reality, of abstract concepts and concrete social forms, thus encouraging a belief in the intellectual's (or, "philosopher's") practical social "function." However, it was precisely the intellectuals' closeness to praxis that

⁴ Marcuse, however, continued to look for such an agent, finding hope in the counter-cultural explosion of the 1960s (see *An Essay on Liberation*, 1969).

was responsible for their failure. Thus, Horkheimer wrote of the 'refugee intellectuals' that they had been 'robbed not only of their citizenship, but also of their minds' (Horkheimer, 1989b: 77) because they had nailed their theoretical colours too firmly to the mast of a revolution which had come crashing to the ground. Hence, for Horkheimer,

It is utterly naive to encourage the German workers from abroad to revolution. Someone who can only play at politics should keep away from it. The confusion has become so general that the truth receives more practical dignity the less it eyes self-styled praxis. Theoretical insight is needed and its transmission to those who will eventually lead the way. The optimism of the political appeal arises today from dejection. (Horkheimer, 1989b: 93-94)

Praxis is reserved, as declared in 'messianic' tones paradoxically reminiscent of those of Mannheim and Lukács in wartime Budapest, for 'those who will eventually lead the way'; optimism denotes nothing other than its opposite, pessimism and despair. The "function of the refugee" (see Mannheim, 1945), such as it is, is the preservation of "mind", as realised in the hard truth of theory.

Abstraction and Materialism

In the 1937 essay, Marcuse endeavoured to spell out the relationship between Critical Theory and idealist philosophy (indeed, in this essay *all* philosophy becomes idealist); he postulated a dialectical relationship between idealism and

materialism, between philosophy and Critical Theory. For Marcuse, insofar as 'philosophy has...made its peace with man's determination by economic conditions, it has allied itself with repression. That is the bad materialism that underlies the edifice of idealism, the consolation that in the material world everything is in order as it is.' (Marcuse, 1989: 70) However, that "bad materialism" 'is overcome in the materialist theory of society' of which Critical Theory is the heir. For that latter theory 'opposes not only the production relations that gave rise to bad materialism, but every form of production that dominates man instead of being dominated by him: this idealism underlies its materialism.' (Marcuse, 1989: 70) Thus, Critical Theory, according to Marcuse, holds on to the positive in philosophy, it presupposes that 'philosophical concepts and problems...really contain truth', and that Critical Theory is 'linked to these truths', which are preserved in its 'economic and political concepts.' (Marcuse, 1989: 67, 73)

Marcuse argues that it is this irreducibility of philosophy - the fact that it contains truths that stretch out beyond itself, as it were - which is its strength. It is certainly true that philosophy is determined historically, that its concepts 'are to be explained precisely by the material conditions of life.' (Marcuse, 1989: 67) But it is also true that its transcendence is itself historical, that it is in its '*historical forms*' that philosophy 'points beyond previous society and thus cannot be completely reduced to it.' (Marcuse, 1989: 67, emphasis added) For the truth of philosophy could only be reduced to existing social conditions 'in a form of existence where consciousness is no longer separated from being', it is of the essence of such truth that it does "surpass" that social reality from which it arises, and that, furthermore, that surpassing truth may only be grasped by 'those

particular historical subjects whose consciousness expresses itself in Critical Theory', and thus itself stands in opposition to 'existing social conditions.' (Marcuse, 1989: 67) The dependent limitation and the abstract independence of thought are alike determined in and through 'bourgeois society's domination', and thus the abstract activity and contents of independent thought, in their very abstractness, save the truth of that society. 'What is true is so only to the extent that it is not the truth about social reality. And just because it is not the latter, because it transcends this reality, it can become a matter for Critical Theory.' (Marcuse, 1989: 69)

For Marcuse, it is the economism of the orthodox Left, which seeks to separate the economic and political spheres, and to make the former alone the locus of struggle, which constitutes the true heir of the bad materialism of philosophy. That is to say, economism, like philosophy, accepts the determination of human beings by economic conditions as unchallengeable. For its part, the criticism of the economic perspective takes the shape of concerning itself with the philosophy of the past in order to salvage abstraction's promise, precisely because, according to Marcuse, the nineteenth-century idealist culture of the individual has been superseded only by 'authoritarian barbarity.' (Marcuse, 1989: 73) On the basis of the "idealism which underlies its materialism" Critical Theory is *self-critical*. Ultimately, the given dominant conditions of existence of Critical Theory include both its practical articulation and 'the social forces that make up its own basis.' (Marcuse, 1989: 72) In this way, it might be seen that theory's allegiance is to that which might never be realised in practice, to a truth which might always remain "surpassing". As Marcuse went on to write in *Reason and Revolution* (1941):

Theory accompanies the practice at every moment, analyzing the changing situation and formulating its concepts accordingly. The concrete conditions for realizing the truth may vary, but the truth remains the same and theory remains its ultimate guardian. Theory will preserve the truth even if revolutionary practice deviates from its proper path. Practice follows the truth, not vice versa. (Marcuse, 1955: 322)

Truth remains the same because it transcends the society that produces it, and as its "guardian" theory preserves the transcendence of that truth. It is this which gives Critical Theory its authority over practice, as the latter, according to Marcuse, is always limited by specific historical conditions - that is, by the fact that political practice must always take concrete forms. It is the very *materiality* of practice that counts against it.

The Subject of Critical Theory

Though Marcuse talked about the criticism of social forces in principle, he did not go on to develop this concretely, or in any detail. He said nothing about the actual position and function of the critical intellectual in this essay. However, in what was effectively a companion-piece (appearing alongside Marcuse's essay in the *Zeitschrift*), "Traditional and Critical Theory" (1937), Horkheimer was more explicit, more concrete about the intellectual. There he wrote about the

relationship of the intellectual to the working class, and about the subject of Critical Theory.⁵

Already in the 1920s Horkheimer was writing of the supposed 'impotence of the German working class.' (Horkheimer, 1978: 61)⁶ That class was now fragmented and no longer necessarily capable, as a *whole* class, of achieving revolutionary consciousness or a totalising theoretical perspective, as had been argued by Lukács (Horkheimer, 1978: 61-63). Dubiel sees continuity in respect of Critical Theory's pessimism, as elaborated by Horkheimer: a continuous orientation upon the experience of the revolution's defeat in Weimar Germany (Dubiel, 1985: 73). And indeed, the criticism of intellectuals of the left which Horkheimer made in notes written during the Weimar period was expressed in similar terms to that of refugee intellectuals which we have already noted. Thus, for Horkheimer, the '[I]oyalty to materialist doctrine [of left intellectuals] threatens to become a mindless and contentless cult of liberalism and personality unless a radical turn soon occurs.' (Horkheimer, 1978: 64) The characteristic deficiency of theory amongst such intellectuals leads them to a potentially disastrous over-reliance upon a scientistic and determinist conception of material "success".

By 1937, as Dubiel points out (Dubiel, 1985: 49), Horkheimer more firmly and explicitly than before expressed the conviction that the self-determination of Critical Theory was a necessary condition for its realisation. Critical Theory, as a theory oriented upon totality, as the 'unfolding of a single existential judgement'

⁵ Horkheimer's "Traditional and Critical Theory" is considered to be the principal programmatic statement of Critical Theory; in his book, Slater calls it a 'manifesto' (Slater, 1977: 27ff).

⁶ Though, for a view of the failure of revolution in Germany as largely a failure of leadership, see Gluckstein, 1985: 138-161.

(Horkheimer, 1972: 227), must remain independent of *all* particular expressions, concrete political forms, or 'material accomplishments.' (Horkheimer, 1972: 218, 219) As in Marcuse, the political struggle was seen as necessarily going 'along lines determined by the theory itself' (Horkheimer, 1972: 229), and as not reducible to moments within that struggle. Moreover, Horkheimer assumed a necessary relation between the autonomy of theory and the independence of the theorist. If Critical Theory was the articulation of an "existential judgement", it was that which had to be enacted by concrete existing subjects. Horkheimer was critical of the "missionary" intelligentsia (Horkheimer, 1972: 223) and of the "optimistic", aligned intellectual. But the question then arises of *how* certain intellectuals could become "subjects of critical activity" (Horkheimer, 1972: 208?). In his essay, Horkheimer writes of 'small groups of men' in whom 'the truth may reside' (Horkheimer, 1972: 241), and of the characteristic activity of the thinker as that of theoretical self-determination (Horkheimer, 1972: 242-243). However, one might ask, if Critical Theory is itself *self*-determined, is independent, how do theorists *themselves* also become so? Might one not see in this merely a reinstatement of a variety of *spontaneity* - a presumption of an unmediated harmony between particular and universal, the individual and the totality (that is, truth) in and through (ideological) consciousness - which Critical Theory criticised in optimistic Left intellectuals and in Mannheim?

Spontaneity and Voluntarism

In his study, Dubiel points to Horkheimer's criticism of "Luxemburgian" intellectuals who assume a spontaneous connection between themselves and the proletariat, who, that is, attribute to the proletariat the capacity for developing

revolutionary consciousness within itself and conceive of themselves as merely articulating that spontaneous consciousness, thus finding 'an ultimate guarantee for theoretically correct knowledge.' (Dubiel, 1985: 50) However, Slater, on the other hand, identifies exactly the opposite tendency at work in Horkheimer. He sees an anti-Leninism in the sense of a rejection of centralism and the directive, organisational function of the Party which is in line with the Luxemburgist emphasis upon seeking the dictatorship of the proletariat from below based upon the latter's capacity for spontaneous self-organisation (Slater, 1977: 64-65). As such, for Slater, spontaneity is precisely what Critical Theory *does* espouse.

This division arises partly through differences in emphasis in these respective conceptions of the Luxemburgian. The first position highlights Critical Theory's critique of mass-culture, its identification of the proletariat as susceptible to "illusions", the second highlights its anti-authoritarianism. As such, one might say, both perspectives are right, for Critical Theory was both fearful of the spontaneity of the masses and also ultimately endorsed the critical power of the autonomous will. That will, however, rested, at least potentially, in the *critical intellectual*. If we look at another of Horkheimer's essays, this becomes apparent.

Slater finds support for his position in Horkheimer's essay "Authoritarian State", written in 1940. Douglas Kellner has described this essay as the last positive statement of the possibilities of revolutionary transformation made by Horkheimer (Kellner, 1989: 76). And indeed, in this piece Horkheimer exhibits an anarchistic anti-authoritarianism; he celebrates the energies of revolt as manifested in the "voluntaristic", "spontaneist" moments of the Councils movement in Germany and Italy, and in the events of 1871, 1905, and the like., as that which must be reclaimed and re-affirmed. (Horkheimer, 1978b: 104) But, in anarchist

fashion, he is critical of mass parties and the bureaucratic élites which head them, and is critical, moreover, of the idea of "development" and an immanent law of historical progress.

For Horkheimer,

Dialectic is not identical with development. Two contradictory moments, the transition to state control and liberation from it, are seized as one in the concept of social revolution. Revolution brings about what would happen without spontaneity in any case: the socialization of the means of production, planned management of production, and the unlimited control of nature. And it also brings about what will not happen without resistance and the constantly renewed efforts to strengthen freedom: *the end of exploitation*. (Horkheimer, 1978b: 107)

History has both possibilities and dangers; the theory that represents the bourgeois economy as determined according to 'an immanent law of development in the transition to freedom' (Horkheimer, 1978b: 107) endangers that transition by removing the crucial element of *conscious will* from that process. Dialectical determination is expressed in both necessity and will. The possibilities for freedom within a post-revolutionary state would be kept alive only through the *continuation* of resistance and 'the uncompromising independence of the citizenry.' (Horkheimer, 1978b: 112)

This emphasis within Horkheimer's theory, as I have indicated, is essentially anti-bureaucratic (and, it could be said, anti-*intellectual*, insofar as it is intellectuals who have become political functionaries) in character. In the Weimar

Republic the mass revolutionary organisations, through a process of bureaucratisation and by their maintenance of authoritarian structures, reproduced the domination which they supposedly set out to abolish (Horkheimer, 1978b: 99). For its part, the success of the Russian revolution -though not referred to directly by name - has resulted in increased control and oppression. The revolution has now become that in which a 'career' may be made and power and celebrity sought in the party hierarchy (Horkheimer, 1978b: 112).⁷ But for Horkheimer, the direction the revolution had taken was not *necessary*, such an authoritarian development was dependent upon the 'belief that one is acting in the name of something greater than oneself' (Horkheimer, 1978b: 112), to which one submits, and in which one may find justifications for enforcing the submission of others.

In its positivist, optimistic version, the revolution is degraded to "progress", to a world-historical movement and Enlightenment conception of increased rational control. However, as we have seen, Horkheimer saw revolution as also containing a contradictory moment of liberation, which may only be brought about through increased resistance and by 'leaping out' of progress ("progress" being understood as the increased domination of instrumental rationality and the extension of control by bureaucratic élites and systems) (Horkheimer, 1978b: 107). This latter moment, in the context of mass politics and society, becomes a struggle *against* collectivism (understood as the political principle of organising

⁷ Earlier, however, in his notes of the 1920s, Horkheimer had described the 'revolutionary career' as 'not a series of banquets and a string of honorific titles...It is a passage toward the unknown, with misery, disgrace, ungratefulness and prison as its way stations.' (Horkheimer, 1978a: 41)

masses) and the seizure of power, *against* planning and the theoretical anticipation of a still undetermined future.

Horkheimer was conceptualising a struggle against the principle of authority, and for the freedom to choose a new, *existential* principle upon which political action could be founded. The struggle for liberation is essentially one of individuals and small political groups, as the 'authoritarian state has to fear the opposing mass parties only as competitors' who 'do not threaten the principle of the authoritarian state itself.' (Horkheimer, 1978b: 103) That struggle is dependent upon creative will and imagination, upon spontaneous action in the here-and-now and 'the active intervention of men.' (Horkheimer, 1978b: 117) In this way, the 'isolated individual' becomes a 'power', but a power of a different sort; his is the power of saying 'what everyone knows and at the same time forbids himself to know', of a *transgressive and negative agency* which does not seek simply to reproduce the existing structure of power, an agency which does not rely upon force (Horkheimer, 1978b: 113). Horkheimer's endorsement of imaginative, spontaneist liberation ultimately found a strong resonance in Marcuse's aestheticist, liberatory oppositionism of the 1960s.

Horkheimer's individuation of struggle involved a necessary emphasis upon self-dependence, for the individual engaged in the struggle for freedom there is nothing beyond the self to be relied upon: '[w]hoever cares for a human arrangement of the world can look to no court of appeal, to no existing or future power.' (Horkheimer, 1978b: 113) To do otherwise would be to look to "something greater than oneself" which would be fundamentally unaccountable and thus threaten the free democracy which Horkheimer seeks. However, in the same movement whereby the self is made self-reliant, the self as a subject

possessed of theoretical truth is erased by Horkheimer; the truth of Critical Theory is not a 'property' (Horkheimer, 1978b: 106) fit for such ownership. 'Thought itself is already a sign of resistance', he writes (Horkheimer, 1978b: 116); and signifying such resistance in itself, theory does not seek to offer anything concrete upon which a specific socio-political subjectivity may fix, and around which it may cohere.

The "spontaneity" of Critical Theory is that of 'unthinkable thought' (Jay, 1973: 80), rather than that of a concrete historical subject. By this I mean that the Critical Theorist related first and foremost to *Theory* itself, not to a social group; it was *Theory* which went its own way, and which the Theorist was obliged to follow. Moreover, the Critical Theorist could claim independence based upon that *Theory* because the latter can only exist independently and spontaneously - that is, it can only arise within the thought (and lives) of independent thinkers. This of course constitutes a circular and self-confirming position (which in the absence of a concrete subject of theory might be said to be the only position that could be taken). Independent thought confirms its independence only through being lived; it can determine itself only through the self-determination of a specific, situated consciousness, which at the same time is self-determining only insofar as it is determined by independent thought. It is in this way, therefore, that Critical Theory may be said to represent "the unfolding of a single existential judgement".

An Existential Theory

In his elaboration of Critical Theory, Horkheimer endorsed Marcuse's positive evaluation of self-criticism and abstraction. Distance, independence and the

spontaneity of thought were not merely the accidental products of the circumstance of exile but made necessary conditions of Critical Theory. In the prevailing circumstances of mass manipulation and totalising ideologies, perhaps the only viable option for holding on to the possibility of an alternative way of things, as far as Critical Theory was concerned, resided in the "loneliness" of small groups of intellectuals. In a passage often quoted from "Traditional and Critical Theory" Horkheimer wrote:

Even to the proletariat the world superficially seems different from what it really is. Even an outlook that could grasp that no opposition really exists between the proletariat's own true interests and those of society as a whole, and would therefore derive its principles of action from the thoughts and feelings of the masses, would fall into slavish dependence on the status quo. (Horkheimer, 1972: 213-214)

The distorted, false nature of the outlook of the proletariat was precisely what made distance, and pessimism, necessary. However, the severing of the link between knowledge and the social situation of the proletariat threw up the question of what constituted the grounds upon which the correctness of Critical Theory might be tested. Ultimately, as I have suggested, this came down to the individual existence of the Theorist. Knowledge cannot be had of revolutionary change until that change has come about, as Horkheimer put it, if the proof of the theoretical "pudding" which he and his Institute colleagues were concocting was in the eating, 'the eating here is still in the future' (Horkheimer, 1972: 221), and could not be legitimately anticipated. The Theorist had, therefore, only the present and his or her *specific existence* in that present to work in and with.

In this way, Critical Theory shared in common with *existentialism* an emphasis upon self-choice and self-determination in and through "authentic" theoretical acts referred to no final court of appeal. The meaning of such acts is found in their transcendence of determinate conditions. Theory provides the possibility of transcendence and self-determination; in the process, Theory determines itself. The self-determination of the thinker is theoretical in character - that is, is a moment within a total unfolding of a "single existential judgement", but an unfolding, or "disclosure", which never ends, which is, therefore, ever present. Notwithstanding its criticisms of existentialism and phenomenology (see Adorno, 1978; Horkheimer, 1993, however, throughout his career Marcuse pursued a more positive engagement with existentialism (see, Jay, 1985: ch.1, Kellner, 1984; ch.2)), like these latter, Critical Theory tended to locate the guarantee of knowledge in self-realising, self-creative, *theoretical* action. If, as Sartre declared, 'we have no means, no intellectual instrument, no concrete experience' (Sartre, 1963: 34) which allows us to gain a conception of the free society and thought of the future against which we may measure our present thought and action, then it could be said that we have nothing but the *spontaneous elaboration of ourselves* to fall back on. Like Mannheim's sociology, Critical Theory maintained a conception of a transcendent, or self-founding, intellectual subject.

Benjamin and 'the organisation of pessimism'

I turn my attention now to Walter Benjamin's conception of the relation between intellectuals and masses, and of the position of art and culture in relation to political struggle. I look at Benjamin principally because he attempted to marry

Critical Theory's "pessimistic" concern with the "crisis of Marxism" and the subjective conditions of revolution (or lack of them) with an explicit orientation upon the intellectual's commitment to concrete social and political struggles. Benjamin sought to organise the liberatory energies of revolt, to place the dialectical negativity of Theory in the service of the revolution. He stood at the margins of the Institute specifically (for instance, remaining in Europe, ultimately with fatal consequences (see Arendt, 1970), when the latter re-located in America) and of academia generally. He was, therefore, less subject to the rigours of the alternative theoretical line pursued by the Institute, and exercised by its most prominent members. As such, Benjamin stimulated contention within Critical Theory about the meaning of independence and commitment, especially as articulated in the contribution of Adorno, which I go on to examine below. One may thus employ him in order to bring out some of the tensions within the disparate "project" of Critical Theory.

Benjamin expressed his approval to Horkheimer of the latter's description of the situation of the critical intellectual as spelt out in "Traditional and Critical Theory" (Dubiel, 1985: 51; Slater, 1977: 57). Indeed, in an essay of 1929 on Surrealism he had been similarly dismissive of bourgeois intellectuals' 'moralizing dilettantism.' (Benjamin, 1989: 179) The express objects of his criticism in that piece were French literary and aesthetic intellectuals standing in the tradition of Zola, as French cultural politics was the area in which he was making his intervention. However, Benjamin also considered that his German familiarity with 'the crisis of the intelligentsia' (Benjamin, 1989: 172) placed him in an advantageous position to make such a critique.

Benjamin berates 'the so-called well-meaning left-wing intelligentsia' in strong terms:

It is typical of these left-wing French intellectuals - exactly as it is of their Russian counterparts, too - that their positive function derives entirely from a feeling of obligation, not to the Revolution, but to traditional culture. Their collective achievement, as far as it is positive, approximates conservation. But politically and economically they must always be considered a potential source of sabotage.

Characteristic of this whole left-wing bourgeois position is its irremediable coupling of idealistic morality with political practice (Benjamin, 1989: 178-179).

It is only in relation to this latter emphasis upon "sentiment" and the conservative idealisation of an old morality and culture that the incendiary romanticism and occultism of Surrealism can be understood. According to Benjamin, '[o]ne finds [Surrealism's] cult of evil as a political device, however romantic, to disinfect and isolate against all moralizing dilettantism.' (Benjamin, 1989: 179) With regard to the intellectual's connection with the proletariat, what is needed is not sympathy or sentiment, nor the adoption of a contemplative, intellectual-passive "attitude" and a "realist" portrayal of the proletariat's plight. For Benjamin, the importance of Surrealism is that its aesthetic presentation is also an attempt to realise *in actuality* the form of existence that its art presents. Thus, the literary products of the Surrealists are not simply "literature" 'but something else - demonstrations, watchwords, documents, bluffs', their 'writings are concerned literally with experiences, not with theories and still less with phantasms.' (Benjamin, 1989:

173) They are *authentic acts*. And the essential method for achieving the 'Surrealist experience' (a method in and by which technique and material, knowledge and being are brought together) is that of '*profane illumination*', envisaged as making the mundane, the world of ordinary, even outmoded, objects and events into things strange, making them parts of a 'revolutionary experience.' (Benjamin, 1989: 173, 174, 175) Later, in "Paris – Capital of the Nineteenth-Century", Benjamin went on to develop this idea as a general principle of the cultural production of the utopian transfigurations of present society:

In the dream in which every epoch sees in images the epoch which is to succeed it, the latter appears coupled with elements of prehistory – that is to say, of a classless society. The experiences of this society, which have their store place in the collective unconscious, interact with the new to give birth to the utopias which leave their traces in a thousand configurations of life. (1983: 159)

It is the experiential, lived, *intoxicating* character of what one could call Surrealist "art-acts" - their 'moral exhibitionism' (Benjamin, 1989: 174) - that makes them significant to Benjamin as that which adds up to a 'radical concept of freedom' (Benjamin, 1989: 180), as a *living demonstration* of such freedom. However, he acknowledges another side to this when he asks: 'are they [i.e., the Surrealists] successful in welding this experience of freedom to the other revolutionary experience that we have to acknowledge because it has been ours, the constructive, dictatorial side of revolution? In short, *have they bound revolt to revolution?*' (Benjamin, 1989: 180; emphasis added) There is a need '[t]o win the energies of intoxication for the revolution' (Benjamin, 1989: 180), otherwise there

is a danger of sinking into an undialectical celebration of such energies, a danger of 'subordinat[ing] the methodical and disciplinary preparation for revolution entirely to a praxis oscillating between fitness exercises and celebration in advance.' (Benjamin, 1989: 181) (The hazards of intoxication are of course those of the "soul", as evinced by Horkheimer above (and Marcuse (see 1968: 112ff).) Moreover, the negation of self in intoxication and the fascination with mystery for mystery's sake are phenomena - and decidedly "earthly" phenomena at that - with which we are very familiar in our own, 'New Age' times.)

For Benjamin, the pessimism of revolt - the rejection of conventional freedoms and morality - demands organisation. Adducing Pierre Naville, a former Surrealist and author of the essay "*La Révolution et les Intellectuels*", Benjamin poses another key question: 'where are the conditions for revolution? In the changing of attitudes or of external circumstances?' (Benjamin, 1989: 181) In dense, complex passages at the end of his essay Benjamin answers this with reference to the extension of the 'organisation of pessimism.' To organise pessimism is understood, cryptically, as 'nothing other than to expel moral metaphor from politics and to discover in political action a sphere reserved 100 percent for images.' (Benjamin, 1989: 182) What this means for Benjamin is that intellectuals should no longer, in contemplative style, continue to supply optimistic metaphorical representations of a better life to come for the proletariat. Instead, they must position themselves within the 'image sphere', 'the world of universal and integral actualities' (Benjamin, 1989: 182) the sphere in which that which is represented in its absence (the socialist future) is made present, as simultaneously ideal and real, in which the collectivity of the proletariat is produced in experiential and political reality. The activity of intellectuals must therefore be an

activity of the technical production – that is, the *cultural-technological* production, the production *in image and in reality* - of the revolutionary collectivity.⁸ The intellectual is significant in his or her *productive activity*.

The Author as Producer

Like Horkheimer and Marcuse, Benjamin sought a more profound connection between the intellectual, the intellectual's theoretical or cultural practice, and class than they saw at work in both social democracy and Russian communism. In the 1934 essay, "The Author as Producer", Benjamin presented his ideas on this relationship more clearly than he had five years earlier. In this essay Benjamin addressed the question of the "political correctness" of the left-wing writer, of '*tendentious*' writing (Benjamin, 1978: 255). He sought to show that the correct political tendency of such writing can not be detached from its formal-technical tendency and quality. For

the tendency of a literary work can only be politically correct if it is also literarily correct. That is to say that the politically correct tendency includes a literary tendency...The correct political tendency of a work includes its literary quality *because* it includes its literary tendency.
(Benjamin, 1978: 256)

For Benjamin, as long as the literary-intellectual remains a 'characterological type', an individual possessed of certain 'spiritual values' and securely superior in

⁸ Such activity is the subject of Benjamin's most famous essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"(1936) (Benjamin, 1992: 211-244).

this possession (Benjamin, 1978: 260), without an awareness of his or her place and function in the (cultural) production process, then the intellectual's tendency has a 'counterrevolutionary function.' (Benjamin, 1978: 260)

It is from this perspective that Benjamin attacked the Activist and *Neue Sachlichkeit* cultural-political movements of Weimar Germany for their adoption of a critical position 'beside the proletariat.' (Benjamin, 1978: 261) Such an attitudinal, characterologically disposed intellectual becomes nothing more than a 'benefactor' or 'ideological patron' of the proletariat (Benjamin, 1978: 261), who condescends merely to take its part. Conversely, the "productive" intellectual seeks the 'transformation of the forms and instruments of production' (Benjamin, 1978: 261); his or her activity does not seek only to use the productive apparatus in the name of the working-class but to transform that apparatus for its use. 'What matters', according to Benjamin, 'is the exemplary character of production, which is able first to induce other producers to produce, and second to put an improved apparatus at their disposal.' (Benjamin, 1978: 265) Truly *revolutionary* cultural activity improves the productive apparatus, and this improvement comes about through turning consumers into producers.⁹ Such work may be said therefore to have an *organising* function. It is not concerned simply with expressing the individual's pessimism and disillusionment with the given but with organising that pessimism and disillusionment in such a way as to produce collective political participation in cultural activity. In the process, the collectivity is engaged in producing itself as a critical force.

⁹ In recent times, the new communications technologies (the Internet, digital broadcasting) have been talked of in this way. Such talk, however, has tended to autonomise technology, leading to a type of determinism. In many cases, the instantaneous exchange of information is regarded as necessarily resulting in politically revolutionary, or at least, democratic, conclusions, rather than simply facilitating the expansion and extension of existing politico-economic models.

Benjamin took his close friend and intellectual companion Bertolt Brecht, the originator of Epic Theatre, as exemplary of this self-conscious author-as-producer. Established theatre 'has become a means against the producers' over which they have no control (Benjamin, 1978: 266). Such theatre is enmeshed in a 'competitive struggle' with 'newer instruments of production' such as film and radio (Benjamin, 1978: 266). Epic Theatre, on the other hand, 'seeks to use and learn from them', and to make possible the exposure of 'what is present' (Benjamin, 1978: 266, 267). Andrew Arato sums up Benjamin's view:

Brecht's theater is a "dramatic laboratory" which uses all of its technical sophistication to make the self-education of audiences possible. The play, "an experimental setup", fosters two dialogues: one between the producers of the play with the technical means of communication, and another between actor, author, technical personnel and the "reduced men of today." The two dialogues allow the audience to become coauthor, coactor of the production. (Arato and Ebhardt, 1978: 214)

By such dialogic means Brecht brings about an *Umfunktionierung* of the means of production, that is, through his intellectual activity he transforms the productive apparatus in such a way as it may serve the class struggle, for he produces a form of theatre which depends upon the realisation of a collective critical consciousness for its own realisation

For Benjamin, following Louis Aragon, the revolutionary intellectual's transformation of the productive apparatus constituted a 'betrayal' of the

intellectual's class of origin (Benjamin, 1978: 268). Such a betrayal was regarded as necessary and valid, in contrast to that with which Julien Benda had recently charged intellectuals in his book *La Trahison des Clercs*, which was published in 1927.¹⁰ It distinguished the revolutionary from the traditional intellectual - that is, such a betrayal made intellectuals give up their "spiritual" or "characterological" self-conception, and enabled them to transcend a purely contemplative (idealist and attitudinal) opposition to capitalism, an opposition rooted in and determined by traditional (that is, bourgeois) culture. As far as Benjamin is concerned, 'the more exactly [the intellectual] is...informed on his position in the process of production, the less it will occur to him to lay claim to "spiritual" qualities.' (Benjamin, 1978: 269) Ultimately, with the intensification of the revolutionary struggle, the basis for the intellectual's oppositional efficacy will only be found in his or her "organic" connection with the proletariat in the production process, '[f]or the revolutionary struggle is not between capitalism and spirit but between capitalism and proletariat.' (Benjamin, 1978: 269) What is necessary are not more professions of revolutionary *ideals* and *faith* but "treacherous" *acts* of cultural appropriation.

Benjamin's classification of intellectuals bears a close resemblance to that developed by Gramsci at much the same time. As we shall see in the next chapter, Gramsci was less directly concerned with specifically aesthetic issues than Benjamin (and, importantly, was situated in a different institutional location, in which he was concerned with *practical political* problems of organisation and education) but both men sought to tie together "pessimistic" intellectual-cultural

¹⁰ We will see in a later chapter Sartre's further development of the idea of the intellectual's betrayal of his or her class of origin in his *Plea for Intellectuals* (1965).

with "optimistic" political-organisational activity. Moreover, in each case this theoretical endeavour resulted in criticism, though from wholly different directions. For Gramsci, this largely entailed entering into intra-party debates with comrades over questions of tactics and strategy. For Benjamin, in the first instance, criticism arose from members of the Institute such as Adorno.

The Critique of Benjamin

As I have indicated, Benjamin's ideas were drawn from the same pool of concerns as those of Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse. Like them, he was concerned with the marginality of the intellectual and the theoretical elaboration of critical, pessimistic consciousness and culture. However, unlike them, he remained more closely fixed upon the idea of the intellectual as actively oriented upon the concrete manifestations of the revolutionary *cause*. It was for this reason that Benjamin was regarded by Horkheimer and Adorno as developing Theory "undialectically", as seeking to identify Theory too clearly with the limited (one-sided) particularity of existing socio-political subjects and institutions.

In letters he wrote to Benjamin commenting upon his work on Baudelaire and the essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", Adorno spelt out his criticisms. He lamented Benjamin's immediate relation of elements within the superstructure to the material base of society (Adorno, 1980: 129), and bemoaned the fact of the latter's forced incorporation of 'materialist categories' into his thought (Adorno, 1980: 130). In Adorno's opinion, Benjamin had added external 'ingredients' to his 'specific insights and conclusion' which had made these latter 'distasteful to swallow' even for himself (Adorno, 1980: 131).

Benjamin's adoption of such an unpalatable materialism was attributed in large part by Adorno and others to the 'baleful' and 'disastrous' influence of Brecht (Gershom Scholem, quoted in Arendt, 1970: 167).¹¹ The two men had been friends since 1929, and as we have seen already, Benjamin considered Brecht's dramatic praxis as of the highest political importance. Moreover, Benjamin explicitly endorsed the "crude" thinking advocated by Brecht, whilst saying of the latter: 'my agreeing with Brecht's production is one of the most important and most strategic points in my entire position.' (Arendt, 1970: 168) But Brecht's committed, "collective" art was roundly questioned by Adorno in his correspondence with Benjamin, the former even suggesting Brecht's opposition to *l'art pour l'art* meant that he formed a *de facto* 'united front' with the Nazis (Adorno, 1980: 122).¹² Adorno argued for the need for '*more* dialectics' of a negative kind (Adorno, 1980: 124) as an antidote to what he saw as a dangerous slide back into a variety of identity theory, even a kind of positivism.

For Adorno, Benjamin's Brechtian defence of a technological, collective, 'utilitarian' (Adorno, 1980: 124) art in "The Work of Art" and "Author as Producer" essays rested on seeing autonomous art purely as compromised or co-opted, as 'unfree' in comparison to committed art. Benjamin 'underestimated the technicality of autonomous art and overestimated that of dependent art.' (Adorno, 1980: 124) However, the truth is that '[b]oth bear the stigmata of capitalism, both contain elements of change...Both are the torn halves of an integral freedom, to which however they do not add up.' (Adorno, 1980: 123) In championing cinema

¹¹ For his part, Brecht derided the Critical Theorists in the United States as 'Tuis', that is, passive, politically impotent, academic intellectuals (see Jay, 1973: fn.338; Slater, 1977: 144-145).

¹² See also Adorno's 1962 essay "Commitment" (in Arato and Eberhardt, 1978) for a continuation of his assault upon Brecht and committed art.

and the Epic Theatre of Brecht, Benjamin, according to Adorno, was guilty of an 'anarchistic romanticism of blind confidence in the spontaneous power of the proletariat in the historical process', of attributing to the proletariat, as the subject of cinema and drama, with theoretical consciousness and a decisive historical subjectivity (Adorno, 1980: 123, 122).

Thus, Benjamin was equated by Adorno to the "Luxemburgian" intellectuals and metaphysical positivists who take the given (whether it be the "fact" of proletarian consciousness or existing socio-economic conditions) as the unequivocal basis for their theoretical observations. In a later letter criticising what was eventually to become "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" Adorno made this charge of an undialectical, uncritical factuality explicit: '[i]f one wished to put it very drastically, one could say that your study is located at the crossroads of magic and positivism.' Benjamin had ended up engaging in little other than 'a wide-eyed presentation of mere facts.' (Adorno, 1980: 129) Again Adorno called for more theory, the study of cultural phenomena requires mediation 'through the *total social process*' (Adorno, 1980: 129), which could only be carried out *theoretically*.

Critical Theory and 'Leninism'

It is significant that Adorno took recourse to Lenin in his critique of Benjamin, for this was to raise again the issue of spontaneity and the exact nature of the intellectual's relationship to the practical workers' movement, and that between the cultural and political vanguards. In his critique, Adorno drew upon Lenin's

conception of the introduction of revolutionary-theoretical consciousness into the proletariat from "outside" of that class as expounded in *What is to be Done?* (1902) (Lenin, 1988: 143-144). For Adorno too the proletariat only achieves such consciousness 'through a theory introduced by intellectuals as dialectical subjects.' (Adorno, 1980: 122) Lenin argued that the proletariat was incapable of anything more than a corporate, economistic consciousness, and Adorno, in accord with Horkheimer's argument in "Traditional and Critical Theory", adjudged the actual consciousness of workers to be "mutilated", as bourgeois. It would thus be impossible for the working-class to make a revolution without the intervention of an external agency – that is, revolutionary intellectuals.

However, whereas Lenin considered this intervention to be the role of the revolutionary party - the tightly organised, highly disciplined, "Jacobin" revolutionary party -, Adorno looked elsewhere. He did not envisage the function of the theoretical subject 'in the sense of an activist conception of "intellectuals"' (Adorno, 1980: 125); the relationship of the intellectual to proletariat is not one of *acting* on its side, as Benjamin - one might say, in Leninist fashion - argued. Instead, it is matter of maintaining solidarity with the working-class through following the "truth" of theory. It is not the party which, as Trotsky was to declare at the founding of the Fourth International, should demand the individual 'totally and completely' (Trotsky, 1974: 86), but *theory* and *theoretical reflection*. To the "corporate" consciousness of the working-class would be counterposed the "universal" consciousness of the intellectual, which would remain universal as long as it was *not* universalised in practical concrete forms. The "revolution" foreseen by Adorno was revolutionary precisely insofar as it remained unrealised.

The "Leninism" endorsed by Adorno (and, one might say, which characterised Critical Theory more generally) was one in which the revolutionary vanguard of the Party was displaced by the *cultural* vanguard of the subjects of Critical Theory. But whereas the Leninist party intellectual was grounded in the necessity of the activist, organisational tasks of enabling the proletariat to fulfil its historical role, to become conscious of its historical subjectivity, Critical Theory saw the intellectual's task as *exactly the reverse*. It became a revolutionary theory without agency. Solidarity was maintained with the proletariat precisely through maintaining the gap between the critical intellectual and the masses. The "backward", "mutilated" consciousness of the proletariat constituted exactly the reason *not* to act as it had for Lenin *to* act. Adorno's citation of Lenin's dictum on the insufficiency of the proletariat's spontaneous consciousness in support of his critique of Benjamin itself represented the "tearing in half" of Lenin's revolutionary thesis, whereby Adorno appropriated its negative, purely *theoretical* moment whilst discarding the positive, *practical* moment.

As such, Critical Theory was not concerned first and foremost with the *changing* of people and conditions but, rather, with the preservation of a *critical space* at the margins of an increasingly conformist and hyper-socialised society. From this perspective, the mass revolutionary party, as Horkheimer argued, represented only another manifestation of the repressive and rigidifying rationality which had penetrated all levels of social and political practice. Faced with contemporary rigidification the intellectuals of the Institute could find ready justification for their withdrawal from practice. Moreover, as Zygmunt Bauman points out, such a withdrawal (or 'surrender') from the point-of view of the

"philosophers" of Frankfurt, itself could be seen as having its own practical efficacy or potency:

Even in their surrender (particularly in their surrender?) philosophers remain incessantly and painfully conscious of the practical connection of the cultural ideal. Its impotence is as much a constituting factor of their discourse as its assumed all-conquering potency was of the discourse of their Enlightenment ancestors. Impotence itself becomes now potency, the cultural ideal stays pure and worthy as long as it is not contaminated by intrinsically impure reality; it stays pure and worthy because it steers clear of practical success. And yet, in a curious twist of mind, this pure, ethereal, cultural ideal is believed to be reality's best chance. (1992: 20)

According to this account, the eventual detachment of Critical Theory from an "impure" practical reality might be seen as the preservation of an alternative form of (using Bauman's term) "legislative" practice on the part of a group of intellectuals who had abjured the modern(ist) intellectuals' attachment to the political realisation of their rational ideals. It was these latter - and especially those who sought to pursue rational schemes of social and state planning - who positioned the intellectual at the very heart of the socio-political process of totalisation, in which all social phenomena were "reconciled" to existing reality within the terms of a rational political calculus. For Critical Theorists, Mannheim had brought about just such a reconciliation, as had, in their different way, the activists of the revolutionary party who, by identifying the interests of a debased and "mutilated" working-class, fell into a "slavish dependence on the status quo".

However, though Critical Theory sought to reject a specific conception of a totalising intellectual activity, as Bauman indicates, they did not manage to avoid

perpetuating that very *mode* of activity. In the process of overcoming the intellectual's attachment to practice, Critical Theory presented itself as 'a form of practice' (Adorno, cited in Anderson, 1976: 73); in disavowing the modern(ist) intellectual's conciliatory, centralising impulses, Critical Theory permitted the intellectual only the possibility of performing work at the social margins which necessarily could have no present benefit. If such a marginal intellectual was forced to forego the consolations of a "legislative" practice directed at the world beyond the boundaries of his or her coterie, he or she might yet legislate, might yet provide the foundational categories and methods from which intellectuals could derive authority within their own tradition(s) (Bauman, 1987: 5), a process which, as I argue in chapter six, has characterised contemporary conceptions of the intellectual. But, these two spheres (or practices) of authority are not separable; the production of a decontaminated Theory which would serve as a vessel for a perhaps unrealisable future was itself dependent upon the operation of particular institutional and procedural mechanisms which enabled that Theory to exert a specifically cultural and moral effectivity.

Chapter Three

Ideas in Action: Gramsci and the Creation of Conviction

Introduction

In the preceding two chapters I have looked at attempts to re-evaluate the relation between the intellectual and the masses, and that between reflective consciousness and the diverse domains of experience in the light of revolutionary crisis and the subsequent apparent failure of revolutionary socialism in Western Europe. In the case of Mannheim, the re-evaluation of the intellectual constituted an integral part of his totalisation of the Marxist ideology-critique as a sociology of knowledge, whereby socialism was displaced into social science. Mannheim proposed the possibility of a new objectivity, a "universal", social consciousness, but one that was not class-based. For its part, Critical Theory sought the recovery of idealism out from under the inert body of a mechanistic materialism, and as part of this, attempted the reclamation of dialectical thought as destabilising the possibility of the progressive "socialisation" of the individual and the optimistic reconciliation of antagonistic classes and social factors.

There can be seen in both these cases an effort to re-introduce consciousness back into the socio-historical process as an active determinant element. The sociology of knowledge and Critical Theory were developed upon the premise expressed by Karl Korsch that '[i]ntellectual life should be conceived in union with social and political life,...should be studied in union with social consciousness...as a real yet ideal (or "ideological") component of the historical process in general.' (1970:71) Consciousness, therefore, could and should be seen not as a mere "reflection" of reality, as argued by Lenin in his contribution to epistemology, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1909), but as *part of reality itself*. This meant that, as Korsch indicated, it was possible to regard the operation

of the intellectual consciousness, in ideological or cultural activity, for example, as a particular and distinct type of "action".

For Mannheim, that active consciousness was synthetic in character; for the Critical Theorists, it was conceived of as dialectical-critical. There were, as I hope to have shown, differences between these constructions of consciousness, especially with regard to their respective relationships to Marxism and revolutionary consciousness. However, one may say that both Mannheim and the Critical Theorists came to similar positions with regard to their idea (and practice) of intellectual action. In that conception, intellectual action was ultimately equated to: i) the privileging of an in some way removed intellect, ii) not merely the severance of the relationship between theory and practice but suspicion of, even hostility to, the latter, iii) the end of the intellectual's organisational-agitational function, and, iv) a process of institutional re-location consequent upon the latter, v) the re-attribution or even loss of political agency, and, vi) the affirmation of a transcendent truth potentially apprehensible by the intellect - a truth not available from within the practical-political but only beyond it.

In short, the emphasis upon the active character of the intellect was marked by a removal of emphasis from the efficacy of other kinds of consciousness. Intellectual consciousness was distinguished as allowing access to dimensions of reality barred to forms of *experiential* consciousness. Experience was that which imposed limits upon consciousness, situated it within specific practical circumstances and conditions which confined it within dominant *Weltanschauungen*. In this, one can discern an Enlightenment conception of the intellect as that which rises beyond power, as that which is based upon brute self-interest, and which renders it rational, objective, and hence "disinterested", in one

case, or sees it as totalising, as totally contaminating all aspects of experience and individual and social life, in the other. Both Mannheim and the Critical Theorists, one positively, the other negatively, continued the *philosophes*' 'promise' (Bauman, 1987: 24) of the possibility of establishing knowledge as an alternative to power and to the limited particularity of practical experience.

Gramsci and Intellectual Action

It is within the general context of the emphasis upon intellectual action that Gramsci is often situated. This position is backed up by reference to Gramsci's continued concern with subjective consciousness, culture, philosophy - with moments of the social and ideological "superstructure" (see, for example, Kellner, 1989: 12). On this score, Gramsci has been placed, with Lukács and Korsch, at the head of the Western Marxist tradition. However, in making such an attribution, Perry Anderson at the same time points to Gramsci as alone amongst Western Marxists in 'embod[ying] in his person a revolutionary unity of theory and practice.' (1976: 45) This latter unity consisted, specifically, *in the unity of intellect and will*, of consciousness and power. For Gramsci, by this reckoning, the development of thought was carried on not at the expense of experience but was, rather, its continuation.

In his study, Walter Adamson too sees Gramsci as alone amongst the original Western Marxists in taking Marxism in 'a uniquely *political* [i.e., practico-organisational] direction' (1980: 3: my emphasis). I do not feel qualified to undertake a detailed comparison of Korsch, Lukács and Gramsci, however, in general terms one can say that Korsch and Lukács performed what they

considered to be the essential task of "Hegelianising" the revisionist Marx of the Second International (see Lukács, 1971: xxi) but that this was, unsurprisingly, an enterprise which was, first and foremost, philosophical in character. Thus, in his 1967 critique of his own "subjectivism", Lukács recognised the disparity between his revolutionary practice and methods, and the distanced philosophism of *History and Class Consciousness*, which led to the contemplation of socio-historical facts as trans-historical universal categories.

By contrast, Adamson places Gramsci on a radically different "*Weg zu Marx*": '[u]nlike Lukács, [Gramsci] did not come to Marx at the end of an essentially intellectual quest. He came to Marx as he had come to socialism: in search of answers to practical political problems' (1980: 34). This emphasises Gramsci's pre-eminent concern with action, and with the practical contexts and conditions of consciousness. Moreover, it explains Gramsci's openness to a variety of ideas and philosophies as part of a search for such answers. The manifest influence of such diverse figures as Machiavelli, Croce and Kant, Gramsci's interest in the Italian Communes and in the Reformation bears witness to this openness. This ecumenism, at least in part, is behind the appeal of Gramsci to a wider constituency than revolutionary Marxists. In directly political terms, the apparently "soft" pluralist contours of Gramsci's thought had great allure for the architects of post-war Eurocommunism in Italy and elsewhere, insofar as the latter sought theoretical foundations for a more "open" and collaborative political strategy centred between parliamentary democracy and revolutionary struggle (see Rosengarten, 1994: 26).

Gramsci's distinction, by this account, lay in his continued search for new modes of political organisation and education, for new ways of relating to the

concrete experiences of the working-class. Gramsci passed through various theoretical and practical positions in pursuit of solutions to practical-political problems of organisation and education. In doing so, he made these central to the whole question of revolutionary politics. Moreover, and importantly from our perspective, Gramsci made the *intellectual*, or rather, made *the making of intellectuals*, as "intellectual and moral reform", and as hegemonic practice, key to the matter of the transformation of the forms and locations of revolutionary struggle. Whereas Lukács, certainly at the time of *History and Class Consciousness*, "imputed" a revolutionary (totalising) consciousness to the working-class as that to which that class under certain objective conditions might come, Gramsci saw consciousness much more as that which would be created *in conjunction with* the proletariat. Gramsci saw revolutionary consciousness as that which had to be given an ethical and practical reality in the everyday life and thought of the proletariat, it needed to become that of which that class was convinced, had to be rooted in subjective *conviction*.

One of the chief tasks of the revolutionary was to create within the proletarian masses the conviction of the possibility and desirability of revolution. The transformation of society would occur only if the working-class could achieve subjectively the cultural and ethical readiness for such a transformation. Convinced of the legitimacy and superiority of its own culture and way of life, that class would be prepared to gain hegemony over all other classes. The achievement of conviction, the commitment to its own values and forms of life constituted the solid experiential and ethical basis upon which the proletariat could build the new socialist society, for the sake of which it needed to be prepared to make many sacrifices. Conviction embodied both the *ethical ends* to

which the class aspired, and the *political means* by which those ends were to be achieved. Politics and ethics were united within conviction.

However, as well as being seen as open and ecumenical, Gramsci has also been represented as more or less "totalitarian" in persuasion. Neil Harding's recent damning assessment of Gramsci as an imperious Ideologist or Jacobin (1997: 210ff) is a recent example of such an analysis. In fact, Harding exhibits a very restricted and monological view of Gramsci, as basically attempting to impose an austere and relentless philosophy upon an unsuspecting (and presumably non-philosophical) people. But, this being said, the question of discipline, authority, and centralisation is relevant with regard to Gramsci. In seeking to unite revolutionary theory and practice, Gramsci was often faced with holding together the competing demands and imperatives of organisation and education, of party discipline and ideological unity, and the expansive, "democratic" development of a mass critical consciousness.

Gramsci was concerned with the problem of uniting the two dimensions of popular participation and centralised authority and discipline, expansive autonomous consciousness and united political-ideological outlook throughout his revolutionary career. His later, mature conception of hegemony constituted his most sophisticated attempt at combining the two, bringing together, in the memorable image of Machiavelli's Centaur, the two levels of 'force and consent,...the individual moment and the universal moment' (1971: 170), party and mass. The problem encountered of the possibility of a clash between educative and political-organisational imperatives (see Adamson, 1980: 38-39) was addressed in the hegemonic struggle for cultural and ideological dominance.

Such dominance was to be achieved through the elaboration of an ever-widening stratum of "organic intellectuals" and by *situating* cultural-educative activity, that is, by making it a practical process tied into concrete means and ends, rather than being concerned with constituting dispassionate, distanced intellectual subjects.

However, that conception, along with the famous delineation of "organic" and "traditional" intellectuals, was elaborated at length only in the reflective space of prison. The exact details of the party's response to Gramsci's theory of political organisation are difficult to determine (see Bellamy and Schecter, 1993: 84; Adamson, 1980: 97-98). But in general one can say that Gramsci's insistence upon a dialectical relationship between individual and universal moments found little resonance in the authoritarian party of Stalin, and that Gramsci himself was critical of developments within the party which led in an authoritarian and mechanistic direction. (1971: 419ff) Indeed, as has been pointed out (see Hoare, 1985: xxiii-xxiv), it may well be that it was the isolating and to some degree insulating experience of prison itself which enabled Gramsci to maintain the unity of intellect and will, reflective critical consciousness and power.

At the same time, one should recognise that Gramsci's emphasis upon the cultural and ethical dimensions of politics initially situated him within a wider tradition of cultural activism amongst Italian intellectuals, for whom it was imperative to secure popular commitment to, and belief in, the Italian nation state. At the head of this tradition stood Benedetto Croce, but such intellectual activity was also the concern of authoritarians and élitists such as Papini, Prezzolini, Marinetti and Mussolini. For these intellectuals, the urgent task was that of providing the state with intellectual and ethical foundations, and to this end they,

along with Gramsci, saw themselves as members of a general movement seeking *intellectual and moral reform*, to which I now turn.

Intellectual and Moral Reform: Unfinished Risorgimento

In a recent piece Richard Bellamy has argued that Gramsci should be seen as fitting into a tradition within Italian social and political theory the main emphasis of which was upon "making Italians" (1997: 39). Within this tradition the unification of Italy constituted the dominant concern. Cavour's diplomatic efforts during the *Risorgimento* period had, as Adamson writes, 'extended the control of one of [Italy's] provinces, Piedmont, over all the rest', but had not initiated 'a genuine social revolution out of which a political mandate might have grown.' (1980: 19) Consequently, unification had remained merely a political veneer spread over Italian society, with little depth and substance, resulting in the uneven economic and political development of the different regions, and allowing the dominance of the South of the country by the North.

By this reckoning, the *Risorgimento* project of unification had failed because it had not brought about 'a political and ethical unity between the people and the state' (Bellamy and Schecter, 1993: 5), it had not become an experiential and moral-intellectual fact for the majority of the Italian populace, had not been internalised as a conviction. For many, what was needed was 'a "second Risorgimento" of moral regeneration to complete the political settlement obtained by the first' (Bellamy, 1994: xxxix), and different forces from across the social and political spectrum sought to bring this second phase about. After his imprisonment, Gramsci offered an assessment of his own involvement with this

movement for intellectual and moral reform. According to this account, 'during the first fifteen years of the century' Italian intellectuals found themselves 'on a common ground', namely, as participants in a broad movement for national rejuvenation, and in this drew upon a common intellectual-philosophical heritage (that is, an activist, militant idealism) at the head of which stood the global cultural figure of Benedetto Croce (Gramsci, 1994a: 56, 164).

Croce

In the first instance, Croce's importance to Gramsci consisted in the former's attack upon positivism, a phenomenon which, as we have seen in previous chapters, swept across Europe in the early years of the century. Positivism, it was thought, led to deterministic, mechanical conclusions, and to an over-reliance upon "objective" causality and laws of development. Moreover, according to Croce, here echoing Horkheimer and Marcuse in the previous chapter, positivism paved the way for ideologies and philosophies of "intuition, pragmatism and mysticism", through its failure 'to create a new and satisfying religion' in the place of that which it had deposed (cited in Adamson, 1980: 20).¹ As a counter to the positivist trend, Croce proposed 'spiritual activity' (1946: 21) as central to the historical process. He sought a 'saner and truer rationalism.' (Adamson, 1980: 32) For Croce, as for Korsch, thought and action were not ontologically distinct but rather should be considered as interdependent moments within the progressive unfolding of reality (see, for example, 1913: 18). Hence, it was possible for him to posit a totality of 'ethico-political history' in which each sphere of human activity

¹ Of course, this is precisely what did happen in Italy, where positivism, rationalism, historicism and democracy were lumped together and rejected as whole (see Ferrarotti, 1981: 148).

- the economic, technical, aesthetic, moral, etc. - though distinct and autonomous as activities, and thus as articulated expressions of the "spirit", were yet dialectically related (see 1946: 73-74; Hoare and Nowell Smith, 1971: xxiii). In this way it was possible to imagine a fuller, "two-sided" rationality which encompassed will and understanding, subjective belief and objective truth. Politics and morality, state and society, became interdependent moments within an encompassing spiritual process.

Croce thus placed great emphasis upon *action*, but understood as "spiritual activity", the conscious, subjective creation of culture and history, and therefore of the nation state. In a later work, *Politics and Morality* (1946), Croce indicated what he described as an Aristotelian conception of the relationship between theory and practice, and between 'the active and the contemplative life', writing 'that not only the actions which turn towards the facts are practical, but even more practical are the contemplations and reflections which have their origin and end in themselves and which, by educating the mind, prepare for good deeds.' (1946: 43)

One can see in this identification of "reflective activity" an exact counterpart to Mannheim's notion of a political science encountered in chapter 1. For Croce, as for Mannheim, politics was not merely a matter of preparing the way for an insurrection but was, or should be, concerned with educating individuals into self-consciousness and habits of good judgement. Unreflective political practice carried with it the danger of "contaminating" sound 'historical judgement' with elements of expediency, which could deprive that judgement 'of tolerance and fairness.' (1946: 43)

Gramsci retained something of Croce's emphasis upon the value and necessity of political-educative activity, though he did not accept the latter's (and by association, Mannheim's) explicit exclusive opposition between the education of reflection and practical political engagement. Indeed, it was precisely the problem of establishing a dialectical relationship between the two that constituted the foundation of his thought and activity. But his early writings do contain a strong measure of Croce's ideas of politics as spiritual activity and of the latter's concern with the ethico-political. They also exhibit the influence of Georges Sorel - who himself owed much to Croce -, whose elevation of practice over doctrine and delineation of the dimension of mythical action was influential on Italian intellectuals more generally. For Sorel, myths were those sets of ideas which are integrated by people into their lives in such a way as they become immovably part of their sense of reality and of themselves; as such, they 'are not descriptions of things, but expressions of a determination to act', and must be either accepted or rejected as they stand. (1961: 50) Myth is that dimension where thought and will, practical reality and consciousness meet. It was just such a conjunction that was Gramsci's focus throughout his work and life. However, I want now to look more closely at some of Gramsci's key early essays in order to show how he developed ideas about the ethical and experiential dimensions of politics and political activity, and about the relationship between the intellectual and the social and cultural life of the people.

Gramsci's Early Writings: Spiritual Activism

In his famous "defence" (1914) of Mussolini's advocacy of the PSI's abandonment of a position of absolute neutrality towards the First World War (an advocacy that preceded Mussolini's expulsion from the party) Gramsci exhibited his commitment to an activist position.² In this piece, Gramsci's argument rested on two related points: (i) the PSI needed to take on specifically *national* tasks, to engage with the international political situation on a national basis; the party had to become autonomous in its authority to judge day-to-day interventions in the national context (1994b: 4); (ii) the general importance of *activity*, as "spiritual creation" - the policy of absolute neutrality might lead to the proletariat's becoming little more than an 'impotent spectator' (1994b: 5), standing aside in 'passive contemplation' (1994b: 7) at the onrush of events, a stance with which the ruling class would be quite happy. A policy of "active neutrality", on the other hand, would force the ruling-class 'to assume its responsibilities' for the current situation, a position which would 'restor[e] to national life its original character as a class struggle' (1994b: 5). Under these conditions, the ruling-class would be shown up as inadequate to the tasks of national life, as incapable of overcoming the current crisis, and the proletariat would begin to see itself as the only class which was so capable.

Essentially, therefore, Gramsci was arguing for a situation in which the working-class could become the active subject of national life, which could, that is, enable the creation of a state which at that time existed only *in potentia*

² As Ferrarotti makes clear, at the beginning of the war the Italian avant garde was pervaded by an interventionist mood. (1981: 154) Ferrarotti emphasises the Sorelian character of this: one should commit oneself to action of any kind, the act of commitment being more important than the specific nature of the act itself. (1981: 152)

(1994b: 4), a state which would be set upon the foundations of new forms of life and new values.

Due to Mussolini's subsequent political trajectory, Gramsci was dogged by this his first foray into political journalism (see Hoare and Nowell Smith, 1971: xxx). He was dubbed an interventionist and wrote nothing for a year after this experience. The editors of the English translation of the *Notebooks* comment on the fact that Mussolini had great authority among the party in Turin, and that therefore it was not surprising that Gramsci would speak up for him. However, from our perspective, Gramsci's ethical-activism may be seen as part of the characteristic national intellectual-political tradition, which sought commitment to specifically *Italian* forms of consciousness and action. Gramsci's alignment with Mussolini was provisional, each proceeding thereon in opposed directions, but was nevertheless consequent upon their having shared concerns - with practical activity, spiritual creation and national-popularity. In his work of the years 1916-19 Gramsci went on to engage further with these concerns, and it is to some of these pieces I want to turn now.

Socialism and Culture

In an essay of 1916 Gramsci outlined a conception of culture, as critique, as a concrete activity of spirit, derived quite explicitly from Romantic and idealist thought. For Gramsci in this piece culture was necessarily *active*, it consisted, that is, in the activity of 'critique', the latter being thought of as the disciplined effort (that is, by implication, as that to which one is *committed*) to know oneself through knowing others, through 'knowing their history, the succession of efforts they have made to be what they are, to create the civilization they have created.'

(1994b: 11) Thus, according to Gramsci, one cannot separate out knowing from being, the "objective culture", to recall Simmel's phrase, of a people, as manifested in its "civilisation", from the subjective work of making one's own identity. Culture is critical in the sense that it involves a process of becoming 'master of oneself', and of asserting one's identity by imposing 'one's own order' upon the accumulated material history of the world (1994b: 11).

Culture was envisaged by Gramsci, *a la* Croce, as a continuous subjective historico-spiritual process, rather than a matter of 'natural evolution.' (1994b: 11) Each revolutionary stage in history was 'preceded by a long process of intense critical activity', a cultural ferment during which ideas spread throughout various social groups (1994b: 10); what was, in fact, a mythologising, in Sorel's sense, or, hegemonising process. Gramsci closely paralleled what Mannheim was claiming for culture at much the same time. As we have seen, in his lecture on "Soul and Culture", Mannheim emphasised the historical necessity for a cultural critique which could pave the way for an as yet unseen future culture. One may elicit similarities of tradition and national-cultural context between the two. Gramsci and Mannheim drew upon similar philosophical traditions and intellectual formations; both were caught up in the pan-European crisis instigated by world war, both were active in countries where intellectuals sought wholesale intellectual and moral regeneration, and both sought to make ideas into concrete forces for change. However, these similarities apart, for Gramsci cultural critique was the precursor to social revolution, was that which prepared the way for political *action*, for Mannheim, on the other hand, such a critique foreshadowed a new moral order, but political action was that which was to be guarded against.

The critique could not be expressed in the concrete form of a particular socio-political force.

The significance of critical activity for Gramsci's conception of revolutionary change meant that it enabled him to recover the Enlightenment as a moment of revolutionary cultural ferment. Displaying a perhaps slightly confusing looseness of terms, Gramsci proclaimed the Enlightenment to have been 'a magnificent revolution in itself', which created 'a kind of pan-European unified consciousness, a bourgeois International of the spirit.' (1994b: 10) The Enlightenment signified the cultural-historical conjuncture when *thought became a kind of action*, when ideas became a "force" in themselves, and when "individual and universal moments" were united.³ Gramsci described the interrelationship of Enlightenment culture and the political transformation (the modernisation) of Europe in an extraordinarily sure and evocative passage:

In Italy, in France, in Germany, the same things were being discussed, the same institutions, the same principles. Each new play by Voltaire, each new pamphlet was like a spark running through the wires which already stretched between one state and another, one region and another; and it found the same sympathizers and the same opponents everywhere at the same moment. The bayonets of Napoleon's armies found their way already cleared by an invisible army of books and tracts, which had been swarming out of Paris since the first half of the eighteenth century, preparing men and institutions for their badly needed renovation. (1994b: 11)

³ On the Enlightenment transformation of ideas into a socially transformational force, see Bauman, 1987: ch. 7.

The significance of this process had three aspects: i) it meant that intellectuals could be seen as having an important politico-historical function, ii) that bourgeois ("traditional") culture could not be simply ignored as 'pedantic, arid intellectualism' (1994b: 10) but had to be seen as having existed in an active, practical ("organic") relationship with historical reality, and iii) it focused attention upon the necessity of preparing the cultural and social ground before a class could ascend to political power. These were insights which Gramsci would later make central to his twin notions of the intellectual and hegemonic activity.

Russian Revolutions

In his initial response to the first (February) Russian revolution (as indeed to the October revolution) Gramsci took up the optic of Crocean idealism in his analysis of events. He immediately fixed upon the perceived ethical and actional aspects of the revolution. In a piece published in April 1917 in *Il Grido del Popolo*, "Notes on the Russian Revolution", he was dismissive of parallels with the French Revolution, on the grounds that the latter had been 'Jacobin' in character (1994b: 32), that is, had been an event characterised by the transfer of power alone. For Gramsci, the February Revolution was to be seen not merely as 'a matter of power' but as 'a revolution in people's behaviour, a moral revolution.' (1994b: 31)

Again, one can see a post-*Risorgimento*, moral-regenerative emphasis at work in Gramsci's thought. Jacobinism is a 'bourgeois phenomenon' (1994b: 32) because it involves the imposition of the limited, corporate ends of one class upon all others. 'Socialist revolutionaries cannot be Jacobins', as far as Gramsci is concerned, precisely because they have *universal* ends, that is, because they

'pursu[e] an ideal which cannot be limited to the few' (1994b: 32). Such revolutionaries were the proper heirs to the Enlightenment *philosophes*, with their achievement of cultural hegemony, in which ideas became practical and concrete in their directly political and ethical value. In a resoundingly optimistic conclusion to his essay, reflecting upon the release of prisoners under the new regime, Gramsci made this connection explicit:

The Russian Revolution has turned man at his most abject - the 'common criminal' - into man as envisaged by Immanuel Kant, the theorist of absolute reason: the man who can say 'beyond me, the vastness of the skies; within me, the imperative of my own conscience'. What these little news items reveal to us is no less than the liberation of the human spirit, the initiation of a new moral sense. It is the advent of a new moral order, which coincides with everything the prophets of our movement told us. (1994b: 34)

At this point, Gramsci was more particularly interested in the moral and intellectual dimensions of the revolution than in its purely *organisational* and *institutional* aspects. The February Revolution became - and this was from the fragments of reports, as he himself acknowledged - the spiritual expression of the 'conscience of the people' (1994b: 32), and of the *Russian* people specifically, who had showed their cultural readiness for such revolutionary change. The revolution had created a 'new way of life', a 'new moral atmosphere' and a 'new freedom of spirit.' (1994b: 33) Gramsci considered the act of liberating the prisoners to be symptomatic of the achievement on the part of the Russian proletariat as a whole of a new moral consciousness and a state of cultural

preparedness. The proletariat had, in Sorelian terms, integrated, intuitively, as a matter of conviction, the myth of its own triumph over the bourgeoisie. (Sorel, 1961: 41-42)

In this largely philosophical analysis of events, Gramsci actions and ideas, deeds and thoughts were brought together under the sign of a unifying "spiritual activity". Gramsci collapsed ethics and politics, society and state together on a conceptual-philosophical basis. The criminal became "Kantian Man" not as the result of a specific *political-organisational* intercession - or rather, the specifically political intervention of organised revolutionaries was not alone responsible for this ascension - but was a matter of the autonomous spiritual or cultural development of the Russian people, which had achieved a collective consciousness and a national identity which found expression in a unified will, which the revolutionaries "reflected" in their political activity. From such a perspective, the revolution was not a political event, in terms of signifying the relative development of the institutional organisation of class forces, but was primarily cultural and moral in character. It signified the development of a certain level of consciousness and spiritual civilisation within the Russian people.

However, this perspective, which took a view of the revolution as an act which evinced a certain state of subjective cultural and moral readiness, as almost a wholly subjective act, carried with it the danger of equating of political power, which is necessarily objectified in institutions and organisational structures, with the spontaneous subjective will and consciousness. It was just such a charge of "spontaneism" which was directed at Gramsci by his critics on the revolutionary left in Italy. Taking in Gramsci's career as a whole, such a charge seems unwarranted; it was his intention, as I make clear further on, to overcome the

opposition between spontaneous and revolutionary consciousnesses, between experience and reflection. At this point, however, one may say that initially Gramsci exhibited an "intellectualist" tendency towards the over-valuation of subjective consciousness, and saw the problem of power as that which could be solved by the force of ideas in themselves.

The fact that in his initial responses to events in Russia Gramsci tended to concentrate upon their intellectual and moral significance, and less upon their political and economic dimensions must be seen also as a reaction to the direction of development of syndicalism and reformism within Left politics in Italy. These had become empiricist, disintegrated and one-sided. Gramsci's primary aim, on the other hand, was that of integrating all forms of social activity. In 1918 he wrote of the situation within Marxism in Italy:

What has happened now is that the syndicalists and the reformists, through the same kind of error in their thinking, have specialized in the empirical language of socialism. The first have arbitrarily extracted one term from the unified whole of social activity - the term 'economy'. The others, equally arbitrarily, have chosen the term politics. (1994b: 48)

One may find the idea of arbitrary choice somewhat disingenuous in this context, however, the burden of Gramsci's approach was the need for a *synthesis* within Marxist politics, which could 'restore the original unity of all social activity.' (1994b: 48) Socialism had developed in a static, undialectical direction, under the aegis of the reformists and syndicalists it had become fossilised as an abstract doctrine which was no longer driven forward by the dynamic of contradictions between the constituent moments of the socio-historical process.

It was against this static backdrop that Gramsci celebrated the October Revolution in Russia as a "Revolution against Capital", that is, as contradicting the prevailing abstract positivist spirit within international socialism. According to Gramsci, the Bolshevik revolution was 'made up of ideologies, more than events.' (1994b: 39) Its significance lay in refuting the positivism and naturalism of Marx's reformist and economist legacies, and in signifying the supersession of the strict division between basic economic facts impelling the course of History and the thought and actions of men and women so impelled. The revolution had shown the true character of Marxist thought, which, according to Gramsci,

has always identified as the most important factor in history not crude, economic facts, but rather men themselves, and the societies they create, as they learn to live with one another and understand one another; as, out of these contacts (civilization), they forge a social, collective will; as they come to understand economic facts, and to assess them, and to control them with their will, until this collective will becomes the driving force of the economy, the force which shapes reality itself (1994b: 40).

The creation of such a collective will and consciousness was understood as a critical-cultural process, much as envisaged in "Socialism and Culture" the previous year; that is, it was conceived as a process of the proletariat's increased understanding both of itself and of the world about it (the two moments being mutual). But, the creation of collective class consciousness and of a moral-cultural disposition sufficient to revolutionary change were seen by Gramsci as *nationally specific*, they were dependent upon the peculiar character of Russian social and political development, upon the specific combination of the effects of war *and* of

socialist propaganda in Russia (1994b: 41). These created the conditions for the development of a revolutionary subjectivity and for the integration of a revolutionary will.

The first of these moments was "mechanical" - that is, economic and physical; the second factor, "organic", that is, political and organisational-institutional. With his culturalist emphasis, the element which Gramsci fixed upon within this latter moment was the 'socialist education' (1994b: 42) which the Russian proletariat had received from the Bolsheviks. It was this education which had enabled it to re-live 'the whole history of the proletariat' 'in thought' (1994b: 41), which enabled it to throw off the chains of mechanical determinism (the logic of *Capital*), and thus to overcome its supposed lack of experience as a working-class within a "backward" nation. The Bolshevik party was conceived as most importantly an educational instrument, educating the will of the Russian workers (making convictions) so that its socio-economic backwardness would be no bar to making a revolution. It was this example that Gramsci sought to put to good use in Italy, as such another "backward" nation.

A Cultural Association

Thus, in the period immediately after the October Revolution Gramsci helped establish an institution for the provision of a specifically working-class education, the *Club di Vita Morale*. The *Club* was to perform the task of creating the moral and cultural conditions for revolution, and in this, Gramsci continued his concern for the integration of all spheres of social activity. The Turin section of the PSI was a strong political force, and had created a similarly potent economic organisation. For Gramsci, however, it was necessary to set up an organisation

which could perform specifically cultural tasks. Political and economic organisations were not equipped to address the philosophical, religious and moral problems 'which underlie political and economic action'; the *Club*, however, would provide 'an appropriate forum for discussing and clarifying these problems.' (1994b: 37) The role of the cultural association was that of 'creating convictions', envisaged as 'priming' the rank-and-file of the workers' movement intellectually and morally, and so to ensure a 'deep-rooted consensus which provides a solid foundation for action' (1994b: 37). The association would thus function to provide the cultural foundations in Italy for a new society and way of life, would provide 'new models of association' and solidarity (1994b: 51) as had been seen in Russia.

In considering the "mentality" of the Italian people, Gramsci emphasised the dimension of *national differentiation* in the development of class consciousness and collective will (for this, see Brennan, 1989: 10-11). (This national dimension was later articulated in Gramsci's ideas about the key differences between "core" and "peripheral" capitalist states, about which more below.) For Gramsci, Catholicism and Jesuitism had instilled a 'dogmatic and intolerant mentality' (1994b: 37) in the Italian people, and had consequently left the latter intellectually enfeebled and in a state of ethical-dispositional unpreparedness. It was the function of the *Club* to counteract this influence at the very base of cultural life. The socialist cultural organisation could lay dispositional foundations, could effect a new consensus and stimulate 'a new habit of mind' (1994b: 37-38) for socialist action.

It was also an important part of the cultural association's functioning that it would provide opportunities and specific tasks for intellectuals in the workers' movement. Up until that time, according to Gramsci, intellectuals had been 'a dead weight' (1994b: 37) within the movement; an organisation dedicated to cultural activity, however, would enable them to put their intellectual abilities to the test. With his belief in the importance of ideas and cultural activity to the process of making the revolution, Gramsci posited a place for the intellectuals in the revolutionary scheme of things. The complex dialectical relationship between intellectuals, culture and material reality outlined in "Socialism and Culture" had opened up a practical and a *theoretical* space for the intellectual in the revolutionary movement. The full exploitation of the theoretical opportunity was yet to come. For the meantime, Gramsci was not making the intellectual, or, the *making* of intellectuals, the centre around which his political theory and practice revolved. At this point, Gramsci appeared to regard the intellectuals as little more than a problem to be solved. He seemed concerned only to employ the consciousness of the intellectual as that which had developed *outside* of the revolutionary struggle, and which would work upon the proletariat from that location.

Councils, Party and State

With the rise of the Councils movement in Turin in 1919 there appeared a new institutional and actional focus for Gramsci and his fellow socialists gathered around the recently established journal *L'Ordine Nuovo*. The journal had been started in May of that year by Gramsci, Togliatti, Terracini and Tasca. Gramsci

took over editorial control from Tasca in June on the grounds that the latter was suspicious of the Councils and had abstracted culture from the concrete political and economic experience of the working -class. For Gramsci, *L'Ordine Nuovo* should become the 'gathering point between the working class and intellectuals.' (Adamson, 1980: 51) The importance of the Councils were precisely that they constituted a locus for bringing together economic, political and cultural activity, for uniting the concrete specific experience of the working-class and a universal revolutionary consciousness. In the Councils it would be possible to forge within the working-class a collective revolutionary will which would enable it to take power. The factories were the nurseries of the revolution; the revolutionary process occurred 'subterraneously' within them as an organic ferment of 'feelings, desires, habits, the stirring of initiative and a new way of life.' (1994b: 164) Industrialisation had 'produced a certain degree of intellectual autonomy in the masses, and a certain spirit of positive historical initiative.' (1994b: 172) Within the factories and the industrialised workplaces had appeared the 'emergent' culture of the working-class, in the sense of that term given to it by Raymond Williams (himself under the influence of Gramsci): the 'new meanings and values, new relationships and kinds of relationship' which stand in opposition to the forms and values of the dominant culture. (1977: 123) It was to this organic oppositional culture that the *Ordinovisti* wanted to relate.

However, during the Councils period Gramsci was forced to address the specific problems of political organisation and discipline concerning the relationship between the revolutionary party and the "organic" institutions and consciousness of the working-class, between revolutionary discipline and ideological unity, and intellectual and moral autonomy. These problems came to

the fore as a consequence of Gramsci's new emphasis upon the need for the proletariat to direct its activity towards the goal of the political conquest of the state.

The Conquest of the State

For Gramsci, the Enlightenment had been both the preparation for revolution (the dissemination of new values, new practices, new relationships) and the revolution itself. This was because it had been a revolution of the *spirit*. Thought had become a kind of action by a process of annexation - the rejection of practice not grounded in Reason. Napoleon's political modernisation of Europe, as Gramsci had argued, was prepared for by the triumph of Enlightenment universalism, and by the assault upon tradition, but at the same time it stood *against* the spirit of the Enlightenment (see Bauman, 1987: 104-105). It represented the re-assertion of practical contingency, particular interest, and customary ways of acting. The promise of the Enlightenment - the domination-free dominion of Reason - remained unfulfilled.

The Enlightenment constituted a "bourgeois international of the spirit"; it was a revolution in ideas and culture where these latter became (or, aspired to become) concrete forces in reality, but ultimately remained unrealised, finding no social agent sufficient to the tasks of universalisation. The proletarian revolution, on the other hand, was of a wholly different kind; it could only be a revolution if and when it was given political-institutional reality.

Thus, Gramsci argued for the need for new workers' institutions and an orientation upon the state. The universal, permanent revolution of the working-class, a revolution which eliminated all contradictions, which realised itself

completely, and which united theory and practice once and for all - demanded the conquest of the state. (1994b: 102-103, 108-114) The state existed only potentially in the social institutions and the crepuscular and life of the working-class. This justified the need for political intervention and organisation at the level of the state. Without it, the class struggle would remain at the level of revolt, as just so many 'passing episode[s]' in the collective life of the workers, impermanent and spasmodic in character. (1994b:102) As Gramsci declared, '[s]ociety can only exist in the form of a State, which is the source and the end of all rights and all duties, and the guarantor of the permanence and success of all social activity.' (1994b: 93) Like Benjamin, Gramsci sought to marry the energies of revolt, as manifested in cultural life, to those of revolution, which are necessarily political in character. However, unlike Benjamin, Gramsci's integrative activity was *practical*, as well as theoretical - that is, his journalistic and intellectual activity was directed towards the institutional and organisational elaboration of class struggle, in addition to being a reflection upon it.

In the essay "Workers' Democracy" (1919), written jointly with Palmiro Togliatti, which has been described as the 'theoretical foundation' of the Councils movement (Gluckstein, 1985: 183), Gramsci spelt out the importance of centralised co-ordination and organisation for the conquest of the state:

The socialist state already exists, potentially, in the social institutions characteristic of the exploited working class. These institutions must be linked together, co-ordinated and ranked in a hierarchy of competences and powers - highly centralized, but still respecting the autonomy and articulations of each individual institution. (1994b: 96-97)

It was the party (the PSI) which was to take on this leaderly, co-ordinating, disciplinary function:

The Party must continue in its role as the organ of communist education, the furnace of faith, the depository of doctrine, the supreme power harmonizing the organized and disciplined forces of the worker and peasant classes, and leading them towards their goal. (1994b: 97)

The most politically advanced elements of the working-class, organised within the party, were enjoined by Gramsci to work within workers' institutions in order 'to bring about a radical transformation in worker psychology' (1994b: 99) and prepare the latter for its assault upon state power. At the same time, the advanced activists of the party should respect the autonomy of the institutions of the class, for it was within these that the proletariat developed the qualities, of independence and initiative, and experience necessary for the revolutionary tasks ahead. However, the cultural and moral preparedness of the proletariat had become explicitly a problem of political organisation - that is, a matter of "Jacobin" intervention. Culture and *power politics* had become inseparable, cultural activism now being subsumed under the political.

For this reason, Gramsci has been seen as adopting an unequivocally vanguardist position. He is charged with advocating Lenin's doctrine of the need to import revolutionary consciousness into the working-class "from without", and Lenin's "Taylorist" conceptions of the need for workplace discipline and conformity.⁴ Such Leninism is regarded as exemplifying the universal

⁴ For a more positive account of Lenin's ideas about the relationship between centralised and spontaneous forms of consciousness, see Shandro, 1995.

consciousness of Foucault's Enlightenment "universal intellectual": the vanguardist revolutionary is removed from, or, blind to, the particular contingencies of specific situations and experiences, taking upon him- or herself the "right" to represent a proletariat which is regarded as incapable of representing itself. Neil Harding, as indicated earlier, constructs just this sort of argument against Gramsci, viewing him as a "philosopher" who sought to impose his will upon the people, demanding the conformity of the masses to revolutionary discipline, and arrogating to himself "superior" (scientific) knowledge. (1997: 210ff) Even Adamson, who is more generally sympathetic to Gramsci, writes of him as having 'instincts [which] were always more puritanical than culturally liberating in an expansive and nonrepressive way.' (1980: 54) By these accounts, Gramsci appears as an unreserved Bordigean revolutionary intransigent, an austere unrelenting figure who positioned himself at the head of the vanguard and waited for the benighted masses to catch up with him.

However, in his study of the *Western Soviets* (1985), Donny Gluckstein has a different perspective on Gramsci's vanguardism. He sees Gramsci as departing from a vanguardist position once the Councils came into being. For Gluckstein, Gramsci began to blur the distinction between the two forms of power, in the workshop and at the level of the state. (1985: 186) The Councils began to be seen as an *existing* rather than a potential socialist state. (1985: 186) Thus, according to Gramsci, it was in the Council that the class was unified 'into a coherent and homogeneous entity, precisely fitted for the industrial process and mastering it once and for all'; it was within the Council 'the dictatorship of the proletariat [could] be realized.' (1994b: 120) Initially, Gluckstein writes, the Councils had been regarded 'as a terrain for party propaganda, the PSI retaining a decisive

role'; within three months, however, Gramsci's 'stress on the party's central importance had disappeared, with the factory council assigned the role of mass democracy *and* vanguard leadership.' (1985: 187) So, by this account, Gramsci was too ready to give up the leadership of the revolutionary movement to ordinary workers who were unable to develop a truly revolutionary consciousness because they were bound by the horizons of the workplace. He was fixed too narrowly upon the *present* manifestations of liberation.

Such apparent ambiguity in Gramsci's position with regard to the question of political leadership is understandable in the light of his avowed *integrative* orientation. Predisposed in a post-Risorgimento, Crocean fashion to an emphasis upon the establishment of an ethico-political unity, Gramsci sought the integration of all forms of activity, political, economic and cultural, and, as part of this, the synthesis of experiential and revolutionary forms of consciousness. As Carl Boggs writes, 'Gramsci's Marxism can be understood as an implicit effort to transcend the extreme polarities of Luxemburgian spontaneism and Leninist Jacobinism.' (1984: 218) The attempt to do so left him open to charges from both sides, with the accusations of voluntarism and an adherence to idealism becoming particularly familiar to all of those associated with *L'Ordine Nuovo* (see Togliatti, 1979: 21-27).

Gluckstein's analysis overlooks the fact that the *L'Ordine Nuovo* activists sought to take up all of the tasks outlined in the "Workers' Democracy" article, that is, the co-ordination of the characteristic institutions and activity of the working-class, but also the preservation of the autonomy of these. From Gramsci's point-of-view, the PSI had shown itself to be little more than a 'spectator' to events in Turin (1994b: 157) and was incapable of reacting

constructively to them. The most important thing, as far as he was concerned, was the integration of thought and action, and the creation of an *organic* relationship between workers and revolutionaries. The Councils, in conjunction with *L'Ordine Nuovo*, were where the promise of the Enlightenment and the *Risorgimento* might be fulfilled, where the ideal could be made real and consciousness embodied in an institutional-organisational form.

According to Gramsci, *L'Ordine Nuovo* was valued by the Turin working-class because its articles sprang from that class's 'actual feelings, desires and passions', and because they 'were almost like a "recording" of real events, seen as moments in a process on inner liberation and self-expression on the part of the working class.' (1994b: 181) It was not that the Councils had usurped the role of the vanguard, but that an active unity of consciousness and experience had been achieved. This unity was not a matter purely of the spirit but practical, not a corporate phenomenon, indicating the domination of the many by the view, but universal, involving the participation of all, not the abstraction of culture (as philosophy, as ideology) but its integration into the quotidian life and outlook, the structures of thought and feeling, of the proletariat.

The "bourgeois international of the spirit" constituted a "revolution" without the conquest of power, an "obscure" revolution which instituted the dominion of critical reason, but which was not subject to rational, organisational control itself. That is to say, as a revolution the Enlightenment was spontaneous, "passionate", and without duration in concrete institutional-organisational terms. With the onset of the Councils, on the other hand, according to Gramsci, there began 'a new era in the history of the human race. For now the revolutionary process has burst

forth into the light of day and entered into the phase where it can be documented and controlled.' (1994b: 165)

Integration and Centralisation

The unity of consciousness and experience represented by the nexus forged between the workers and the *Ordinovisti* was broken with the defeat of the Councils movement in 1920. Ultimately, Gramsci and his fellow activists found themselves isolated in Turin, and were incapable of leading the proletarian masses to revolution. Consequently, Gramsci focused upon elaborating a theory of the party which envisaged it as the locus of the integration of revolutionary and organic forms of consciousness, an 'integrated theory of political organisation', in Adamson's words, which expressed the 'dialectical relation between the formation of critical consciousness in the councils and the symbolic and military guidance entrusted to the party.' (1980: 58)

Hence, in a document that gained the approval of Lenin, Gramsci argued for the renewal of the PSI. The revamped party should become the 'guide and intellect' of the working-class; the party's task was 'to draw the attention of the masses to itself, to ensure that its directives become their directives and to win their permanent trust.' (1994b: 157) After his experience with the Councils, Gramsci now declared that the essential condition 'for attempting any experiment with Soviets is the existence of a cohesive and highly disciplined Communist Party that can co-ordinate and centralize the whole of the proletariat's revolutionary action in its central executive committee.' (1994b: 161) For Gramsci, the events of 1919 signified the indispensability of structures and mechanisms of political *authority* to the achievement of revolutionary ends. If the initial answer to the

"Workers' Democracy" article's call for the co-ordination and organisation of class forces had been the integrative activity of *L'Ordine Nuovo*, in the wake of the defeat of the Councils his emphasis shifted decidedly to the need for fully-fledged political *centralisation*, by the means of which society and state, individual and universal moments would be finally united.

However, this was not the end of the story, as far as the development of Gramsci's theory of political organisation and the relationship between practical and revolutionary consciousnesses was concerned. Critics who charge Gramsci with "totalitarian" tendencies largely do so on the basis of such facts as his support for Bordiga's purist opposition to the adoption of a united front position by the PCI (Gramsci, 1978: 123-125), and his endorsement of the Fifth World Congress's policy of "Bolshevisation" - that is, increased centralisation and the enforcement of strict ideological unity - of the International. But, one may point out that after the imprisonment of PCI leaders, including Bordiga, Gramsci changed his position with regard to the united front policy and refused to continue to support Bordiga in his opposition to the Comintern. (1978: 152-153; 173, 177) Moreover, one can say that during the time before his incarceration Gramsci ideas about and strategy for revolutionary consciousness and organisation sought to address and to incorporate the twin dimensions of discipline and participation. With the victory of Fascism, he argued for the need for a party which would be both tightly controlled and highly centralised *and* the truly 'mass organisation of workers and peasants required to confront and counter the fascist state' (Adamson, 1980: 84), which would be the object of the voluntary loyalty of the working-class. As Bellamy and Schecter write, 'Gramsci's Party was designed to

include all the populace, not just an elite section of it, and to ensure the responsiveness of the leadership to the led as well as vice versa.' (1993: 132)

Such a conception of the party can be seen as signifying the continuation of Gramsci's emphasis upon the ethico-political, seeking the unity of various levels of action and modes of consciousness, attempting to give ethical reality in the practical, contingent life of the masses to the direction of the party in such a way as that leadership becomes nothing less than the centralised organisation of the will of the working-class itself. It was, indeed, just such a *hegemony* over all areas of the life of the masses - intellectual, ethical - that Fascism, in the establishment of an "ethical state", and with its "spiritualised conception" of politics, had apparently achieved. This it had been able to do, Gramsci came to believe, by mobilising the resources of bourgeois society in its defence, and thus, it was to these latter that the embattled revolutionary party would have to turn in order to build a *counter-hegemony* based upon the broadest possible participation.

Hegemony and Bourgeois Society

In the earlier years of his revolutionary activity, Gramsci had foreseen revolution as a continuous and continuously accelerating series of moments leading to the quick seizure of power. By 1924, with the advent of Fascism, he regarded the bourgeois state as more stubbornly entrenched within society (religious, educational and media institutions) than previously had been realised. The state had demonstrated 'far greater adaptive capacities' (Adamson, 1980: 86) than expected. Thus, in February of that year, Gramsci wrote to Togliatti expressing his belief that a new strategy was required for changed circumstances

in which the domination of the bourgeoisie took a more diverse and mediated form than it had in Russia. (1978: 199-200) The search for such a strategy became the centrepiece of Gramsci's work thereon.

This argument, revolving around the need for differentiation and the conception of a "Western Front" of the revolutionary struggle, was put forward in the midst of the criticism made by Gramsci of the PCI's organisational ossification. The Party, he maintained, had

accorded priority in an abstract fashion to the problem of party organisation, which in practice has simply meant creating an apparatus of functionaries...It was believed, it is still believed that the revolution depends only on the existence of such an apparatus; and it is sometimes even believed that its existence can bring about the revolution. (1978: 198)

The Party saw itself as 'suspended in the air', and the Party centre deigned to 'stoop[] to the level of the masses' only when the situation suited it. (1978: 198) In short, Gramsci accused the PCI of having no connection with activity on the ground, and consequently, as insensible of practical factors and contingencies peculiar to the specific circumstances and conditions of the class struggle in the West.

The argument put to Togliatti constituted the beginnings of Gramsci's theory of hegemony. This latter centred on three related points: i) the importance of relatively autonomous elements in the cultural and ideological "superstructure", ii) the distinction between the "war of position" and the "war of manoeuvre" as strategies in the class struggle, the former being concerned with the civil-social 'trench-systems' which engird the modern state (Gramsci, 1971: 235), the latter

being a strategy of frontal assault upon the state, and iii) the need to distinguish between East and West - and to make a corresponding distinction between 'core' and 'peripheral' states in the West (1978: 408-409) - in the conception and organisation of revolutionary strategy.

As to the first of these points, one may say that Gramsci had made the "superstructural" elements of the working-class's social and cultural life central to his political and cultural thought from the beginning. The characteristic forms of thought and of social existence of that class were not regarded as dead weight to be discounted, or even countered, but were seen by Gramsci as vital in the development of the revolutionary process. The proletariat had to be *convinced* of its historical role; though society could only exist in the form of a state, the state itself had to be brought to life in the ideas, the beliefs and the actions of the people.

However, after the triumph of Fascism in Italy, it was *bourgeois* society and culture which Gramsci brought into theoretical focus. As Bellamy and Schecter write:

The invaluable lesson of Fascism, in terms of Italian realities, meant fighting an ideological and cultural battle not only against capital and the State, but also against the Vatican, the school in its present form, and the other institutions of civil society promoting traditional modes of thinking that maintained the gulf between economic crisis and political revolution (1993: 80)

That "gulf" was maintained by the bourgeois state's utilisation of 'political and organizational reserves' (Gramsci, 1978: 408) which were not possessed by the

Russian state. These were reserves of ideas and values, resources of technical and procedural knowledge - of what might now be termed "cultural capital". In order to bridge the gap between crisis and revolution, it was necessary for the proletariat to mobilise its own social and cultural reserves to gain hegemony over bourgeois society. Through the hegemonic process, the values, the culture and the lived experience of the working-class would become *universal* moral-intellectual facts, its organic culture dominate that of the bourgeoisie to become that of society as a whole. Gramsci's concept of hegemony re-stated, in more fully elaborated class terms, his earlier, post-*Risorgimento* ethico-political position.

The formation of a 'fascist bourgeois/agrarian bloc' by securing the consent of the 'broad masses of the people' (1978: 403, 402) through the ideological and cultural activities of bourgeois parties and institutions for Gramsci demonstrated the importance of an intermediate stratum (for example, parliamentary deputies, clerical and educational personnel) to the hegemonic process. Such a stratum maintained the link between 'the leading group at the top' and the mass of the members of political and cultural institutions. (1978: 401) In the *Prison Notebooks* Gramsci went on to develop this insight in a revised theory of party organisation. There he wrote of the three elements that were needed to converge in order for a party to come into being:

1. A mass element, composed of ordinary average men, whose participation takes the form of discipline and loyalty, rather than any creative spirit or organisational ability...
2. The principal cohesive element, which centralises nationally and renders effective and powerful a complex of forces which left to themselves would count for little or

nothing...3. An intermediate element, which articulates the first element with the second and maintains contact between them, not only 2. physically but also morally and intellectually. (1971: 152-153)

Once all three of these elements are in place, 'a party cannot be destroyed by normal means.' (1971: 153)

This tripartite structure constituted Gramsci's most sophisticated theoretical formulation of the relationship between discipline and participation, experiential and revolutionary forms of consciousness, and between economic, political and cultural moments. In this formulation, moreover, is recognisable an adaptation of Croce's notion of a dialectical totality of moments of the spirit, in which each moment is posited as autonomous but linked within a "dialectic of distincts". (1971: 137) For Gramsci, however, such a dialectic 'will certainly not be between the moments of the absolute spirit, but between the levels of the superstructure.' (1971: 137) The fascist crisis, which demonstrated the intransigence of bourgeois social formations, led Gramsci to affirm the *relative autonomy* of elements of the superstructure, their relative independence ("distinctness") from one another and from the economic base.

The significance of this conception was that it was dependent upon the need for the conscious identification of superstructural elements with one another, and of the superstructure with the base. There was a need for an intermediate component which could articulate politics as "passion" in Croce's sense - as spasmodic, without duration (as manifested in energetic but unstable revolt) - and politics as 'permanent action', embodied in organisations, institutions and practices - that is, in a specific, *organic* political culture. (1971: 138-140) This

intermediate stratum would ensure the two-way articulation of the spontaneous consciousness of the masses and the revolutionary-theoretical consciousness of its leaders in the party. And in working to elaborate and establish an integrated and permanent organic class culture, such a stratum would enable the proletariat to secure its hegemony over bourgeois society.

Organic Intellectuals as the New *Philosophes*

It was the "organic intellectuals" which Gramsci saw as acting as this intermediate, articulating stratum for the working-class. The elaboration of such a stratum was central to that class's achievement of hegemony. For the process of the production of organic intellectuals was dialectically related to the cultural development of the proletarian masses:

The intellectual stratum develops both quantitatively and qualitatively, but every leap forward towards a new breadth and complexity of the intellectual stratum is tied to an analogous movement on the part of the mass of the "simple", who raise themselves to higher levels of culture and at the same time extend their circle of influence towards the stratum of specialised intellectuals, producing outstanding individuals and groups of greater or less importance. (1971: 334-335)

The need for creating conviction, for creating within the mass of the "simple" an active belief in its own historical role and forms of social life, was now conceived by Gramsci as a process of producing specialised intellectuals on the

contemporary politico-cultural terrain. Analysis of the specific nature of Western society and of conditions prevailing within the post-fascist "peripheral" Italian state had revealed the function of the "traditional intellectuals" associated with the dominant bourgeoisie, intellectuals who bound the peasant to the landowner, and performed technical-administrative functions for the bourgeois state. Such intellectuals legitimised the domination of the ruling class, although they thought of themselves as independent and 'endowed with a character of their own.' (1971: 8) They had themselves been the organic intellectuals of the rising bourgeoisie (constituting, as seen above, the 'bourgeois international of the spirit') at that point when the expanding spirit of intellectual inquiry (the moment of spirit) had coincided with the expanding, modernising dynamic of capitalism (the practical, material moment). But, with the divorce of these two moments, the traditional intellectuals became merely the signs of the continuation of that division - simultaneously fatally attached to that (bourgeois culture) which its universalistic spirit condemned it to seek to transcend.⁵

The process whereby specialised intellectuals are created, according to Gramsci, was not marginal to the proletariat's achievement of domination over all other classes but constituted the very movement of that hegemonic process itself. Insofar as the working-class "distinguishes" itself (1971: 334) by producing its own intellectuals, so far does it raise the general level of its culture, and is thereby enabled to create larger numbers of, and better, more accomplished, organic intellectuals, who are thus better equipped to challenge the "traditional intellectuals" across the whole terrain of bourgeois society and culture. Thus, this

⁵ See Sartre in chapter five below for a recapitulation of this idea in the context of his depiction of an existential intellectual practice.

is a process in which the masses participate and, at the same time, disciplines and organises itself as a class. The organic intellectuals would represent the concurrent politicisation of culture and the elaboration of politics *as* culture. They would constitute the *embodiment* of revolutionary political theory in cultural form.

For Gramsci, the organic intellectuals effected the re-unification of thought and action, where, as with the Enlightenment *philosophes*, thought becomes a kind of action. However, for these the new *philosophes* the force of ideas would not lie in their universalist, abstract dissolution of a practical, contingent reality; rather, for them, the power and effectivity of thought lay precisely in its recognition of its own necessarily organic and practical character, and in the understanding that all thought has its foundations in contingent, interested conceptions of the world, that all ideas are rooted in beliefs and convictions. This recognition was also the basis of Mannheim's sociology of knowledge. But, whereas in Mannheim it led to an intellectual practice which sought synthesis and the reconciliation of social contradictions in science, for Gramsci it offered the possibility of the organic intellectual, whose function it was, by becoming a "permanent persuader" (1971: 10), and thereby securing the loyalty of the masses to revolutionary ideology, to transform belief - partial, interested belief - into practical, political reality. But, by the time of Gramsci's death, with the ascendancy of the Stalinist bureaucracy over international Communism, the organic intellectual remained only a diminishingly distant possibility - though one which, as we shall see, remained an active and relevant model for oppositional intellectual practice.

Chapter Four

'A School of Awkwardness': The Uses of Experience in E.P. Thompson and C.Wright Mills

'A Communist Society – indeed, any authoritarian régime – forces indifference upon the mass of the population as an act of policy. Indifference is almost a social virtue... But we have not had indifference thrust upon us: we have acquired it, and we have accepted it because it makes less trouble, not for our bosses, but for ourselves. Its classic symptom is the question: Why bother?' (Mackenzie, 1958: 16)

Introduction

The account given of the intellectual thus far has concentrated upon European developments of that concept in the period of massive political upheaval between, roughly, 1910-1940 – a period encompassing pan-European revolution and counter-revolution and global economic, political and cultural crises. For the theorists of the intellectual examined so far, this was a period which both presented opportunities for intellectual action and in which the very basis of the intellectual as a rational social agent was threatened.

So, for Mannheim, the salient fact of modern social life was that it made possible a synthesis of competing collective *Weltanschauungen*, or ideologies. However, this synthesis was also made necessary because, according to Mannheim, the public life of society was now permeated by irrationalist tendencies and ideas which previously had been confined to the private sphere. Collectivist political ideologies had penetrated all the way down into the roots of the individual's experience and vision of the world, thereby making that experience and vision, which sought its exclusive generalisation, something that had to be compensated for theoretically by intellectuals in order to maintain the possibility of social action based upon rational reflection.

Similarly, the Critical Theorists of the Institute for Social Research, established in the wake of the defeat of the German Revolution, came to view all social and

political practice, whether that of the state or of the opposition, as bearing the imprint of domination and authority. The consciousness and the experience of the working-class, as well as the theory and the organisations of its representatives, was that from which the critical intellectual should distance him- or herself; intellectuals had too readily given themselves over to the revolutionary cause and thereby had lost their negative agency.

For his part, Gramsci maintained, by means of the dialectic expressed in the formulation "pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will", a commitment to the cause of revolution. But this did not stop him seeing that changing conditions in the West necessitated theoretical innovation with regard to the questions of party organisation and the socio-political function of the intellectual. Along with Mannheim, he recognised that critical conditions (specifically, the retrenchment of the bourgeois state under Fascism) required the intellectual to pay heed to the everyday, experiential dimension of politics. But, for Gramsci, popular culture, understood as the specific traditions and "commonsense philosophy" of the working-class, was not simply to be corrected or dismissed but was the basis upon which the hegemony of that class could be built. Organic intellectuals would emerge out of the collective experience and traditions of "the simple" and would thereby serve both to signify its level of organisation and to extend and to deepen that organisation. These intellectuals would be integrated under the direction of the Party, which, as history's representative, acted as the arbiter over politics and culture. Thus, the revolution cause and the mundane experience of the class would not be opposed but mutually fulfilling.

In this chapter I bring the narrative of the intellectual forward in to the post-war period, specifically, the 1950s. In addition, I move from a predominantly

Continental European context to one specifically Anglo-American in orientation. This latter shift in focus is significant with regard to the discussion of the Left intellectual in two respects; firstly, there are important differences historically between Anglo-American and European Left political and intellectual cultures – namely, the relative weakness of the Communist Party as an organising force in the former context. (However, common cultural points of reference aside, there have been, and continue to be, as I argue below, differences between British and American political cultures.) Secondly, and consequent upon the previous point, in the circumstances of the Cold War and the moral and intellectual bankruptcy of the Stalinist Communist Party the intellectuals discussed in this chapter sought to propagate a *new internationalism* based upon vibrant *national* cultural and intellectual traditions. In each case, over against the sterility of bipolar Cold War politics was counterposed the possibility of creating educated, democratic publics.

“The Shouting under the Window”

But for many intellectuals in the 1950s, the obstacle which barred the way to the achievement of such a goal was no longer – or, no longer only – the ruling class, but was the *indifference* of the exploited class to its historical fate. “Apathy” was a term that buzzed around intellectual circles. If the 1930s were marked by an apparent surfeit of causes – or, a surplus of reasons for subscribing to the cause – the 1950s were, supposedly, without causes altogether to which the intellectual could subscribe. The task of the intellectual, according to those who contributed to such volumes as *Conviction* (1958) and *Out of Apathy* (1960), had become one of breaking the hold of Cold War thinking which asserted that things could not be other than as they were. In the words of the title of Norman

Mackenzie's introduction to *Conviction*, this involved envisioning the possibility of life (a truly *public* life) "after the stalemate state."

Within the context of the Cold War and the possibility mutual annihilation of the superpowers, traditional politics, that is, politics as articulated in ideological or scientific systems, politics as occurring only at state-level, the prerogative of parties, bureaucracies and representative bodies, was thrown into question, if not discredited altogether. In order to break 'the crust of apathy' (Mackenzie, 1958: 12) and the false belief in one's indifference to matters political, it was necessary to reinvigorate politics by connecting it again with the everyday lives and ethical experience of individuals and groups. In this, of course, one can see the Gramscian imperative to unite the ethical and the political, to root political thought in the quotidian commonsense of "the simple" at work. I will return below to Gramsci, in a comparison his conception of intellectual practice and that of E.P. Thompson. But, for the moment, one can say that the emphasis upon the ethical dimensions of politics in the 1950s was in general intended as making possible the development of a non-aligned political culture which was not, first and foremost, *organisational* – that is, serving to extend the influence and power of one organisation or party. Rather, over against the *Realpolitik* of the Cold War state, intellectuals asserted the possibility of a humanist, democratic world order in which political relations were set on a firm ethical basis, and as such, could not be reduced to membership of, or allegiance to, particular political organisations. The intellectual's activity was focused upon extending values and norms formerly regarded as proper to private subjects into the public-political sphere; it sought to make "the shouting under the window" audible within the public life of society.

Politics and Morality

C. Wright Mills and E.P. Thompson were central figures in the demand for a new humanist emphasis in the conduct and concerns of politics in the 1950s. Both men sought to make *moral values* and *human agency* central to the practice of politics, and saw the intellectual as making possible the creation of alternative kinds of political identity and solidarity to those sanctioned in and by the bipolar global order. The intellectual should try to articulate politics and morality, to connect the politics of élites with its practical outcomes in the consciousness and experience of living human beings. As such, the intellectual's concern was less with making a state than with *regenerating the public sphere* as a defence against the state, less with capturing power than with resisting its effects.

The public sphere would be strengthened through the free participation of individuals acting as conscious agents of reason and morality and as members of collectivities which were (self-)organised "from below" - that is, which had their foundations not at the level of the "universal" state but in specific communities and social groups. However, one should also acknowledge that Mills' and Thompson's moral-humanist criticisms arose within differing contexts and were directed at differing targets, issuing in differing specific conclusions and forms.

For his part, Mills' work arose within the context of the professionalism of academic social science in the United States. From the beginning of his career Mills had contributed to such radical journals as *Politics*, *Dissent* and *Partisan Review* (for Mills' involvement with this radical milieu, see Buhle, 1991: ch.6), and his best known works were journalistic and polemical in kind (*The Causes of World War III* (1958) and *Listen, Yankee* (1960)). However, he was preoccupied

with the "betrayal" of professional academics in aligning with military and industrial élites in the United States. Indeed, his repeated journalistic forays into the public sphere were themselves intended to show the way for "defaulting" intellectuals (Miller, 1988: 86). The abnegation of public responsibility of such intellectuals itself constituted the 'central unifying focus or problematic' which some have seen as missing in Mills (McQuarie, 1981: 93). If the "irresponsibility" of intellectuals was the problem, as far as Mills was concerned, the solution lay in *politicising* the academy, that is, in making intellectuals address public issues and problems in their work not just as 'objective' questions of policy science but as matters of moral choice and commitment.

At the same time, Mills' sustained critique of academic professionalism was in fact the consequence of a lasting belief, expressed most cogently and evocatively in *The Sociological Imagination* (1959), in the privileged character of social science as holding the 'promise' of enabling the rational clarification and resolution of the 'crisis of individuality and the crisis of history-making.' (1959b: 173) If for Mills the exercise of the 'free intellect' was an essential component in the practice of a 'radical human[ism]' (1963: 220), it would be true also to say that that intellect was identified with the "imaginative" social-science intellectual. That is to say that Mills, like Mannheim, looked to a specific community of professionals to act as agents for rational social regeneration, but, unlike the latter, this was to be achieved not by the transcendent synthesis (or neutralisation) of personal-experiential elements but by making all choices and decisions *personal*.

Unlike Mills, who never belonged to a political party (he was 'a determined non-joiner', according to Miliband (cited in McQuarie, 1981: 84)), E.P. Thompson's humanism developed within the context of the organised workers' movement - as a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain and as a tutor within workers' and adult education. Thompson's orientation was primarily upon the structure, practice and ideology of bureaucratic political organisation. The crushing of the Hungarian Revolt in 1956 was for Thompson a consequence of the Communist Party's politico-ideological failure to connect the revolutionary struggle with the established collective traditions and values of the working class. But, though the Party may have failed, Thompson believed that socialism itself could be revitalised. This revitalisation was dependent upon counterposing 'a warm, personal and humane socialist morality' to the dogmatism and impersonal abstractions of the Stalinist orthodoxy, upon tapping into the 'moral attitudes always present in the rank and file of the communist movement' and ranging those against the distortions of 'Stalinist ideology, institutions, and bureaucratic practices.' (Thompson, 1957a: 116)

Like Mills, for Thompson humanist practice was centred upon the activity of the independent and critical intellect. However, he saw that activity not as that which is performed by a specific group within society but as the *collective* exercise of 'conscious human agency' (1957a: 115) by "the people". The Communist Party had severed the dialectical connection between social consciousness and social being, and thus had also broken the connection between the educator and the world of concrete social and moral experience in and by which he or she too is educated. It was this relationship, originally articulated by Marx (see Thompson, 1957a: 113), that Thompson was set upon restoring. The

socialist-humanist intellectual had to enter into a fundamentally dialectical relationship with the traditions and collective experiences and values of the people in order to enable the latter to combat the denigrative effects of a "vulgar" Marxist-Stalinist bureaucratic practice which had reduced, as Thompson saw it, the supple, creative and humane dynamic of Marx to the outworn inflexible determinist materialism of the contemporary Communist Party.

Thompson's humanist revolt against élitism and bureaucratism may be seen as having ostensibly much in common with the politico-philosophical criticism of a reductive Marxism that saw consciousness and affectivity as the reflexes of material economic conditions which took place during and after the First World War, and which, as we have seen, made "intellectual action" central to socialist practice. Particularly, of course, one can compare Thompson's conception of a humanist intellectual practice with Gramsci's notions of hegemonic activity and the organic intellectual. For Gramsci, hegemony was conceived as achieved by building upon a base of existing popular traditions, experiential forms and conceptions, which process being articulated through the creation of intellectuals rooted in the working class. However, though for Gramsci society should be seen as a 'school' (1971: 350) in which the lessons of the revolution could be learned by such intellectuals, that "school" was ultimately presided over by the revolutionary party which sought to exercise centralised control. For Thompson, on the other hand, the intellectual had to put him- or herself into a 'school of awkwardness', presided over by no institutional body, a school established within the individual's own moral and cultural experience which provided the 'unassimilated socialist' with the requisite lessons that enabled him or her to resist institutionalisation and the impress of power. (1978: 183)

Thus far I have sketched only the contours of Mills' and Thompson's respective conceptions of the significance and characteristic effectivity of the dissenting intellectual within the intellectually and politically straitened circumstances of Cold War bipolarisation. We need now to return to the principal themes identified above at greater length in order to demonstrate more clearly the development within the cultural politics of the intellectual of which Mills and Thompson were representative.

E.P. Thompson: Education and Experience

Though Thompson's humanist critique was directed at the abstract determinist theory and the elitist and bureaucratic political practice and organisation of the Communist Party, it is possible to say that that revolt itself was a direct consequence of Thompson's activities within the Party. For in the immediate post-war period, the Communist Party in Britain sought 'to conduct a "battle of ideas" in the intensifying cold war struggle against capitalism and bourgeois culture.' (Fieldhouse, 1985: 12) The field of education became a key site of this struggle. Certainly the Party organised its own initiatives in this area, but it also saw the existing adult and extramural education sector as a potentially fruitful area for exercising ideological influence.

It was within this context that Thompson joined the Department of Extramural Studies at Leeds University as an adult education tutor in 1948, declaring as he did so that it was 'his aim in adult education "to create revolutionaries".' (Searsby, et al 1993: 3) Equipped with such an unequivocal aim, Thompson then

went on to engage in a dispute with, amongst others, the director of the department, Sydney Raybould, about objectivity and "university standards" in adult education. According to Thompson, the advocacy of such a conception of objectivity was not simply a matter of doing justice to "facts" but also presumed an attitude towards the student whereby his or her social and political experience was denied validity and in its stead the tutor sought to 'prescribe an attitude (usually of "tolerance" or some associated response) to situations which might well demand an attitude of militancy or indignation' (cited in Fieldhouse, 1985: 17). Over against this class-based "objectivity", Thompson asserted the value of "education for social purpose" such as had been enshrined in the original aims (1903) of the Workers' Education Association. In this, Thompson stood up for the pursuit of knowledge in the cause of social emancipation, and for healing the breach between 'institutions of higher education and the centres of social experience - between "workers by hand and brain" - existing in our society' (cited in Searsby et al, 1993: 5).

The polemic against "objectivity" may be seen as indicative of a commitment to the politicisation of adult education at work in Thompson and his fellow Communist activists in that sector.¹ However, in placing himself within the tradition of workers' education, Thompson also committed himself to ideals of working-class participation and independence deeply rooted in British radical education. Moreover, Thompson and the majority of Communist tutors were themselves relatively autonomous in relation to the Party. (According to

¹ Of course, other, non-Communist tutors also worked towards political ends in their work in adult education, perhaps most significantly Raymond Williams. Williams, in adult education from 1946 until 1961, was in contact with Communist tutors, but distanced himself from them politically. (McIlroy, 1993: 12) However, like Thompson, he looked to adult education as an

Hobsbawm, the historians group within the Communist Party, of which Thompson was a member, was generally tolerated by the Party hierarchy at least partly because there was less of a fixed line on questions of British history, and because that independence enabled it to maintain intellectual credibility in its debates and contacts with liberal historians. (1978: 31-34)) They saw the adherence to intellectual integrity and to independent thought as the key element in their political involvement and effectivity (Fieldhouse, 1985: 14).

The synchronisation of these commitments - of Party loyalty and loyalty to the possibility of independent thought "from below" - was possible for as long as individuals could be allowed to remain only fairly loosely disciplined by the Party. However, with the suppression of the Hungarian Revolt in 1956 and the concomitant suppression of the journal *The Reasoner*, set up by Thompson and John Saville whilst still members of the Party, Thompson demonstrated which of the two loyalties had a prior claim upon him by leaving the Party. Moreover, in so doing Thompson, in his declaration in favour of "socialist humanism", displaced the "battle of ideas" between capitalism and communism by emphasising a prior struggle, 'the human quarrel between the actual and the potential, between the boundless aspirations of life and the necessary limitations of the particular, the concrete, the personal.' (1957a: 129)

This re-foundation of struggle upon the existential terrain of "life" and "experience" involved, as Harvey Kaye points out, the enlargement of 'the scope of what is to be understood as "struggle"' (1990: 254), as well as the transformation of its character. For Thompson, this meant that 'the great battle'

important element in the creation of a common culture. (McIlroy, 1993: 16-17; Williams, 1993: 89-102)

of the day was *not* the struggle for dominance between the two great ideologies but was 'for the mind of the working people', which battle could not be divorced from the struggle 'between competing moralities within the working class' - that is, from the struggle for the people's "heart" (1959: 55,52). Thompson's 'persistent stress on the *historical* in historical materialism' (Kaye, 1990: 256), his continued relation to and use of popular experience in his tutorial practice in adult education (see Searsby et al, 1993: 9) led him to a position where the triumph of humanist values in the long battle between the opposed moments of individual acquisitiveness and communality, narrow prejudice and tolerance in the historical culture of the people offered the best defence against the 'corruption of society.' (1957a: 118)

In a guest lecture read at Leeds University in 1967, given at a time when he had withdrawn from active politics, Thompson made a categorical statement in favour of the dialectical relationship between education and experience at work in 'liberal adult education.' (1968: 1) According to Thompson, it is in adult education that the necessary *mutuality* of the educational relationship is most clearly visible, for there the experience of the student may not be easily ignored. 'In the good adult class', he writes, 'the criticism of life is brought to bear upon the work or subject under study' (1968: 21), which work would otherwise be a labour of applying abstract rules or quasi-mathematical formulae to the material being studied. The adult student's experience becomes thereby not simply a passive, abstracted "resource" which may be made use of in analysis but a *critical agent* which *actively* and continually 'modifies...the entire educational process.' (1968: 1)

Such an emphasis upon "life" was, of course, a continuation of the Leavisite *Scrutiny* tradition (itself drawing upon the vitalism of D.H. Lawrence), which was, as Eagleton puts it, 'the focus of a moral and cultural crusade.' (1983: 33) In this tradition, Literature was regarded as serving the moral and social function – the two from its perspective being inseparable – of providing the foundation for a native organic community. Exposure to Literature constituted in fact exposure to life – a vital, affirmative experience which equipped the reader not only with the technical capacity for discrimination but also fortified him or her morally. As McIlroy points out, Leavis and Denys Thompson identified adult education as a key site in the crusade for national cultural/moral regeneration (1993: 7); moreover, in the 1930s attempts had been made explicitly to politicise the *Scrutiny* project, to link critical literary studies with Marxism. These efforts were continued in the 1950s by Williams and Richard Hoggart, and it was to this tradition Thompson himself related – and for which they were all criticised by Perry Anderson as exhibiting a provincialism typical of the native British intelligentsia. (1969, Chun, 1993: 28)

It was precisely the "criticism of life" that Thompson had called to be brought to bear upon the dogmatic abstractions of the Communist Party in 1956 (1957a: 116). This continuity across the two contexts is unsurprising, as it is proper to the continuity of "life" itself. Thus, one can see that Thompson was concerned with giving expression to conflicts which were more fundamental than those which had been the concern of institutional politics at the level of the state: life versus abstraction, intellectual integrity versus dogmatism, and the establishment of a 'common egalitarian culture' (1968: 22) versus the preservation of an elitist exclusive culture. The break with the Communist Party over the events of 1956

had been the specific politico-institutional context in which Thompson had developed his humanist critique, but that critique, founded upon enduring moral certainties, ultimately was concerned with utilising popular experience to enable the people to resist *all* politico-institutional constraints upon their potential for history-making.

Thus, the function of the intellectual, as “educator for social purposes”, within the dialectic of education and experience, as Thompson wrote in a commentary upon Mills’ conception of the tasks of the intellectual, is not to act as a leader but ‘to precipitate a new consciousness and initiate much broader processes.’ (1960b: 29) The intellectual’s task is to enable the people to choose what is of the greatest (moral) value in its own culture and to *participate* in the socialist re-foundation of society. That participation, as participation in the creation of an *alternative public sphere* of a common culture - like Gramsci’s notion of the creation of an organic culture of the working-class - itself evidences the ‘maturity and activity of the people’ (1960a: 7), and in its turn makes the intellectual as a member of a corporate élite, as “external” organiser redundant.

Thompson as Organic Intellectual?

Thompson’s emphasis upon the mutuality of the educational relationship, with his corresponding conception of a type of critical consciousness and activity originating in popular experience and the forms and structures of a “counter-public sphere” (Eagleton, cited in Kaye, 1990: 263), has led a number of authors to view Thompson in Gramscian terms. Hence, Lin Chun writes of Thompson as an organic intellectual spawned within the tradition of radical political education

in Britain (1993: 28). Likewise, Harvey Kaye sees Thompson as an organic intellectual of a native radical democratic tradition, as one who 'sought to position himself *within* and to speak *from* English experience and traditions and, from that site, to articulate an interpretation of English history which both the Left *and* "the people" might recognize' (1990: 266)

Such assessments perhaps too readily equate Thompson's aspiration for the abolition of the elitism and corporatism of the intellectual with the accomplishment of that abolition in reality. However, that being said, there are valid grounds for a comparison between Gramsci's and Thompson's conceptions of the relation between the intellectual and the "masses", and between intellectual practice and popular forms of conscious agency. In each case, as we have seen, there is an emphasis upon grounding socialist consciousness and forms of political organisation in the collective experience and traditions and "commonsense philosophy" of the mass of the people. Thus, Thompson writes in his essay "Revolution", '[t]he *form* of a revolution may depend upon forms of power; but, in the last analysis, its *content* depends upon the consciousness and will of the people' (1960a: 8). If the revolution became distanced from people's everyday lives, experiences, and aspirations (which it had done, according to Thompson) then it became nothing more than the imposition of "forms of power" devoid of human "content" upon the people, and would, therefore, never achieve its end of the complete moral transformation of society.

Therefore, for Thompson, like Gramsci, the chief task of the intellectual lay in the "intellectual and moral reform" of the people, that is, in the *hegemonic* activity of the 'making of socialists' (1960a: 8) amongst the people, who then would be able to make the revolution themselves (though, as will become clear below,

Thompson's conception of "revolution" differed radically from that of Gramsci). The conscious will of the people, expressed in customary practices and in modes and structures of self- organisation, as the active agent in the historical process of social transformation, was the key factor in ensuring the depth and permanence of any such transformation. It was the people that ensured that the transformation was carried beyond the realm of the limits of politics down into the relational and experiential fabric of society itself.

Central to Gramsci's mature conception of hegemony was the idea of the need to wage a "war of position" against the bourgeois state, such a war concentrating upon the capture of the civil social "outworks", the institutions of the media, of the law and especially, for Gramsci, of education, which serve to legitimate that state. With the advent of Fascism in Italy, the intensification of repression had made direct confrontation with the state extremely difficult and hazardous, thus necessitating a strategy which sought to undermine it ideologically and to create a broad alternative "national-popular" ethico-political consensus against Fascism. In order to counter a monolithic, totalising state, a "bloc" rooted in *society as a whole* had to be formed. The political strategy of the united front for which Gramsci argued during the period immediately prior to his incarceration represented an attempt to achieve just such a bloc

Thompson's emphasis upon the extension of oppositional political struggle onto the whole broad terrain of "life" itself, encompassing areas and issues hitherto neglected by socialists such as the peace and nuclear disarmament movements, arose, as did Gramsci's hegemonic emphasis, in the context of a perceived political monolithicism and *imminent monopolisation of public-political space* by the Cold War state. The Communist monolith on the one side

was faced by the "whale" of "Natopolis" on the other. In the latter case - which, as a citizen of Natopolis, had to be Thompson's primary concern - the whale sought not only to swallow all oppositional Jonahs but also the very notion of opposition, that is the very possibility of an alternative way of doing things, itself. Thus, in the essay "Outside the Whale" (1960), Thompson wrote that for 'the "Natopolitan" intellectual of the fifties' '[t]here are no good causes left, not because of any lack of causes, but because with Natopolitan culture the very notion of a good cause is a source of embarrassment' (1978: 9, 13). According to many commentators looking back from the 1950s at the heyday of intellectual commitment, the 1930s, that commitment had amounted to no more than political romanticism, a flash of colouring diffused over the works of Auden, Spender, and the like, which 'did not go at all deep' (Amis, 1957: 4), an expression of particular psychic needs amongst intellectuals at that time.

Such sentiments found more methodical and coherent expression in the "End of Ideology" thesis propounded by Edward Shils, Daniel Bell, and the luminaries of the Congress for Cultural Freedom (for this latter, see Lasch, 1970: ch.3). This latter had had the effect, according to Thompson, resorting to Millsian terminology, of bringing about a 'cultural default' (1978: 4) among Western intellectuals, and had thereby extended the reach of the whale's jaws into the sphere of oppositional ideology and culture. The "End of Ideology", as Mills pointed out (1963: 249), signified the end of *Left-oppositional* ideology specifically - and seemingly, ineluctably - because opposition became no more than the sign of being wedded to outdated and now inapplicable norms, it placed the former Left intellectual firmly inside the "belly" of Nato.

However, if Thompson and Gramsci may be seen as having articulated apparently similar cultural-political strategies in the face of a totalising, all-powerful state which threatened to extend that power into every corner of cultural and social activity, it is also the case that there were vital differences between them with regard to the ends to which those strategies were directed. Gramsci's hegemonic activity had been oriented ultimately upon the creation of a state, upon laying the parallel foundations upon which the "dictatorship of the proletariat" would be built. His strategy was yet centred upon a *revolutionary* seizure of power, and, as described in the previous chapter, Gramsci's "democratic" emphasis upon the creation of organic intellectuals was matched by an organisational imperative upon centralisation and authority necessary for confrontation with organised state power.

For Thompson, on the other hand, for all of the fact of his continued employment of the discourse of revolution after the break with the Communist Party, the seizure of state power was not the principal aim. Thus, in "Outside the Whale" he wrote that '[t]he aim is not to create a socialist State, towering above man and upon which his socialist nature depends, but to create an "*human* society or socialised humanity" where (to adapt the words of More) man, and not money, beareth all the stroke' (1978: 29). For Gramsci, "intellectual and moral reform" ultimately had to take place within the context of a specified and concrete political struggle against the state - that is, the struggle of the revolutionary party. The achievement of hegemony within the cultural and moral spheres was first and foremost the achievement of *dominance* by one class over all others. The concept of hegemony thus served to denote the current relative balance of *relations of power* between classes.

In contrast, Thompson, in his call for socialist humanism and with his reconceptualisation of the relationship between the socialist intellectual and the culture and experience of the people, established the grounds for an opposition between morality *per se* and the expedient, compromised, unprincipled practice of politics both East and West. The "reality" of contemporary Cold War politics required not an organisational capacity from the intellectual (1957b: 22) but rather a 'capacity for utopian vision.' (1978: 32) The intellectual now should seek to *inspire* rather than agitate, to bring 'hope' to the people, 'a sense of their own strength and potential life.' (1959: 55) According to Thompson, the intellectual should act to draw together a truly popular community, which would be made up of autonomous individuals constitutionally resistant to monolithic, impersonal political structures and their domineering political strategies.

Gramsci's organic intellectual was an intellectual of a *class* (the proletariat) whose activity towards the victory of that class over the bourgeoisie constituted the totality of his or her identity as an intellectual. That activity was wholly directed at the elaboration of concrete class (socio-economic) interests in the "spiritual" spheres of culture, morality, and intellectual thought. The socialist-utopian intellectual envisaged by Thompson, on the other hand, related to a 'moral community' (Keith McClelland, cited in Soper, 1990: 218), a community of experience, values, and traditions reminiscent of the organic community of Leavis and the *Scrutineers*, certainly, but also an embodiment of the creative, loving community of fully cultivated individuals found in William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890). Such a community could exist only insofar as it *felt* itself to exist - that is, only "subjectively" and not simply as rooted in an "objective" socio-economic "base"-, could exist only in practical "lived experience".

Therefore, the premises of the organic relation of Gramsci's intellectual, the class-political character of that relation, the elaboration of "basic" interests, do not apply in the case of the intellectual as imagined by Thompson. The "utopian vision" of that intellectual (re-)constructs the class as a community rooted in experiences and values; the value of just such a vision lies precisely in its offering the people an image of itself (through an act of imagination) as *more than* a collectivity founded upon an economic base. The intellectual provides the possibility of self-transcendence not through the denial of the particularity of "private" experience but by giving suitable *public* expression to that experience by means of establishing alternative, egalitarian social and cultural practices, manifested in social movements and in educational and media institutions, within the public sphere.

C.Wright Mills: 'The Solitary Horseman'

In his characteristic emphasis upon the elaboration of a "radical humanism" and upon the responsibility of the intellectual in the face of the appropriation of public politics by élites, C.Wright Mills provides a suitable complement to E.P. Thompson in a study of the cultural politics of the 1950s radical intellectual. The two men, indeed, were friends and intellectual colleagues. Mills was a figure who made the commitment to the foundation of an independent and democratic public sphere the central organising point of his work, and who looms large consequently in the history of intellectual radicalism in the United States, being often esteemed as a venerable precursor of the student New Left. In this latter regard, therefore, Mills could be said to occupy a similar position to that of

Thompson in relation to the New Left in Britain. As I have indicated, moreover, Mills, like Thompson, argued for the articulation of political and moral values, and of the private experiences and consciousnesses of individuals situated within specific social contexts and the public, impersonal practice of institutional politics. However, having said this, Mills departed from Thompson in the way in and the means by which that articulation was to be achieved. His specific practical involvements and intellectual affiliations led him to frame his analysis in such a way as, ultimately, to privilege certain "solutions" which were at variance with those propounded by Thompson. Furthermore, that analysis provoked a pessimism in Mills which would remain alien to Thompson.

In a review of *The Sociological Imagination* (1959) in *Encounter* Edward Shils drew an acid sketch of Mills that amounted to a personal attack. Shils caricatured Mills as 'this solitary horseman, who is in part a prophet, in part a scholar, and in part a rough-tongued brawler', as a 'learned cowpuncher' who had traversed the vast hinterlands of the United States astride his horse perusing 'some novels of Kafka, Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*, and some essays of Max Weber' along the way.' (1960: 77-78) Shils' personal attack upon Mills, as Horowitz points out, 'became something of a cause célèbre within American sociological circles' (1983: 102), representing as it did the explicit personalisation of an intellectual dispute.

Such a personal attack was, understandably, resented by Mills himself, who decided, however, not to respond, but to leave it to 'friends in England [to] write letters', and to his publisher to take out an advertisement to 'rebalance[] the picture' (Mills, cited in Horowitz, 1983: 103). However, even if his specific

judgement and sentiments might be challenged, Shils' critical mode was in some ways apt with regard to engaging with Mills. The "scholar/prophet/brawler" conjunction might well have been specifically intended as an unflattering criticism, but it also obliquely articulated Mills' central concern that scholars should make *more than scholarship* their business, should extend their intellectual reach into other, *public* areas of concern. Such an extension, rather than invalidating the scholarship, as implied by Shils, was, for Mills, central to that work.

It was this concern that provided the impetus for Mills' opening salvo against the "irresponsible" assimilated character of the American intellectual in an essay of 1944 (1963: 292-304). The penetration of culture and the realms of intellect and morality by the demands and interests of political-economy, carried into those spheres by its tribunes, the mass media, had resulted, according to Mills, in the 'death of genuinely lively things.' (1963: 299) Faced with the politicisation of all areas of lived experience, the contemporary intellectual had taken up either one of two options. In some cases he or she had retreated into "objectivity" or "scientism", what Mills was later to call 'the pose of the technician' (1963: 299, 1951: 160). Social scientists in particular had taken this route, allowing problems and questions to be set for them by external political and commercial interests, and busying themselves with providing those interests with the appropriate "objective" solutions and answers (see Vidich, 1993: 375). Alternatively, according to Mills, intellectuals had retreated into the 'personal excuse' of 'alienation' (1963: 301), allowing themselves to be overwhelmed by their sense of powerlessness when confronted by the magnitude of the political-economic power and influence ranged against them. In both cases, the annexation of life by politics

provoked only a withdrawal on the part of intellectuals, and in the process deprived them of their identity *as* intellectuals.

Unsurprisingly, Mills argued for his fellow social scientists and all others involved in the vocational elaboration of intellect to face up to the challenge of politicisation. This was necessarily a matter not simply of augmenting the store of knowledge, of seeking 'increased understanding' (1963: 300), but of questioning one's own 'internal condition.' (1963: 304) In order to do this, the intellectual had 'to unmask and to smash the stereotypes of vision and intellect with which modern communications swamp us' (1963: 299); that is, he or she was required to "unmask" him- or herself. Achieving an oppositional efficacy against the politicisation by undemocratic élites of all aspects of "personal life" (thought and action, morality and intellect) required both the employment of a disinterested and distanced "understanding" *and* the "subjective" elements of will, conviction, and personal integrity. Thus, according to Mills, '[w]e must constantly shuttle between the understanding which is made possible by detachment and the longing and working for a politics of truth in a society that is responsible' (1963: 301). The intellectual should uncover the truth of the political nature of the "personal", its position within the dominant structures and practices of the political-economy, and then through *principled activity* of communicating that truth to others (1963: 301) in the face of dominant conceptions of that activity, make a truthful, moral politics, a public discourse which encompasses private issues of value and interest. For Mills, this was what the public should be - that sphere in which the personal and the political would be brought together in a critical relationship.

However, in his 1944 essay Mills showed himself to be pessimistic about the prospects for the appearance of a responsible, public intellectual. The prevailing circumstances of war had led to a general acceptance of current realities, and even the discussions of the future were conducted within the parameters of post-war "planning" derived from the present (1963: 302). The intellectuals (or those who would be intellectuals) were becoming more and more assimilated, succumbing to the increasing power of the "cultural apparatus"; truly *public* communication was being overwhelmed by the privatising imperative of the élitist but *mass* institutions of state and commerce. But, in arriving at this conclusion, Mills was liable to be beset with the problem which he had himself identified (1963: 300) as the common cause of intellectual despair, that of facing a seemingly unbridgeable gap between thought and action, ideas and agency.

Hence, it was with the problem of agency in mind that Mills went on throughout the 1940s to identify "politically alert publics" in the United States, in order to assess the potential of each of them for practising the "politics of truth", that is, to weigh the potential of each public as a social actor in the service of a public rational politics. In an essay of 1943 Mills had written of the labour movement as having just such potential for bringing about 'genuine democracy' and breaking the hold of élites on power (1963: 75-76). Moreover, Alan Wald writes of Mills as under the influence of the Workers' Party during this period (1987: 275). However, in this same piece Mills also specified the importance of the part played by 'pro-labor' intellectuals in galvanising the dormant political opposition (1963: 76). It was these latter which, in Gramscian fashion, could articulate the narrowly economic demands of labour with the wider *social* demand

for democratic participation and the genuinely public accountability of those in power.

In *The New Men of Power* (1948) Mills singled out the labour leaders as, potentially, at least, in a position to perform the public intellectuals' function of forging the crucial links between the labour movement, as the socio-economic force which could challenge those in power, and those actors in society who could construct a new, genuinely public and rational politics. He stated that it was the labour leader who was 'now the only possible link between power and the ideas of the politically alert of the left and liberal publics.' (1971: 30) But, as with his earlier assessment of intellectuals, Mills saw the existing stratum of labour leaders as neither capable nor willing to capitalise upon the political potential of their position.

Again Mills told a familiar tale of assimilation, adaptation, and expediency: the leadership of the labour movement had trodden the well-worn path 'from political ideas to practical politics' (1971: 165); that is to say, echoing the Critical Theorist's criticism of "optimistic" intellectuals, the labour leaders had lost their collective political "mind" en route to institutional power. They acted 'as if they were in an economic world only', and, indeed, constituted, in many cases, 'the last representatives of the economic man.' (1971: 155, 236) This economism made labour leaders 'poor bets as far as political action is concerned', and led Mills to conclude in counter-Churchillian mode: '[n]ever has so much depended upon men who are so ill-prepared and so little inclined to assume the responsibility.' (1971: 236, 291) As before, Mills' political sociology enabled him to identify problems and their solutions, whilst at the same time seemingly disclosing those problems

(as stubbornly *structural* problems) in such a way as to overwhelm any agency that might implement those solutions.

Craftsmanship and Imagination

Mills was still faced with the problem of finding a way out of the impasse of structure and agency in order to avoid either falling into the despair of the wholly alienated or marginal intellectual, or succumbing to the enticements of an accommodating professionalism. He needed to find alternative social foundations for oppositional agency, extrapersonal (though not necessarily *collective*) structures, practices and articulations in and by which the question of the "internal condition" of the prospective social agent could be addressed and subjective limitations overcome. Increasingly, in his work of the fifties, Mills offered the activity of *imaginative craftsmanship* as the principal foundation for the social (extrapersonal) elaboration of the personal will.

Initially, in *White Collar* (1951), craftsmanship was introduced as an *ideal* against which modern work-experience could be judged. Modern work, even white collar work, as Mills sought to show, was alienating and bureaucratised. The modern division of labour is characterised by routinisation, commodification and by purely economic motives. Such conditions have led, in turn, to precisely that economism - a preoccupation with 'income, power, status' (1951: 230) - on the part of the working class (now including white collar workers) and also fatally pursued by its leaders detailed in Mills' earlier work. A reductionist 'short-run' materialism infects every part of social and political life, such that even the

'upsurge of trade unionism' cannot be taken as signifying bright prospects for an imminent 'political insurgency', for trade unionism provides no effective 'counter-symbols' to the prevailing materialism (1951: 331). The political opposition had no adequate counter-hegemonic resources upon which it could draw.

Craftsmanship was offered by Mills as just such a "counter-symbol". It was invoked as a contrastive 'idealized model of work gratification' (1951: 220), as an 'anachronism' which could not be achieved in 'modern work-worlds.' (1951: 224) The ideal of craftsmanship (drawn from G.D.H. Cole and, thereby, from William Morris) was as a unity of work and leisure, of work and culture, in and through which the fundamental division of livelihood and living is overcome. The craft-worker and his or her work exist in a symbiotic relation, as Mills made clear:

The craftsman's work is thus a means of developing his skill, as well as a means of developing himself as a man. It is not that self-development is an ulterior goal, but that such development is the cumulative result obtained by devotion to and practice of his skills. As he gives it the quality of his own mind and skill, he is also further developing his own nature, in this simple sense, he lives in and through his work, which confesses and reveals him to the world. (1951: 222)

However, if in *White Collar* craftsmanship remains an ethical ideal, as a mode of conjoining living and working, articulating the private life of the mind and the public revelation and elaboration of the self in and to the world, in *The Sociological Imagination* (1959) Mills sought to *realise* that ideal. This effort was related directly to a re-emphasis upon the importance of social science in the

modern world, and hence upon the potential importance of social scientists. The social sciences, according to Mills, were 'becoming the common denominator of our cultural period.' (1959: 13) The coincidence within the social sciences of the 'political and intellectual crises of our time' made 'serious work in either sphere...also work in the other' (1959: 173), and thus also made the social scientist simultaneously a significant political figure. Social science therefore seemed to bear a 'promise' (1959: 173) of fully meaningful work, that is, work which attained the status and value of a *craft*. The conditions of the modern division of labour might militate against the *general* achievement of the craftsmanship ideal, but it was possible for "certain types of mind", those possessed of "sociological imagination", understood as the capacity 'to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society' (1959: 6), to bring work and life, the private and the public together within the restricted sphere of the "craft" of imaginative social science.

The Sociological Imagination was addressed to the specific constituency of social scientists within the United States, and as such dealt with the procedures, the parameters, the very foundations (conceptual, methodological and political) of the discipline. Mills was not concerned within that work with the traditions, the experiences, or the consciousness of "the people", but with those of the prospective intellectuals active within the social sciences. In an appendix Mills addressed an appeal to the "intellectual craftsman", the politicised social scientist of the future. In so doing, he sought to exemplify the intellectual procedure of active *self-creation*, the intellectual craft-worker creating him- or herself as a

distinctive subjectivity, the "scholar" and the "person" becoming inseparable. 'Scholarship', Mills informed his imaginary audience,

is a choice of how to live as well as a choice of career; whether he knows it or not, the intellectual workman forms his own self as he works toward the perfection of his craft; to realize his own potentialities, and any opportunities that come his way, he constructs a character which has at its core the qualities of the good workman. (1959: 196)

"Objective" history - the public work of creating the world - and "subjective" biography - the ongoing construction of the private individual life - are part of the same process, the elaboration of the *craft ethic*.

Intellectual craftsmanship, as the 'fusion of intellectual and personal life' (1959: 201), provided, for Mills, the ground for bridging the gap, which threatened to grow ever wider in the modern world, between thought and action, work and life, "private troubles" and "public issues". In this way, socio-political agency became identified with *personal creativity*. The exercise of craftsmanship was equated to work which did not result in the alienation of the subject by making the latter a private property but which constituted the active creation of the subject through the concrete expression of his or her "private" experience, manifested in skill, specific knowledge and moral value, in public activity. Craftsmanship entailed the biographical "ownership" of public intellectual activity. And, for Mills, within the Cold War context of a widespread abnegation of responsibility and assimilative scientism, being one's *own* person was a vital political act, living the *life* of an intellectual was morally and politically crucial:

'[i]n a world of widely communicated nonsense, any statement of fact is of political and moral significance...In such a world as ours, to provide social science is, first of all, to practice the politics of truth' (1959: 178). The social scientific intellectual had an existential and moral value; and in Mills, the "solitary horseman" perusing the novels of Kafka on his journey out of the West, now turned 'motor-cycle driving radical-professor-as-existentialist' (Buhle, 1991: 213), social science had taken on just such a significance.

Mills and Mannheim

In the same way that Thompson's conception of the intellectual may be compared and contrasted with that of Gramsci, Mills' idea of the intellectual (of the social scientific intellectual particularly) as a key social and political actor prompts comparisons with Mannheim. Mills had little faith in the working-class, even if constituted as "the people", *a la* Thompson, and ultimately became dismissive of what he was to call the 'labour metaphysic', that is, the elevation by those on the Left of the revolutionary agency of labour to the level of an unassailable political first principle (1963: 256). As we have seen, Mills came to propose intellectuals as filling the historical shoes of the working-class as a possible 'radical agency for change' (1963: 256); and as an integral part of this political perspective he looked to the traditions of social science and the experience and consciousness of social scientists, rather than popular traditions and experience, as that in which such agency could be grounded.

In *The Sociological Imagination* Mills spoke of the tradition of classic social science as exemplary in providing models of engaged and truly *social* science, wherein methods are employed for specific sets of concrete social problems and theories 'are theories of some range of phenomena.' (1959: 121) Practitioners within this tradition, according to Mills, were concerned not with building models or schema 'from microscopic study', nor with deducing down from grand theories to the level of empirical reality, but 'try to build and to deduce at the same time.' (1959: 128)

A year later Mills edited a volume of readings from the classic tradition, *Images of Man* (1960). That tradition constituted, as John Eldridge points out, 'a great cultural and intellectual resource. Its existence could not be taken for granted and the task of the contemporary sociologist was to ensure that it was a living tradition.' (1983: 102) The contemporary social science intellectual was obliged to '[t]o reflect, keep alive and extend the social science tradition.' (1983: 103) Indeed, for Mills, that tradition was comparable with the literary tradition. Mills displayed a distinct literary consciousness, and in *White Collar* in particular sought to meld together social-scientific and literary methodologies and perspectives, just as Mannheim had tried to renew social science by incorporating concepts and categories drawn from art-historical and cultural studies.

It is possible to see in Mills' active conception of social science not only respect for Mannheim as a vital contributor to a quasi-Leavisite Great Tradition but also an apparent re-activation of the latter's notion of 'sociology as a form of consciousness' (Eldridge, 1983: 103) - that is, as that which cannot be restricted to disciplinary boundaries or purely academic contexts, but which enables

understanding of social life in its totality. Mills' claim that the social sciences constituted the "common denominator of our cultural period" directly echoed Mannheim's claim that 'the self-interpretation of man' was now mirrored 'in the perspective of his social pursuits' (1956: 94). For both, sociology had become an "ethos" and an epistemological principle. For Mills, the "promise" of the social sciences was that which Mannheim saw in the sociology of knowledge - the possibility for reciprocal knowledge of the individual and the world, self-knowledge becoming knowledge of the world. Moreover, Mills' conception of the mutual character of political and intellectual crises in modern society seemed to endorse precisely Mannheim's collapsing of intellectual self-consciousness and socio-political action in the process of synthesising conflicting ideologies.

However, having indicated these conceptual connections, it is necessary to point out that Mills' "Mannheimian" commitment to intellectual agency and to the efficacy of the sociological consciousness should be seen in relation to other, critical elements in Mills' intellectual relation to Mannheim.

Thus, Mills was highly resistant to the idea of *planning*, which he conceived of as offering solutions of a technocratic order. The planner, the expert, the policy scientist were, for Mills, all liable to be drawn into the service of power. As we saw in chapter one, the intellectual-as-planner, as conceived by Mannheim, became an agent of the existing social structure, a supposedly neutral figure seeking the rational adjustment of all parts - social actors and institutional functions - into an harmonious social whole. Mannheim's earlier historicisation and socialisation of knowledge and of the intellectual had ultimately laid the grounds for a new objectivity *beyond* history, which in turn provided the

foundations for the scientific manipulation of the "key positions" within the social structure.

For Mills, however, as expressed in a review of Mannheim's *Man and Society*, and in terms similar to those of Horkheimer and Adorno in chapter two, Mannheim's notion of planning exhibited myopia where the realities of power were concerned. Mannheim appeared to carry on regardless of the fact that there were strata who already occupied the "key positions" in society, and that this was the key problem to face rather than entertaining possibilities of planning on that basis (1940: 968-969). Such planning would simply deliver more power, now of a "decontaminated" technocratic-scientific kind, into the hands of those who already held it.

The "intellectual craftsman" envisaged by Mills was rooted in the active unity of history and biography, of object and subject. The very designation "craftsman" signalled an attempt by Mills to give a new experiential and moral texture and value to scientific-scholarly activity. In this regard, Mills could be said to be more readily related to the earlier Mannheim, to the Mannheim rooted in the cultural revolt and vanguardism of the Sunday Circle, the Mannheim who articulated the *Lebensphilosophie* of Simmel and Dilthey - the "critical-moral" rather than the "methodological" Mannheim. Or rather, perhaps one should say that whereas for Mannheim methodology could be detached from a specific cultural-critical and moral stance, and thence could become the foundation of detachment, inhering in the method of politico-cultural synthesis constituted as a scientific warrant against barbarism and cultural collapse, for Mills, as articulated in the *ethic of*

craftsmanship, method could not be so detached from morality, from the specific moral progression of the individual intellectual.

The sociology of knowledge, though rooted in experience, nevertheless sought its synthesis, and as an essential part of the synthetic process sought to defer specific commitments and decisions which had to be taken within the realm of experience. The idea of planning that grew out of the sociology of knowledge ultimately turned knowledge against the supposedly irrational and chaotic sphere of experience: science -social science - could achieve, indeed, had to achieve, a position beyond the "irrational" flux of history. For his part, however, Mills' imaginative crafts-worker, grafting onto the sociology of knowledge a literary and philosophic sensibility of which Mannheim had tried to purge it, sought to turn social science - as the use of specific skills and knowledges, as the elaboration and extension of a specific "living tradition" - back into personal-moral experience, into that which was a matter of individual feeling and creativity.

Organisation and Independence

James Miller has described how Mills influenced the founders of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in the United States in the early sixties. As he makes clear, this influence was conceptual and analytical, deriving especially from Mills' *The Power Elite* (1956), which became, according to one of the SDS activists, 'Bible' (Bob Ross, cited 1988: 87). Moreover, '[w]hen SDS published its agenda for the December [1961] meeting in Ann Arbor, it opened with an epigraph from Mills' (1988: 79). However, Mills' influence was also, as one might expect,

personal - that is, it was a matter of his *personal example*, as one who refused to genuflect to power and was willing to venture beyond the cordons of professionalism and power-politics in practising the "politics of truth." Thus, upon joining SDS, according to Miller, one had to know Mills, 'to know not just the major texts and key concepts, but the personal anecdotes, the rhetorical style, the sweep of the man's political vision' (1988: 79).

In truth, the two moments of personal-moral and impersonal-intellectual influence were bound to be indivisible: acceptance of one involved the necessary acceptance of the other. Mills had insisted upon treating what formerly had been questions of correct professional practice as essentially moral issues, and in the process had attempted to re-politicise - the political and moral being intimately connected - the public life of a society which was in danger of passing into private hands. Mills' practice of what has been called an 'alternative professionalism' (Eyerman and Jamison, 1994: 17) attempted to unite the exercise of a specialist, technical knowledge with the ends to which that knowledge was put; method and technique were indissociable from morality and personal aspiration

Mills' resolute suspicion of "fraternity", seemingly, of all collective organisational forms, and his insistence upon opposing them to intellectual independence, were seen as problematic even within SDS circles (Miller, 1988: 90). The critical social analysis and insistence upon taking responsibility for "what is made of one" politically and morally in 'the immediate context of [one's] own work (1963: 232) could provide the spur for the 're-assertion of the personal' (Tom Hayden, cited in Miller, 1988: 101) in political life, but Mills provided no basis or resources for forming and sustaining an *organisation*. Unlike Gramsci, he

was not interested in doing so; he was not concerned with translating a "spasmodic" politics – politics as existential revolt – into politics as "permanent persuasion." Rather, the main focus of his hopes, as indicated above, remained the intellectual – the intellectual as a particular kind of *public professional*. Hence, in his later writings Mills called for what amounted to an "International of Intellectuals", a loose aggregate of individuals in touch with one another across borders, who maintained, above all, their independence. (1963: 235)

In chapter six we will see that such a call has been repeated recently, by Pierre Bourdieu, though on the basis of an analysis which places the personal moral aspirations of the intellectual reflexively *within* an institutional history of intellectual practice and *habitus*, rather than placing them against it. Moreover, in that chapter I will show how Mills' notion of an alternative, or, "partisan", professionalism has been reconfigured in recent theories of the intellectual developed by Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, and Bruce Robbins. In these, largely arising from the experience and context of social movements and student radicalism in the United States, Mills' intellectual can be said to be adapted to new circumstances in which politics is seen increasingly as a matter of professional practice.

As far as Thompson is concerned, one can see a development that is in many ways different from that of Mills, consonant with his practical-institutional involvement. Thompson's criticism of and break with the Communist Party was undeniably personal and moral in character, but also he was concerned with identifying and developing new forms of collective self-activity and self-organisation which could articulate a 'language of moral revolt' (1960a: 9)

against the existing political culture and discourse. Hence, it was with this end in view that Thompson focused his attention (and his hopes) upon the burgeoning anti-nuclear movement in the fifties as exemplifying a new kind of 'majority movement' (Chun, 1993: 50) that would act as a counter to the organisation of the working-class into a passive mass. And it was for this reason that Thompson was cautious with regard to Mills' apparent focus upon intellectuals as possible agents of social transformation; the intellectuals could end up simply perpetuating the domination of the people, but this time in a technocratic form.

Of course, this was precisely what Mills himself was wary of, and it was because of this that his earlier search for just such an agent was effectively abandoned in favour of elaborating a theory and a practice of *moral* agency, in which the life and work of the intellectual itself would take on, simultaneously, both a personal and a social significance. And one can say that even with his sharper organisational focus, even with his roots within native political and intellectual traditions and institutions, Thompson eventually followed a similar trajectory to Mills. For Thompson, indeed, the role of the intellectual remained decidedly oriented upon collective organisations – and hence he devoted much energy to the revitalised anti-nuclear movement in the 1980s. But, in tandem with this, the intellectual was conceived as necessarily separate from *all* political organisation, as bound to jut out the 'knees and elbows' of his or her 'sensibility' in order to resist being 'pressed through the grid into the universal mish-mash of the received assumptions of the intellectual culture' (1978: 183) – the intellectual culture of both Left and Right.

The very formulation "socialist humanism" perhaps contained from the very beginning the possibility of just such a tension between collective-organisational and personal-moral imperatives. It was intended as that which would overcome this opposition, to show how the bureaucratic, reductionist, inhumane version of Socialism represented by Stalinism was not necessarily the last stage in its evolution, that a warmer, morally sensitive Socialism could be brought into being and sustained. However, this task and vision itself split the New Left, which could find, seemingly, no satisfactory organisational consensus. Within this context of conflict and contradiction, perhaps it is true to say that, for Thompson, it was most important to hold to the possibility of and the potential in the second of these two terms, to place 'human', rather than class, issues at the heart of intellectual practice. (1982: 28)

Chapter Five

‘Living in truth’: The Intellectual as Existential Praxis

Introduction

The instances of the conceptualisation of the intellectual discussed in this chapter, Jean-Paul Sartre and Václav Havel, continue the general emphasis found within those of Mills and Thompson upon the intellectual as rooted in a level of experience that enables him or her to resist the repressive assimilation of institutionalised ideological politics. In the previous chapter, the intellectual was proposed as one whose concern it should be to articulate values and norms appropriate to private life and activity of specific social groups within the public life of society as a whole. In Mills, this work was seen, largely, as being a question of the reactivation of a *professional or vocational ethos* but within the context of an intellectual and creative culture thoroughly penetrated by the élite politics of the Cold War era. The Millsian intellectual, the professional practitioner, could not help but be politicised the moment he or she stepped outside the confines of a narrowly constrained professionalism. In Thompson, the intellectual endeavour to revitalise a moribund politics by making it again a matter of ethical decision and action was conceived as a matter of identifying and mobilising strong moral constituents within the politico-cultural traditions of the people. It was to this popular cultural life that the intellectual should relate, and to which he or she was primarily accountable. The intellectual, as such, was lodged between a "sophisticated" intellectual culture and the experience and traditions of the generality.

In the cases of Sartre and Havel the intellectual is again regarded from the perspective of his or her capacity for undermining a dogmatic and bureaucratic politics and for overcoming ideological constraints upon his or her identity.

However, in these instances the intellectual is refracted through a predominantly *philosophical* discourse – existentialism – and is not only “explained”, or, analysed, thereby but through his or her identity elaborates that philosophy. The intellectual is that in which the philosophy is manifested and by which it is itself “explained”. In this respect, existentialism, as Sartre makes clear below, is a counterpart to Marxism (in Sartre’s view, as that which augments the latter, in Havel’s, as that which is opposed to it) because it provides the conceptual resources and context for a theory of the intellectual in which theory and practice, thought and action can be united.

The philosophical placement of the intellectual also draws attention to the relevance of specific conditions – of tradition, of cultural resources and paradigms, of political institutional context – in his or her construction. Mills and Thompson worked within the contexts of particular intellectual and cultural idioms and in relation to political and cultural institutions that made available particular opportunities for action and conceptualisation while excluding others. Sartre, for his part, stood within the tradition of the *philosophes* and the Ideologists of the *Institut National* (for this, see Kennedy, 1978), lived and was brought up in a culture which could be said to have been founded on eminently philosophical ideas. This was his “inheritance”, an intellectual culture that was unmistakably a *state* and a *class* culture. And it was the *living presence* of that culture within the identity and practice of the French intellectual which made *betrayal* – of class and of state – central to Sartre’s conception of the intellectual. Just as it was the presence of the influence of the French Communist Party, as opposed to its weakness in Britain and the United States, that made the

relationship between the intellectual and the Party a recurring problematic in Sartre's notion of the intellectual.

For Havel, similarly, the Communist Party was that with which the intellectual had to be preoccupied – but in this case, of course, as the political force that controlled the Czechoslovak state. Havel, unlike our other examples, was active on the other side of the Iron Curtain. As such, therefore, his development of an idea of dissidence took place within the circumstance of a state that, seemingly, practised Marxism, and his opposition to that state, called upon a philosophy that could provide a total set of values and normative moral standards upon which that opposition could stand firm. As we will see, in doing so, Havel drew upon intellectual traditions and philosophical resources that had carried particular force in his country, and also enacted an intellectual role which had roots specifically in Eastern and Central Europe. At the same time, however, both Havel and Sartre, in their existentialist articulations of the intellectual, necessarily made universalist claims for the intellectual identity that permitted the possibility of its being seen as non-specific and trans-national.

Sartre: The Intellectual as Monster

Sartre's construction of the intellectual, especially as developed in his 1965 *Plea for Intellectuals*, was explicitly the product of his attempt to synthesise Marxism and Existentialism. In this regard, the intellectual becomes a category of agent whose real significance lies in the effort to overcome at the level of 'concrete events' (1974: 251) the *lived contradiction* between the universal and the particular which the intellectual herself embodies. In this way, according to

Sartre, the intellectual is necessarily already committed to radicalism because as an intellectual she constitutes nothing other than the self-recognition of society's wider class contradictions. As with Havel's existential dissident, for Sartre the function of the intellectual is to assume the responsibility for the recognition of the fundamental antagonism between the realisation of a universal humanism (truth, morality) and the particular, interested forms of knowledge and technique in which the universal is manifested and by which it is limited. The intellectual's characteristic task, by this account, is to explore herself as the living embodiment of this fundamental contradiction, as 'the monstrous product of a monstrous society.' (1974: 247)

Marxism and Existentialism

Unlike Havel, Sartre's conception of the intellectual, and of his "essential" responsibility, was articulated in terms of Marxist master-categories of class and the political revolutionary transformation of society. However, through his elaboration of existentialism Sartre sought the revitalisation of Marxism, the development of which, he thought, had come to a halt under Stalin (Anderson, 1976: 38). During that period theory and practice had become separated. Contemporary Marxism no longer offered the possibility of gaining practical knowledge of contingent historical experience, instead:

The open concepts of Marxism have closed in. They are no longer keys, interpretive schemata; they are posited for themselves as an already totalized knowledge. The totalizing investigation has given way to a Scholasticism of the totality. The heuristic principle - "to search for the

whole in the parts" - has become the terrorist practice of "liquidating the particularity". (1963: 27-28)

Soviet Marxism could no longer *actively* know anything because it had ceased to acknowledge its *lack* of knowledge; its concepts had become '*dictates*' existing absolutely *a priori*. (1963: 28)

It was within this context of extreme theoreticism, in which particular experiential facts and events were forcibly adapted to the synthetic generalities of the theory, that Sartre could find a place for existentialism. The value of such a philosophy was that it affirmed the irreducible reality of the lived experience of individuals. According to Sartre, it was just this fact of 'the irreducibility and the specificity of what is lived' (1963: 10) that Kierkegaard asserted against the totalising philosophic system of Hegel, which proposed the assimilation of the whole of reality into thought, and which regarded all the phenomena of inwardness as the objects of knowledge in and for Absolute Mind.

In the circumstances of idealism and absolutism prevailing within Marxism, therefore, 'existentialism has been able to return and to maintain itself because it reaffirmed the reality of men as Kierkegaard asserted his own reality against Hegel.' (1963: 28) If existentialism and Marxism can be said to 'aim at the same object' - that is, the concrete human being - nevertheless, 'Marxism has reabsorbed man into the idea', whereas 'existentialism seeks him everywhere *where he is*, at his work, in his home, in the street.' (1963: 28) Existentialism returned because Marxism, while furnishing the concepts and categories for 'the only valid interpretation of history' (1963:21), had frozen into a dogmatic

idealism and no longer worked to guide practical understanding in everyday life and experience. For Sartre, it was existentialism which 'remained the only concrete approach to reality', which 'addresses itself to experience in order to discover there concrete syntheses, and which in the circumstances of the bureaucratic sclerosis of Soviet Marxism took upon itself Marxism's mantle of "philosophy-becoming-the-world".' (1963: 21, 30) Existentialism carried on the ongoing dialectical-historical process of the totalisation of experience which, as living experience, is 'forever being totalised.' (1963: 30)

A New Humanism

Sartre's conception of the irreducible character of experience and of the political significance of particularity places him with Mills and Thompson as an advocate for a new humanism in opposition to the political totalisation of all forms of life in the Cold War superpower states. In *The Marxists* Mills included Sartre in his pantheon of 'Plain Marxists' (1963a: 98), as a thinker who worked 'in Marx's own tradition', but who treated Marx 'in a scholarly way', rather than performing intellectual genuflections to Marxist orthodoxies. (1963a: 97) Thompson, on the other hand, as Kate Soper points out, often placed Sartre (as he also did, more famously, Althusser) in the ranks of the anti-humanists who denied the value of human agency in favour of obscure structural forces which were not accessible to 'the conscious intentions of subjects.' (Thompson cited in Soper, 1990: 212) However, Sartre was a contributor to the first issue of *The New Reasoner* in 1957, and over against Thompson's later charge of the former's denial of agency one may cite Sartre's endorsement of the idea of 'man as a *task*' (1974: 250), and of the idea that each individual is fundamentally responsible for

carrying out that task: 'in the end one is always responsible for what is made of one. Even if one can do nothing else besides assume this responsibility. For I believe that a man can always make something out of what is made of him.' (1974: 34-35)

According to Sartre, it was the false universality of *bourgeois* humanism, which unproblematically posits the universal (the universal, omniscient, self-consonant consciousness) as that which already exists, which should be the object of relentless criticism. It was this abstract universality that Marxism had adopted with its assumption of an all-knowing position beyond everyday contingency and its absorption of human consciousness and experience into an Absolute Mind. Like Thompson, therefore, Sartre sought a new humanism which envisaged the human being as that which is to be "made" through his or her own conscious activity. Such activity, he believed, is consequent upon the awareness of the *absence* of humanity - in the sense of a free and fully rational consciousness - in the particular conditions and biographical constitution of the individual personality, upon, that is, the consciousness of a fundamental contradiction between the universal, "human" ends and value of his or her conduct and the particular limits placed upon it by external forces which are internalised by the individual. It is this awareness of a *lived contradiction* that, according to Sartre, actively constitutes the intellectual.

The Singular Universality of the Intellectual

For Sartre, in his 1965 lectures on the constitution and function of the intellectual, the latter is that which arises in the conflict between universalist humanist *ends* and particularist technical *means*, which are legitimated with

reference to those ends, but which in reality endanger their realisation. The intellectual comes into being in the consciousness of the contradiction between ideologically determined and delimited practical knowledge and knowledge of a critical-evaluative kind, knowledge which is political or moral in character insofar as it is, in its very particularity, informed by 'a global and dogmatic conception (vague or precise: moralist or marxist) of man.' (1974: 230) This contradiction lay at the heart of the common French conception of the intellectual, which appeared at the time of the Dreyfus Affair. According to Sartre, such an intellectual necessarily interferes in problems which do not concern him or her, straying into areas outside of his or her technical competence. Sartre employs the example of the nuclear scientist to illustrate his point:

I would suggest that the scientists working on the atomic fission in order to perfect the techniques of atomic warfare should not be called 'intellectuals': they are scientists, and nothing more. But if these same scientists, terrified by the destructive power of the devices they have helped to create, join forces and sign a manifesto alerting public opinion to the dangers of the atomic bomb, they become intellectuals. (1974: 232)

The 'technicians of practical knowledge' (1974: 232) for as long as they keep within the boundaries of their expertise cannot be called intellectuals, because they are not concerned with the ends to which their technical practice is put. However, at the same time, it is only out of the mass of such technicians that intellectuals will be recruited. This is because it is to the strata of technicians ('the tertiary sector made up of scientists, engineers, doctors, lawyers, jurists, academics' (1974: 232)) that the particular social function of the examination of possibilities,

the specialist study of means, is assigned. In their scientific concern with all alternative means the technicians throw open the possibility of questioning and re-evaluating the ends to which specific means will be put. Rational scientific procedure requires the specialist, in the first instance, to pursue that which is 'useful' in terms of its own universalising logic, and without regard to 'specification or limits.' (1974: 242) Such a procedure must therefore be free to contest particularist perspectives and viewpoints regardless of specific political and social interests.

For Sartre, the significance of the Enlightenment *philosophes* lay in precisely this universalising, contestatory activity. As specialists of practical knowledge, "experts in means" (1974: 233), drawn from the tertiary sector, they demanded 'the right of free enquiry' and 'independence for thought' (1974: 235) to enable them to conduct practical research in the most effective manner. In the process, the *philosophes*, as Bauman has argued (1987: ch.2), established Reason as a universal criterion by which human conduct in society and in culture should be judged, and thereby furnished a global conception of humanity and its conduct which necessarily extended beyond their specific areas of competence. Thus, according to Sartre, '[i]n short the *philosophes* did what intellectuals are criticized for doing today - they used their skills for another end than that towards which they were supposed to be working; they developed a bourgeois ideology based on a mechanistic and analytical scientism.' (1974: 236) As masters of technique and practical knowledge, the *philosophes* ventured into the spheres of value and truth; they traversed the distance between the *is* of objective fact and the *oughts* of morality and politics.

But, if the *philosophes* may be considered to have been intellectuals by dint of the fact of their interfering in affairs which, as specialists, were not their concern, at the same time, they could not be said to be intellectuals in the modern sense of the term. The *philosophes* were 'born, educated and moulded within the bourgeoisie' (1974: 236-237); their championing of the universality of rationalism and of the human being was at odds with the particularity and traditionalism of aristocratic feudalism, but it was consonant with the bourgeoisie's thrust towards the universalisation of individualism and economic liberalism. Hence, for Sartre, as for Gramsci, 'the advance of scientific and practical research, and the progression of the rising [bourgeois] class, moved forward together.' (1974: 236) The *philosophes* were, he writes, Gramscian organic intellectuals of the bourgeoisie, taking 'upon themselves the task of expressing the *objective spirit* of [that] class.' (1974: 236) The humanism which the *philosophes* advocated and established - the triumph of 'universal man', of the sovereignty of free rational individuals - was in fact *bourgeois* humanism, according to which 'every man is a bourgeois, every bourgeois is a man.' (1974: 236)

It was this *consonance* between *philosophes* and the class to which they belonged, between the universalising logic and principles of their scientific technique and the universalism of bourgeois ideology that, Sartre argued, debarred them from being considered as truly modern intellectuals in the radical definition he sought to give to this term. The intellectual appeared at that point when the technicians of practical knowledge found themselves reduced to the status of functionaries whose work is determined by priorities expressive of particular interests within society, and thus distanced from the ends towards which their knowledge-practice tend. The technicians now have their social being

determined for them - determined, indeed, in the allocation of social roles to be played, jobs to be filled, even before they come into existence as the various kinds of specialist.

Sartre echoed the complaint voiced by '60s student activists that education had been subordinated to the demands of industry and commerce, which sought (and continue to seek) 'to extend its control over the university [in order] to force it to abandon the old obsolete humanism and replace it with specialized disciplines, destined to supply firms with testers, supervisors, public relations officers, and so forth.' (1974: 238) This process of selection is simultaneously a matter of political-economic decisions concerning the priorities of investment and the "efficient" structure of institutions, and also a matter of ideology. Specialists in practical knowledge are transformed into 'agents of an ideological particularism' (1974: 238), become in their roles as experts in their various fields transmitters of accepted values and ideas - of, for instance, nationalist or racist ideologies, or of the ideology of liberal capitalism. By these means, and by the fact that the technician is cut off from the working-class by the very selectivity of his or her education in class society, the specialist becomes a 'middle man, a middling man, a middle-class man', becomes one whose 'social being and destiny come to him from without.' (1974: 239)

Whereas the *philosophes* experienced a "false" harmony between the principle of universality inherent in their scientific activity and the universal principles which legitimated bourgeois hegemony, the intellectuals experience rather a conflict between their knowledge practice and the now revealed particularism of that hegemony. The intellectual is caught between the inheritance of a humanist

culture, educated as he or she has been in a tradition which is based on the principle of universal equality and the disinterested character of reason, and the particular conditions of *personal history*, the whole complex of ideological conditions which have produced his or her own self. It is only in an abstracted sphere of cultural practice that technique is independent and universal; in the reality of class society it is pressed to serve particular ends, though its potential for self-determination and universality remains recognisable.

It is with the recognition of the tension between the potential and the reality of technical practice that the intellectual comes into being (and with its traditions of a disinterested humanist culture and one socially directed in character, it is less than surprising that the modern intellectual came to light in France). The recognition of contradiction is simultaneously externally *and* internally directed, according to Sartre. For the intellectual is concerned with his or her own *interiorisation* of dominant norms and of particularist restrictions upon the development of universal ends.

The key point in Sartre's elaboration of the intellectuals is that he or she is characterised as exemplifying a specific mode of existence or being. Intellectuals can not be defined according to their disposition of knowledge or the specific practical-occupational function they perform. As a specialist in knowledge, the intellectual

does know certain things,...[b]ut as an intellectual, he is *searching* for other things: the restrictions, violent or subtle, of universality by particularism, and the envelopment of truth by myth have made him essentially an *investigator*. He investigates *himself* first of all in order to

transform the contradictory being assigned to him into a harmonious totality. (1974: 247)

That "investigation" is necessarily dialectical, however, that is, the intellectual's exploration of his or her self involves, at the same time, investigation of the world which has produced intellectuals - 'the self is referred to the world and the world is referred to the self.' (1974: 245) The "monstrous" identity of the intellectual is precisely that which marks the monstrousness of the world itself. He or she is not brought into existence by any *particular* decision made by any one group in society, rather, the intellectual represents in his or her very experience as a "specialist in universality" the fundamental global contradiction inherent in particular decisions being taken in the name of humanity as a whole.

In this way, Sartre's intellectual, 'characterized as having a mandate from no one,...receiving [a] statute from no authority' (1974: 246-247), represents no-one but him- or herself. But because that self constitutes no more than the reality of society's dialectical division, is situated on the fault which divides that society, the intellectual represents or embodies the whole of humanity. The intellectual constitutes a '*singular universality*.' (1974: 249) And it was Sartre himself, as a *self-identified* monstrous intellectual, who embodied the singularity of that universality most completely.

As noted in the opening chapter, in his conception of the intellectual Mannheim proposed an interdependence between consciousness and the world which meant that the knower and the known, and more specifically, the intellectual and the particular facts of his or her existence could not be separated out from one

another. As with Sartre, self and world had to be reciprocally referred. In his earlier, Sunday Circle incarnation, under the influence of Simmel, Mannheim argued for seeing the intellectual as engaged in a necessarily doomed struggle to reconcile life and thought, "objective" and "subjective" cultures. However, with the elaboration of successive conceptions of a cultural science (the sociology of knowledge and interdependent thought), Mannheim laid the conceptual and methodological foundations for the intellectual (and later, the planner) to achieve a "transcendental" synthesis of existential particularity and rational universality in a scientific consciousness. For Sartre, however, the intellectual *could not* achieve such a transcendence, even if hedged about by qualifications which emphasised its need for continual renewal. Science is not that into which experience could be incorporated and its distorting effects overcome, but rather, *is* that experience - a contradictory experience of particular universality, of the (self-)alienation of the universal ends of science - into which the intellectual is thrown and by which he or she is constituted. As the lived experience of the intellectual, science is simultaneously *subjective and objective* in character, that is, it is an ensemble of method and technique by which the intellectual gains understanding and to which, as a knowledge practitioner, he or she is committed, but it is also that from which the intellectual is consciously alienated. As lived experience, science 'is always simultaneously present to itself and absent from itself' (1974: 42); it is that which, in the self-conscious intellectual, goes beyond its own particular totalisation.

Universal and Specific Intellectuals

It is interesting that Sartre has often been described as a "universal intellectual" in the sense given to that term by Michel Foucault (see Jennings, 1997: 74 for a recent example). According to Foucault, 'the "universal" intellectual derives from the jurist or notable, and finds his fullest manifestation in the writer, the bearer of values and significations in which all men can recognise themselves.' (1980: 128) Such an intellectual stands as the 'master of truth and justice' (1980: 126), acting as the consciousness of all, and speaking for all those without a voice.

For Foucault, the history of the French intellectual from Voltaire to Zola was the history of the universal intellectual. Over against this figure, however, he identified an alternative tradition, appearing from the end of the nineteenth-century onwards, of the "specific intellectual". This latter intellectual, he writes, 'derives from quite another figure, not the jurist or notable, but the savant or expert.' (1980: 128) The specific intellectual does not place him- or herself "somewhat ahead and to the side" in order to express the stifled truth of the collectivity' (1977: 207-208), but is situated in 'specific sectors' of knowledge practice, and through his or her 'own conditions of life and work', in the hospital, laboratory, university, and so on, is given 'a much more immediate and concrete awareness of struggles' (1980: 126) It is at the level of the *situation* that the specific intellectual operates. However, though this carries with it the dangers of sectoralism and the staking out and defence of areas of professional competence as exclusive territories of expertise, according to Foucault, the specificity of the intellectual's life and work 'can take on a general significance' by being connected to the structure and function of the 'régime of truth' in society (1980: 132), the

attribution and administration of truth being organised socially within a system of political power relations.

Rather than being strictly opposed, I would argue that Foucault offered an idea of the intellectual which in fact was in many ways continuous with that of Sartre, and which was, therefore, continuous with the French tradition. Central to Foucault's critique of the universal intellectual was the problematising of representation, of the intellectual's arrogation of the "right" to speak on behalf of others. In this, he was responding to the dominance of the Left intellectual and of Marxism in French political culture, and to the events of May 1968. In these latter, Foucault stated in a 1972 conversation with Gilles Deleuze, 'the intellectual discovered that the masses no longer need him to gain knowledge: they *know* perfectly well without illusion; they know far better than he and they are certainly capable of expressing themselves.' (1977: 207)¹ The relationship between intellectuals and masses was now on a new footing, whereby Marxist intellectuals themselves could be seen as 'agents of [a] system of power', through their promulgation of 'the idea of their responsibility for "consciousness" and discourse', who prevent the masses from expressing *their* knowledge (1977: 207).

However, in his delineation of the intellectual-as-monster, Sartre's main concern was with the exact nature of the representativeness of the intellectual. The special character of the Sartrean intellectual consists in his or her living the contradiction between (ideological) particularism and (scientific) universalism, which leaves him or her, *as* an intellectual, without a "mandate" from any social group. Thus, such an intellectual *cannot* speak on behalf of others, cannot

¹ Eyerman and Jamison also make this point in their discussion of the "movement intellectual" (1991: 114), which I will return to below.

arrogate the function of universal consciousness, because the universal is precisely that which is to be achieved. (1974: 260) Commitment to the masses in the shape of joining or aligning oneself to their organisations does not make the intellectual an intellectual of the masses, and will not enable him or her to overcome the particularising conditions of his or her background and education. As such, the intellectual cannot become *politically* or *socially* representative of the masses; rather he or she is *existentially* representative, commitment being given an existential basis. It is a matter of being inserted into a specific social destiny, but then seeking to take *responsibility* for that destiny.

Commitment, as conceived by Sartre, is not that which is "external" to the intellectual, that is, it is not an "object" towards which one directs one's energies, but is that which arises from the situation of the specialist in practical knowledge. The "conditions of life and work" of the latter, being conditions in which scientific truth is fettered by ideological myths, call the intellectual into being, not as a figure who is primarily committed to the struggles of others, but as one committed in his or her own reflective activity to the liberation of her own divided self. That activity is inseparable from the existence of the intellectual, which is, in turn, necessarily a *committed* existence.

Writer as Intellectual

It was the writer who, for Sartre, most completely embodied this existence. Whereas other intellectuals become so through the contradiction arising 'between the universalist demands of their profession and the particularist demands of the dominant class' (1974: 284), for the writer this contradiction is internal to the

profession itself. The writer can not avoid writing of his or her experience of global contradictions, but insofar as this is experience, it 'occurs in the domain of non-knowledge.' (1974: 284) However, it is the task of the writer 'to communicate the incommunicable' (1974: 284) by exploiting the ambiguity of ordinary language – that is, by seeking to expose its nature as both material and immaterial, particular and general, *parole* and *langue*. It is the writer's function simultaneously to thicken, to complicate, and to demonstrate and connect. The task of "communicating the incommunicable" is thus strictly an impossible, or, "utopian", task of maintaining in and through that communication that incommunicability – that is, it is a task of conveying an experience *without giving knowledge of it*.

Hence, Sartre writes of the writer's style:

style, in effect communicates no knowledge: it produces the singular universal by showing simultaneously language as a generality that produces and wholly conditions the writer in his facticity, and the writer as an adventurer, turning back on his language, and assuming its follies and ambiguities in order to give witness to his practical singularity and imprison his relationship with the world, as lived experience, in the material presence of words. (1974: 280)

As a specialist in ordinary language, which constitutes the conjunction between particular and universal, 'the writer is not an intellectual *accidentally*, like others, but *essentially*.' (1974: 284)

Such a distinction is important, I think, from the point-of-view of the validation of writing as an activity of the intellectual. It is that which most clearly delineates

the modern intellectual. This is endorsed by Sartre's identification of the transformation of the classic bourgeois intellectual into the modern as taking place 'particularly from the Dreyfus affair onwards.' (1974: 237) It is Zola, the writer, who is given a special place in the tradition. Zola, as a writer, as the *essential* "singular universal", could not but "interfere" in what didn't concern him. According to Sartre's conception, the proper domain of such a figure was that hidden, obscure totality of "the world" which ordinary language, in its incessant ramblings, touches upon at every point. And as Pierre Bourdieu points out (1996: 209ff), Sartre's notion of the writer-intellectual – and of *himself* as such an existent – indicates a special, elevated place for writing – *philosophical* writing – as a "total" activity that assimilates all other fields of expertise and modes of activity. Writing is validated thereby as *existential praxis*.

1968: The Intellectual Transformed

The events of May 1968 prompted Sartre into a re-appraisal of his conception of the practice of the intellectual. A prefatory note attached to the *Plea for Intellectuals* in 1972 indicated his change of perspective and his dissatisfaction with his pre-'68 idea of the intellectual:

Today I have finally understood that the intellectual cannot remain at the stage of unhappy consciousness (characterized by idealism and inefficacy): he must resolve his own problem - or, if you like, negate his *intellectual moment* in order to try and achieve a new *popular* statute.
(1974: 227)

And, in a lecture of the same year, "Justice and the State", about his trial on libel charges as editor of *La Cause du Peuple*, Sartre spoke of the possibility now open to the intellectual for "choosing the people", which had demonstrated itself in 1968 as capable of constituting itself as such. He spoke in Foucauldian fashion of this choice:

If an intellectual chooses the People, he must know that the time for signing manifestos, for quiet protest meetings, and for publishing articles in "reformist" newspapers is over. His task is not so much to speak as to try, by any means available to him, to let the people speak for themselves.
(1978: 179)

Whereas previously the monstrous intellectual received a statute from no group, now he or she was obliged to seek it out. Whereas the modern intellectual had been exemplified in the atomic scientist who signed a petition against the bomb, and thus challenged the ends to which his or her knowledge practice was put, now the signing of petitions, of manifestos – the "writerly" practice *par excellence* of the French intellectual – now such activity was declared obsolete. The People were in a position to speak for themselves, and it now became the intellectuals' chief function to 'contest themselves as intellectuals' (cited in Aronson, 1980: 316).

However, self-contestation, investigation of the particularist restrictions and ideological interests constraining the intellectual, had been central to the idea of the intellectual as presented by Sartre in 1965. Such contestation then had been that which constituted him or her as specific kind of existence. But, after 1968,

one might say, for Sartre it was no longer sufficient for the intellectual to contest him- or herself existentially, because this self-negation was simultaneously an *affirmation* of the intellectual identity, the existence of the intellectual was dependent upon it, and that existence only confirmed the universality of truth and morality as that which was always *becoming*.

In the popular uprising of May 1968 Sartre identified the re-birth of an active politics and the opportunity for the adoption of a positive political position ("a new popular statute") that seemed to offer the possibility of achieving politically that universalism. From this position, the intellectual – the writer, especially the writer of a "non-political" biography of Flaubert – had to be *politically* contested, his or her existential praxis was no longer to the point, and a specifically political activism had to take its place. But instead, what occurred was a division between the two: the writer-intellectual and the "anonymous" paper-seller and activist existed side-by-side. The 'special contradiction' (1978: 185) of the writer of bourgeois books and the anti-intellectual activist continued the contradiction between ideological particularism and rational universalism, only now Sartre saw this contradiction itself as wholly *negative* and took a position on one side of it, rather than seeing it as an existential bind which produced the intellectual that he was.

Havel: Dissidence and Existence

The conception of dissidence elaborated in the work and life of Václav Havel (these two moments being inseparable from his point-of-view) under the communist régime in Czechoslovakia during the 1970s and 1980s situated the

dissident intellectual within the sphere of social existence, rather than in politics primarily. As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, Havel, like Sartre, drew upon existentialist ideas in order to provide conceptual and ethical foundations for political oppositionism and for the intellectual's reflective activity.

For Sartre, existentialism revitalised the humanist core of a mechanical, determinist Marxism, which now offered only absolute *a priori* laws encompassing the totality of human experience, past and present. Moreover, with specific regard to the intellectual, it provided a paradoxically non-political basis for commitment and responsibility (and hence representativeness) in existence itself, rather than in the intellectual's political-theoretical alignment or sympathies. As Pierre Bourdieu writes, 'Sartre convert[ed] into an ontological structure, constitutive of human existence in its universality, the social experience of the intellectual' (1996: 212) The intellectual becomes so not by what he or she says, or in accordance with his or her profession of certain types of knowledge - though these latter might be regarded as the *necessary* conditions for intellectualism; instead, the intellectual becomes so through what she *is* in modern society, and most importantly, through taking responsibility for that being in actions which seek to *overcome* it. The reflective activity of the intellectual is simultaneously inwardly and outwardly directed; indeed, it is within such activity that the contradictions which cut across the relations between self and society, particularity and universality, are brought to the fore, and their unity or synthesis sought from both sides, as it were.

Havel's experience in communist Czechoslovakia led him to an extreme distrust of Marxism in particular and of statist politics in general. His existential outlook was developed not as the means whereby a humanistic revolutionary or radical

politics could be recovered, as in Sartre and, in their emphasis upon the irreducibility of the ethical, as in Thompson and Mills, but as an alternative to "ideological" politics altogether, as that which offered an alternative basis and context for truth and ethical action in individual and in collective life. Over against *political* revolution, Havel offered a notion of *existential* revolution, a concept which was fundamentally anti-statist, insofar as it posited the private sphere of society as the locale of significant human action, and anti-historicist, insofar as it situated human activity within the transcendent realm of Being.

Remembrance of Things Past

As a number of authors have pointed out, Havel relates to a strong tradition of existentialism in Czechoslovakia. His mentor co-founder of Charter 77, Jan Patocka, was himself a student of Heidegger's at Freiburg in the 1920s. In the cultural flowering that occurred in the newly established state in the 1920s and 1930s, as Vladimir Tismaneanu relates, existentialist philosophy and avant-garde art flourished. (1992a: 9) The same author then goes on to give a political and historical context for this flourishing:

In that part of the world, people valued memory and tried to escape a perpetually cunning History. For them History had been a slaughterhouse, a stage for continuous injustice and defeats. Memory was the faculty that preserved the unfulfilled dreams of freedom and expectations for a community of true citizens. Apocalyptic sarcasm rather than metaphysical commitments was the hallmark of the Central European identity. (1992a:

10)

As an example of just such "sarcasm", one might think of the anarchic mischief of Jaroslav Hasek, author of *The Good Soldier Svejk*, famous throughout 1910s Prague as an practical joker and puller of stunts, such as declaring himself to be, upon checking in at a Prague hotel/brothel, a Russian visitor 'looking into the activities of the Austrian general staff.' (Parrott, 1974: x) Upon arrest, Hasek claimed that he only 'wanted to assure himself that the Austrian police were operating effectively.' (1974: x) The figures of the "jester" and the ironist, moreover, have featured strongly within East and Central European dissidence more generally (see, for example, Kolakowski, 1971; Konrad, 1984).

According to Tismaneanu, within the Central European context intellectuals conceived of themselves as playing 'a central role in articulating values and defending the cultural memory of nations long deprived of state existence.' (1992a: 11) Ideological systems which claimed the mandate of a universal and transcendent History, and which demanded the subordination of the particularity of national traditions and experiences and modes of thought were rejected by such intellectuals. These latter turned instead to ways of thinking which were focussed upon the irreducible reality of things and events in themselves. Existential modes of thinking, such as phenomenology, which did not seek to explain 'the meaning of things, beings, relations and events' by means of the "external" mediation of 'an ideology or a scientific theory' (Wilson, 1988: 18), bestowed a reality upon *inwardness*. Hence, such a phenomenon as memory could not be dismissed as an unreliable, feeble and wavering reflection of the substantial objectivity of History, but had to be seen as *in and of itself* having a extra-personal significance and value.

In an interview given to Philip Roth, Milan Kundera, himself as central figure in the rise of dissidence in Czechoslovakia, identifies the problem of memory and forgetting as that which enables the political and private lives of human beings to be seen as united within a common "metaphysics". The problem of forgetting, of the loss of self is ever present in the lives of individuals. 'But', according to Kundera, 'forgetting is also the great problem of politics', and of totalitarian politics especially.

When a big power wants to deprive a small country of its national consciousness it uses the method of *organized forgetting*... A nation which loses awareness of its past gradually loses its self. And so the political situation has brutally illuminated the ordinary metaphysical problem of forgetting that we face all the time, every day, without paying any attention. Politics unmask the metaphysics of private life, private life unmask the metaphysics of politics. (1983: 235)

In such a country as Czechoslovakia, which has been burdened with the full weight of History (1983: 231), in the words of one of Kundera's characters, 'the struggle against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.' (1983: 3)

The Intelligentsia Tradition

The existential, memorial orientation which Tismaneanu identifies amongst Eastern and Central European intellectuals may be seen itself as relating to the *intelligentsia* tradition in Eastern Europe. It is within that tradition, I would argue, that Havel may be placed. However, at the same time, one should point out

that that tradition has been marked by fundamental divisions. The *intelligentsia* (and most markedly the Russian *intelligentsia*) of the nineteenth-century was split according to its members' adherence to, either, a *materialist-scientific* notion of society and socio-political *development*, or, to *metaphysical* outlooks which emphasised irreducible *identities*, racial, national, or cultural. The dispute between the two sides thus revolved around the opposition between a religious or mystical transcendence, and an historical materialism.

It was in the struggle between "Westernism" and "Slavophilism" in Russia in the middle of the last century this dispute took on 'an acute form', although, as Richard Pipes points out, it was the Poles and the Czechs who originated a Slavophile theory. (1974: 265) Slavophile members of the *intelligentsia* reacted to the pronouncements of German-influenced Russian thinkers who proclaimed the Slavic peoples to be "unhistoric" and without a significant civilisation. Peter Chaadaev provoked an extreme response from the authorities when he declared in 1836 that Russians 'live entirely in the present in the narrowest confines, without a past or future, amid a dead calm' (cited in Pipes, 1974: 266). Russia was little more than an historic 'backwater', a 'swampland' where the currents of history were stilled, and stagnated (1974: 266)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this attack led to an intellectual response which was nationalistic in tone, and which centred upon the elaboration of peculiarly Russian virtues and traditions. The charge of historical marginality was answered by the Slavophiles who identified the true nature of the division between West and East as religious and spiritual in character. The dominance of rationalism and individualism in Western society and culture meant that life in the West was marked by an absence of spirituality and community. In Russia, on the other hand,

the Orthodox Church, because it was supposedly rooted firmly in the communal life and traditions of the Russian people, had ensured the survival of a fulfilling spiritual conception of life. As Pipes writes, '[t]hanks to Orthodoxy, Russians [had] managed to retain "integral" personalities in which logic and faith fused to produce a superior kind of knowledge which Alexis Khomiakov...called "living knowledge" (*zhivoe znanie*).'² (1974: 267) From the perspective provided by such integrated, spiritualised knowledge, the merely historical magnitude and significance of the Western nations was extensively diminished.²

According to the Slavophile version of history, it was the modernising reforms of Peter the Great which had introduced ideas and social and cultural forms into Russia which were alien and damaging to its native "organic spirit". Those reforms, in education and in the administration of financial, economic and state affairs, had created a bureaucracy which interfered intolerably in the daily lives of the people, and brought about a breach 'between the crown and the people.' (Pipes, 1974: 267) "Traditional" Russian life, characterised, according to Slavophile opinion, by an unconscious integration and organicism, had been disrupted by a rationalising spirit which sought to make that life the object of a calculating, functionalist consciousness. This spirit was embodied by certain members of the *intelligentsia* who, first under the influence of Hegelian Idealism and then various strands of scientific materialism, sought the rationalisation of Russian society in accord with universalist principles.

² Such a strategy bears comparison with that adopted by the Muscovite Tsars in their dealings with Western monarchies in which the latter were judged by purely native conceptions and standards of sovereignty, and invariably found wanting. (Pipes, 1974: 76-77)

What in fact had occurred in Russia from the time of Peter's reforms onwards was the progressive separation of the state from the person of the tsar. (Pipes, 1974: 128). Russia's rulers had created a space for public debate and for an ethos of social commitment. However, at the same time, they denied the public any meaningful *political* participation. (The Enlightenment monarch Catherine the Great, for instance, encouraged criticism of Russian society, but then, in the aftermath of the French Revolution, was prepared to condemn Alexander Radishchev to death for writing *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* (1790) (Shatz, 1980: 26-27; Pipes, 1974: 256)) The *intelligentsia* had been called upon to make a contribution to Russian society, but they were denied the possibility of doing so in the sphere of politics. Political participation became that to which a large proportion of the educated aspired, and its refusal that upon which their collective grievance centred.

However, this focus upon politics was, for Slavophiles and their intellectual descendants, damaging, insofar as it led the *intelligentsia* to neglect the individual person in favour of the supra-individual collective, and interiority in favour of the merely external. In the wake of the 1905 revolution in Russia, the division between the "materialist-political" and the "spiritual-antipolitical" wings of the *intelligentsia* was made sharply apparent. According to Marc Raeff,

The revolution of 1905 and its authoritarian aftermath created a still deeper rift in the ranks of Russia's intellectual elite. Those events confirmed the radical intelligentsia in its traditional "mystique of revolution" and social philosophy, while another element now distanced itself and focused on spiritual and professional concerns. (1994: viii)

Vekhi

In 1909 a number of this latter "element" published a collection of essays called *Vekhi* (Landmarks) in which they sought to give an alternative vision of the value and function of the consciousness of the *intelligent*. According to Mikhail Gershenzon in that volume, 'the Russian *intelligent* is a person who has literally lived outside himself since youth, recognizing as the only worthy object of his interest and sympathy something outside of his own society: the people, society, or the state. (1994: 51) The socialistic, materialist *intelligentsia*, which had found in the events of 1904 and 1905 its 'golden age' (Kagarlitsky, 1988: 26), had 'become a slave to politics.' (Gershenzon, 1994: 60) It had "consecrated" itself to revolution (see Nechaev, in Payne, 1964: 26), and thus performed the rites and rituals appropriate to religious observance, whilst having at the same time rejected the spiritual-subjective content of religion. (Struve, 1994: 124)

But, the failure of the 1905 revolution to deliver to the *intelligentsia* heaven on earth opened the way for it to see that political revolution alone was insufficient to bring about the necessary changes for the liberation of the *intelligent*. Before 1905, according to Gershenzon, '[t]he *intelligent* was suffocating, or thought he was suffocating only because he was in bondage. A revolution really could have provided the people with everything they needed for a healthy life - freedom of self-determination and legal security. But what would political freedom have given us, the intelligentsia?' (1994: 65) From this perspective, the events of 1905 and their aftermath had shaken the *intelligentsia* out of its automatic identification with the "collective good" of the social whole, and enabled it to re-focus its attention upon questions of the newly individualised consciousness and personality. 'The intelligentsia's disorder after the revolution', wrote Gershenzon,

'was a psychological reaction of the *personality*, and not a transformation of social consciousness: the hypnotic power of civic activism which had dominated the intelligentsia for so many years suddenly disappeared, and the personality found itself at liberty.' (1994: 66) From now on, it was the individual personality that would shape society, pronounced Gershenzon, unaware of the collectivist shape of things to come; 'the tyranny of politics has come to an end' (1994: 67)

What Gershenzon and his fellow *Vekhi*-ists were arguing for was the importance of the preservation of the autonomy and distinctness of the individual self for the creation of a truly human society. Over against collective social agency they asserted the individual human *identity* as the irreducible truth of human existence: '[a]ll that lives lives individually according to a complete plan specific for each being' (Gershenzon, 1994: 55) The attempt to claim autonomy for the individual's life and work, and to cordon off a private space free from the priorities and interventions of the state is central in the subsequent history of dissidence. In the case of such figures as Kolakowski and Sakharov this bid was made largely in the name and for the sake of an academic or intellectual freedom (see Kolakowski, 1971a: 184-185; Sakharov, 1969: 25). Like Sartre, these dissidents sought the fulfilment of the universalist promise of science, and at least initially, saw the realisation of that promise as in accord with 'the real interests of communism' (Kolakowski, 1971a: 186) Unlike Sartre, however, they did not view the contradiction between the universalist technique and epistemology of

science, and the individualised consciousness of the knowing self as fundamentally *existential* in character.³

For Havel, the preservation of a private space for autonomous action is not conceived principally in terms of intellectual freedom and the universalist interest of science but in moral and existential terms. The preservation of such a space is important because it is there that the personality as a centre of essential moral responsibility may be nurtured; it is upon the foundations of such a core of personality that the individual can build a life "lived within the truth", as Havel's famous phrase (after Kafka) has it. Ann Mische writes of an Arendtian concern in Havel with the "treasure" of a 'half-hidden, very private sphere' as conceived as a "holding area" of the self, from which the self must necessarily emerge to act publicly' (1993: 245) Living in truth is characterised by its attempt to restore to public life the dimension of individual responsibility over against the systemic irresponsibility which Havel saw as sanctioned by the Soviet socio-political structure. Through an emphasis upon living in truth, Havel 'pave[d] the way for a type of civic participation in which human subjectivity is not sacrificed to politics' (Mische, 1993: 245) Like his *intelligentsia* forebears, Havel believed that a return to personality, to the essential "authentic" identity of the individual could overcome the "tyranny of politics".⁴

³ However, though this is true of Kolakowski in his dissident writings of the 1950s, after coming to the West in the 1960s he began to write of socio-political conflict in terms of being an indissoluble 'part of the human condition.' (1971b: 45)

⁴ In *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984), however, Kundera places the phrase "living in truth" within a chapter entitled "Words Misunderstood". Each of the two main characters in that chapter has a different conception of what it means to live in truth; for one, it means perfect transparency in public and private life; for the other, it means the preservation of a secret space in one's inner life even at the expense of lies and deceptions in the world outside. For Havel, the two are not incompatible, as long as the transparency striven for is of a *moral* kind, rather than being seen simply as social and political *accountability*.

The public participation of the dissident was not, therefore, first and foremost a matter of politics, of gaining power to bring about what were for Havel merely 'external' changes (1987a: 70) in the structure and organisation of society, but rather was a matter of the individual's reclamation of responsibility for his or her own self. The "function" of the intellectual, if such a thing could be attributed to him or her, is not to offer new self-sustaining systemic conceptions of the world based upon "universal" science or reason, is not to devise plans or conceptual structures which can be superimposed upon living reality, for Havel, consciousness should not seek to synthesise or transcend, *a la* Mannheim, diversified existence by accounting for itself in social or political terms. Rather, reflective practice should be seen as that which *returns* the existent to itself, is that which is *ontologically* constituted, and thus should seek to recover the lost integrity of being of which it itself is the "cause" and the "effect".

In one of his *Letters to Olga* (1988), Havel spelt out this conception of reflective practice:

What in fact are mind, reflection, consciousness?...[W]e are both "somewhat" rooted in Being and "somewhat" outside it, and our mind is in fact a kind of bridge that attempts to span that "gap" by substituting, re-constructing, re-creating what we are not, or what we don't have, what is on the far shore of that "gap". So though we are only "half" in Being, yet in a sense we are so doubly, wherein through this second "half-being" we attempt to replace the loss of the first: perceiving, knowing, appearance, understanding, grasping, becoming aware - all of these are degrees or modes of how our "half-Being" strives towards its missing second half, strives to re-create it (1988: 328-329)

In this account, thought and apprehension are transformed from being actively creative to being *re-creative*, re-collective in character. Consciousness becomes synonymous with the exercise of *conscience*, wherein thought is characterised by the recognition of responsibility and obligation towards transcendent Being.

Reflecting Being

Havel's notion of reflection is Kierkegaardian in its identification of a transcendent, untotalisable referent for consciousness, and in its anti-Hegelianism. It is, therefore, worthwhile reviewing briefly Kierkegaard's conception of a reflective practice which was allotted a primary role in reclaiming a transcendent ontological and theological foundation for human existence.

Reflection, for Kierkegaard, was that which should make that existence more inwardly directed. Thus, Sartre's assessment of Kierkegaard's opposition to Hegelian historicism emphasised his objection to the latter's externalisation or objectification of lived experience. Sartre writes: '[w]hat Kierkegaard opposes in Hegel is the fact that for Hegel the tragedy of a particular life is always surpassed. The lived fades away into knowledge.' (1963: 9fn) Hegelianism neglected 'the *unsurpassable opaqueness* of the lived experience', and though it might have been 'aware of the unity of life and consciousness', these are at the same time recognised as 'incomplete *from the point of view* of the totality.' (1963: 9fn)

The "present age" was characterised by Kierkegaard as lacking in inwardness. The Hegelian notion of history as the progressive self-recognition of the Idea in reality, of Absolute Mind's becoming transparent to itself through the historical consciousness of individuals in the aggregate, found for Kierkegaard its

expression in the "absurd" affirmation of the modern subject as absolute. Such a subject acts as Shakespeare's Coriolanus, 'As if a man were author of himself.' (5.3.36); he takes upon himself responsibility for his own actions, seeking an ethical autonomy in and by which those actions may only be judged on terms he himself provides. This principle of self-authorship, according to which subjects encounter only themselves in others, for Kierkegaard is extended into modern political organisation, wherein the principles of association and accountability dominate. In the public sphere of institutionally organised opinion and association (the press, political parties and social movements, and the like), the individual in actuality is reduced to an aggregated abstraction. Caught up in the process of elaborating the Idea in and through the historical development of public institutions, *the subject is reflected out of itself*, becoming little more than a 'third party' (1940: 17) to its own life.

Thus, the supposed emphasis upon the personal responsibility of the individual in the present age for Kierkegaard had led in the contrary direction, that is, to the *abnegation of responsibility*. Publicity, accountability, and the advance of a scientific rationality which proclaimed the possibility of making all natural and social phenomena transparent to human understanding resulted in the loss of unique particularity, the "unsurpassable", irreducible individuality of the living subject. No longer embedded in the unreflected 'substantial categories' (1944: 141) of nationhood, family and religion, cut off from the sphere of essential relationship, the modern individual became merely an abstract category, an object of knowledge without substantial identity. Such an identity, according to Kierkegaard, arises only within a private space, a space 'inaccessible to every living being' (1944: 155), but accessible to the transcendent truths of God. For

Kierkegaard, to see the end of history as self-revelation, as the revelation of an absolute publicity, with all things being known, was patently absurd. For the sake of the preservation of an inner life, there needed to be things that could not be known to human understanding, which, like God, transcended the possibility of knowledge, and which constituted the unreflected pre-existent (ontological) foundation of human existence and identity.

In opposition to philosophical idealism's reduction of life to moments within a process of (self-) externalisation towards an absent totality, Kierkegaard proposed a conception of reflective practice as that which *reflects the subject back into itself*. Reflection was not "bad" in itself, but should be employed to other ends than those of publicity and scientific enlightenment. Hence, Kierkegaard wrote in *The Present Age*: 'reflection is not of itself something harmful, on the contrary, it is necessary to work through it in order that one's actions should be more intensive.' (1940: 39) Reflection could enable the reclamation of private space by the modern subject, but only by becoming reflection upon humanity's essential relationship with a supreme and infinite God. Such religious reflection allowed the individual to preserve the "unsurpassable opaqueness" of lived experience, because that experience thereby could be *known as unknowable*, and each particular lived moment could be recognised as opening upon a prospect of eternity which had yet to be experienced anew in every moment. Reflection, for Kierkegaard, should lead always to that which was *outside itself* - that is, to the obscure reality of the *inwardness* of the subject, to that which is, as Havel put it, "on the far shore" of our Being.

The Responsibility of the Intellectual

The idea of the dissident-intellectual as asserted by Havel was one which centred upon *responsibility* - such an intellectual, indeed, for Havel was responsible by definition. But this responsibility was seen as at odds with the conception which prevailed under totalitarianism. In Communist society responsibility was a purely state-political affair, was a matter of responsibility *for* the collective welfare as embodied and articulated in official state institutions and an official ideology. Responsibility had become rigidified in just the kind of institutionally organised public sphere which Kierkegaard had rejected as effacing the individual subject in favour of an abstract idea of it. The individual had had the sense of *self*-responsibility, of responsibility *to* something above and beyond the self, an inner identity and being, taken away from him or her, and in its stead had been given a set of impersonal truths and identifications (those of Class, State or Party)

In the Communist Bloc, according to Havel, the responsibility of many intellectuals had been of this impersonal, "external" kind. Such intellectuals identified themselves with an ideology which sought the imposition of universal solutions in the name of the people, but which in fact led them to betray the people. (1995: 37) They sought the "utopian" realisation of ideals which, for Havel, should remain transcendent:

One must distinguish between, on the one hand, a state of openness towards mysteriously changing and always rather elusive and never quite attainable ideals such as truth and morality, and, on the other hand, an

unequivocal identification with a detailed plan for implementing those ideals which in the end becomes self-justifying. (1987b: 82)

The utopianism of such intellectuals resided in their attempt to take responsibility for the practical realisation of those areas of human concern which are necessarily unrealisable. It is the activities of these intellectuals which have resulted in the widespread belief that 'the intellectual is a biological species dangerous to humankind', and which leads Havel himself to conclude that '[w]e should treat "utopian intellectuals" with caution', though at the same time listening to 'the humble, responsible, *moral* intellectual.' (1995: 37)

As we will see in the next chapter, such an appeal to humility has become a familiar refrain in contemporary discussion of the intellectual, though in many cases it has not arisen from the sort of absolute ontology espoused by Havel.

Ideology vs. Being

Havel's criticism of the utopian universalist ideology which, with the co-operation of intellectuals, spread its 'tentacles' into 'all aspects of life' in Communist society (Tismaneanu, 1992b: 617) stands squarely in the *intelligentsia* tradition of complaint against *systemic* explanations of and resolutions for characteristically human behaviour and problems. In the '*post-totalitarian* system' (1987a: 40) of Communist Czechoslovakia, according to Havel, ideology was all embracing, and as such did away with the need for large-scale overt coercion on the part of the state. The official Communist ideology provided its citizens with the means to live a meaningful life of sorts:

Ideology is a specious way of relating to the world. It offers human beings the illusion of an identity, of dignity, and of morality, while making it easier for them to part with them...It is an excuse that everyone can use...the primary excusatory function of ideology...is to provide people, both as victims and pillars of the community, with the illusion that the system is in harmony with the human order and the order of the universe. (1987a: 42-43)

Havel's conception of ideology as a comprehensive system of ideas and beliefs which offers individuals the possibility of finding a meaningful place for themselves in the world seems to be very much in accord with a number of other important conceptions of the nature and function of ideology. Amongst these, one can include Gramsci's notion of hegemony, as discussed in chapter three, Althusser's structuralist conception, which posits ideology as the concrete means in and by which individuals and groups reproduce the totality of social relations and identities, and Barthes' "mythological" conception, according to which ideology functions in a discursive or rhetorical manner, as a 'meta-language' (1973: 115) or mode of representation. In each of these cases, ideology is viewed as that which gives specific form and meaning to experience, is seen as a process of the social and political formation of necessarily collective identities. Ideology is in this sense *productive*, insofar as it is the ongoing production of a set of social narratives in and by which a society seeks to live.

From these points-of-view the ideological, as embodied and articulated within social and cultural institutions and practices, is a problem which may be addressed in political terms. That is to say, it is a matter of a *political* struggle over

consciousness which is concerned with the identification of ideological formations and meanings, and their displacement by formations and meanings of a universal ("scientific-objective") *class* character. In short, the particularist "truths" of the bourgeoisie are displaced by the universal "truths" of the working-class. For Havel, however, ideology is seen strictly in *moral* terms; it is dismissed not because it normalises or naturalises the oppression and exploitation of one class by another but because it debases *all* human beings, by providing them with a false and illusory conception of themselves. Ideology's crime is against human nature or being *per se*, in that it enables individuals to excuse themselves and shirk their fundamental responsibility to themselves and each other.

Such a moral and ontological shortfall cannot be addressed politically through the development of a *consciousness* which represents the transformation of politics into a science - whether revolutionary or otherwise - but requires the recovery of personal *conscience*.⁵ Paradoxically it is conscience which opens out the individual to a higher, more comprehensive totality, because in and through conscience he or she is brought into relationship with the 'absolute horizon of his relations' (1987a: 142), that is, becomes aware of his or her absolute obligations and responsibilities *as* a human being. However, such a relationship, according to Havel, is dependent upon the rehabilitation of 'the personal experience of the human being as the initial measure of things' (1987a: 149); it is only by "taking

⁵ The issue of conscience was central to the criticism voiced by intellectuals of the Czechoslovak régime in the period before the Prague Spring. In an address given at the Forth Congress of the Czech Writers' Union in June 1967, Karel Kósik spoke of the indivisibility of reason and conscience. Using the fifteenth-century Czech reformer Jan Hus as his example, Kósik declared that if the unity of reason and conscience is lost, 'reason loses substantiality and conscience reality. Reason without conscience becomes the utilitarian and mechanical reason of computation and calculation...Conscience divorced from reason sinks to an impotent inner voice, or the variety of good intentions.' (1973: 28) The idea of conscience as requiring public and rational expression was also central to Havel's dissidence.

things personally", one might say, that it is possible for the individual to oppose to the "guiltless" impersonality (1987a: 156) of the post-totalitarian system the *moral* universalism inherent in the assumption of responsibility in living in truth. Hence, Havel writes: '[w]hat is most dangerous to [the] evil [of impersonal power] are not the rockets aimed at this or that state but the fundamental negation of this evil in the very structure of contemporary humanity.' (1987a: 154) The greatest threat to the powerful lies in those who have transformed their existence by placing the ultimate value upon the integrity of their own being and personal experience.

The Significance of Sacrifice

Havel's validation of the personal conscience as that which constitutes the foundation of the individual's interventions in the public sphere of civil society may be related to Sartre's conception of the intellectual as one who "meddles" in the affairs of others on the basis of minding his or her own business. Like Sartre, for Havel the intellectual's activity takes on universal significance when the intellectual achieves a unity of the personality, that is, *unites the self that knows with the self that acts*, and is thereby enabled to burst the constraints of a particularist conditioning. The intellectual's transcendence of particularity is predicated on that particularity itself, it is the consequence of the individual's return into, and reclamation of, the universal foundations within his or her particular existence. Just as in Sartre the process of research, of scientific investigation necessarily involved an existential dimension - the "traversal" of that investigation through the self of the researcher - so in Havel the practice of

knowledge becomes an existential praxis - the elaboration of a life lived in truth. Through living his or her life according to the dictates of conscience, the individual gains access to a universally valid knowledge and thus provides the foundations for a universal identity

The emphasis upon personal responsibility and the agency of conscience within Havel's dissident thought led him to see *sacrifice* as a key element in the activity and identity of the intellectual-dissident.⁶ Sacrifice was the *public affirmation of conscience*, it constituted the means by which the transcendent truths of existence, the 'something in the order of being which...exceeds all our competence' (1987a: 153), could be made the object of a kind of knowledge - that is, by becoming the subject-object of a *living* knowledge. Through the act of sacrifice the individual is able 'personally to guarantee something that transcends him', and thus "his" life is made 'meaningful.' (1987a: 152) However, that meaning, indeed, the fact that life has meaning, is not confined to the individual alone, for the true significance of sacrifice is that it guarantees meaning *for all*, insofar as the meaning of a sacrifice, as affirming transcendent truth and value, must be universal or otherwise be meaningless. Conceived in this way, sacrifice becomes almost a form of *public discourse* or mode of communication that provides the existential-epistemological grounds upon which a *theologically* rooted community may be founded.

Of course, sacrifice - the sacrifice of self and of others, the two being inseparable - is a strongly influential factor in the constitution of many of the "utopian" rationalist intellectuals which Havel identified as a threat to the public

⁶ Jan Patocka described the movement around Charter 77 as the 'solidarity of the shaken and sacrificed.' (Tucker, 1993/4: 292)

weal. The "revolutionary career" written of by Horkheimer was one of endurance of privation, of imprisonment, exile and relentless persecution by the authorities, not only for the marked revolutionary or oppositionist but usually for his or her family and associates. For the sake of political commitment, the individual was prepared to subordinate his or her fate to that of the majority. Thus, in his "Revolutionary Catechism" Sergei Nechaev wrote of the revolutionary as just so much 'capital' to be spent in the service of the revolution (in Payne, 1964: 26), and himself died in one of the Tsar's prisons in 1882. Trotsky was first imprisoned at the age of seventeen and spent much of the rest of his life in exile or on the move. In a speech upon the founding of the Fourth International he declared: '[o]ur party demands each of us, totally and completely. Let the philistines hunt their own individuality in empty space. For a revolutionary to give himself entirely to the party signifies finding himself.' (1974: 86) At the end of his life, shortened after ten years in prison and detention, Gramsci wrote of how he had 'always thought that my individual fate was a subordinate matter' (1994a: 362), and displayed consistently throughout his term of imprisonment a sense of the public, impersonal character and significance of his personal predicament. Hence, in a letter written to his wife in 1931 he wrote of the seeming absence of passion and intimacy in his letters: 'my letters are "public," not restricted to the two of us, and the awareness of this inevitably forces me to curb the explosion of my feelings insofar as they are expressed by the words written in these letters.' (1994a: 111)⁷

⁷ In her book *Resistance Literature* (1987) Barbara Harlow writes of the collective character of the prison-writings of political detainees, seeing them as a type of collective (auto-)biography, as 'collective documents' in which the fate of the individual is given a representative significance. (1987: 120-121)

One may point to many other examples of the "revolutionary career", but the intention here is to emphasise the sense of the necessity of sacrificing themselves to "something higher" that has prevailed amongst revolutionary intellectuals. Trotsky's language in the above citation parallels that of Havel, in that he sees that it is in the giving of oneself to something beyond oneself that it is possible to "find" that same self. The revolutionary's sacrifice, like that of Havel's dissident, acts as a guarantee of a level of truth and value raised above the practical everyday. It is the realisation of the idea (the Ideal) in experiential substance, in the ethical life of the individual, as sought by Gramsci, as described in chapter three.

However, the difference between the dissident and the revolutionary as conceived by Havel revolves around the fact that the latter's sacrifice, the consecration of him- or herself to higher ends, is carried out in the name of *history*, and thus represents a "utopian" attempt to realise the universal - the inherently unrealisable universal dimension of truth and morality - in concrete collective and institutional forms in the 'human "here and now".' (1987a: 99) As such, the revolutionary for Havel, as the bourgeois for Sartre, attempts to bring that into being which is always *becoming*. For Havel, being cannot be identified in any specific concrete entity, unlike history, being has no agent; it cannot be 'represented by a maquette of itself..., by an entity among entity, a thing among things.' (1988: 363) The act of sacrifice performed in the name of being is therefore not a moment of *agency*, an act which is intended in the first instance to bring about particular historical effects, changes in the social or political order. Rather, such an act is primarily *self-referential*, it carries its own "ends" within itself - that is, it is an act addressed to the reclamation of a pre-existent universal

integral identity which is performed in the full knowledge of its ultimate inefficacy.

Dissident become President

If the activity of the dissident was existential in character, according to Havel, it did have political consequences in the circumstances of the post-totalitarian system. Thus, in "The Power of the Powerless" he wrote that under such a system 'living within the truth has more than a mere existential dimension (returning humanity to its inherent nature), or a noetic dimension (revealing reality as it is), or a moral dimension (setting an example for others). It also has an unambiguous *political* dimension.' (1987a: 56-57) Living in truth represented a political challenge precisely because it was *anti*-political in operation, that is to say, it sought the re-foundation of social life on moral and ontological grounds. In a society totalised under the sign of ideological politics the attempt 'to put politics in its place' (Konrád, 1984: 92), to substitute moral for political ends, inevitably leads to *political* conflict and opposition. In these circumstances, the intellectual-dissident, the antipolitician, in his or her effort to reclaim the fundamental ends of intellectual and cultural activity, is seen as interfering in affairs which are not his or her concern - in the case of Communist Czechoslovakia, all of the life of state and society.

The particular cast of Havel's dissidence - its grounding in existentialist conceptions - made it possible, even necessary, for him to participate in the political reconstruction of his country in the aftermath of the 1989 events. The

decision to become president, according to Havel, was much less a matter of cool political calculation than of being "pulled forward by Being." (1992: xvi) It is possible for Havel to see the pursuit of a "non-political politics" as not inconsistent with the exercise of power in office (1991: 219) precisely because for him the politics of power may be in a very real sense domesticated. Faced with the question of how he can reconcile the idea of living in truth and the dictates of conscience with his now high office, Havel declares his current political practice to be in fact the exercise of *civility*, with the long-term aim of establishing a 'moral and intellectual state' (1992: 20) Hence, he writes: '[f]rom my political ideals, it should be clear enough that what I would like to accentuate in every possible way in my practice of politics is culture.' (1992: 12) Politics in this way becomes part of 'the culture of everyday life' (1992: 12), is freed from the damaging conflicts and moral corruption of parties and partiality; it is no longer rooted in the dialectic of history but in the immediacy and essential unity of Being. Rather than being occupied with collective confrontations over the distribution of resources or the priorities of production and consumption, the conduct of politics is centred on the nurture and cultivation of the individual human being. Politics becomes civility by other means, an ongoing cultural process toward self-realisation.

Havel's decision to accept the presidency was consistent with his philosophical position because that decision was made by him into an essential *moral* – or, life – choice. As such, it was not the practical application of a theory or doctrine, a specific enactment of an overarching ideological system. For Havel, indeed, the practical political effects and significance of dissident antipolitics were specific to the Czech situation and should not be worked up into a general 'doctrine.'

(1987b: 82) Thus, the purpose of elaborating an existential philosophy of dissidence was not to develop an encompassing system of thought adequate to all contingent situations but to enable the individual to recognise his or her moral responsibility in a given set of circumstances; to enable the individual to make the right choice of that (the integrity of Being) which has been *already* "chosen" for him or her.

As represented by the dissident practice of Havel, intellectual reflection – and in what is often regarded as its highest form, philosophy – is no longer concerned with the construction of theories and the manufacture of conceptual and methodological tools that permit the intellectual to get beyond particularity and the limitations of local truths and values. But this is not simply a matter of the displacement of an adherence to universalist perspectives and methods by an affiliation to particularity amongst intellectuals. Rather, the conception of reflection as enabling a deepening of particularity and the return of the subject back into itself must be seen as itself shaped by universalist forces and pressures. The intellectual resistance to totalitarianism mounted by Havel was undertaken on the basis of a deeper, more extensive totality, that of Being, which exercises a moral pull stronger than the merely provisional ideological influence of the Communist state. Such a totality is *unknowable*, in the same way as Sartre's lived experience, but is all the more "real" for that, because thereby it becomes that which is brought to life only in acts of faith or belief, rather than requiring rational demonstrative proof, which necessarily presupposes its opposite, disproof, and hence is always in danger of slipping into partiality, if not outright falsehood.

It is not my contention that Havel's metaphysical conception of intellectual reflection typifies specifically the contemporary intellectual. However, I do contend that in his emphasis upon the priority of moral-existential over political choices and decisions, and upon the acknowledgement of the obligation of the intellectual towards the specificity of the situation as a *universal* obligation Havel may be regarded as representative. The contemporary intellectual is now humble in the face of the plurality of identities and worldviews visible in the everyday life of society.

Chapter Six

Symbolic Exchanges? The Intellectual in Everyday Life

'[W]e shouldn't attack the system negatively any more or critically take it to task for not giving us the cards to play with, because that seems to me entirely nostalgic and pessimistic-nihilistic...We have to transform it...[T]his kind of operation isn't exceptional; it isn't the preserve of theorists: you can try and do it in thought, but in my opinion people in their lives do it every day. It's the game of life.' (Jean Baudrillard, 1995: 92)

'Converse or Perish'

In *Legislators and Interpreters* (1987) Zygmunt Bauman identifies a change having taken place in the (self-)conception of the intellectual in the conditions of "postmodernity". This latter is characterised, in general terms, as referring to 'a distinct quality of intellectual climate, to a distinctly new meta-cultural stance, to a distinct self-awareness of the era.' (1987: 119) Central to the postmodern sense is a consciousness of the ending of what Bauman elsewhere calls 'the audacious dream of modernity' (1992: 179) - that is, a sense of the historically and culturally specific nature of the modernist "project" of imposing a universal order upon a spontaneous, chaotic Nature, and upon other societies and cultures, which in relation to the forces of modernity become part of Nature, as primitive and rudimentary in character. For Bauman, the modern(ist) state (the state being itself an essential constituent of modernity) was one modelled upon horticultural, therapeutic and architectural paradigms, seeking to manage Nature and natural spaces and phenomena in accord with universal principles of use, health and proportion. (1992: 178-179, 1987: ch.2) Postmodernity, on the other hand, constitutes, if not the "return" of Nature, at least an acknowledgement that modernity's confident elevation of itself above that which it sought to control and to dominate was largely illusory; that the self of modernity could not be easily separated out from the life of the other which was its object.

Modernity, as essentially managerial and interventionist, and as universalist in orientation, was, according to Bauman, predicated upon the unequal relationship-paradigm of tutor and tutee, leader and led. More particularly, with regard to the practice and status of intellectuals, it called upon the latter to assume a *legislative* social function, to deploy their accumulated knowledge and culture in such a way as to establish universal rules and criteria for the judgement of truth and beauty, in the process laying the grounds for their own authority and for the authority of those who can demonstrate their reflexive mastery of such rules and procedures. Thus, Bauman writes:

The typically modern strategy of intellectual work is one best characterised by the metaphor of the 'legislator' role. It consists of making authoritative statements which arbitrate in controversies of opinions and which select those opinions which, having been selected, become correct and binding. The authority to arbitrate is in this sense legitimized by superior (objective) knowledge to which intellectuals have a better access than the non-intellectual part of society. Access to such knowledge is better thanks to procedural rules which assure the attainment of truth, the arrival at valid moral judgement, and the selection of proper artistic taste. (1987: 4-5)

The legislative intellectuals' role was to legitimate the universalist modern order not by becoming ideologists - that is, purveyors of specific points-of-view, social or political orthodoxies which explicitly endorse the rule of the dominant class - but by securing the sovereignty of objective procedures and criteria, which enabled "correct and binding" choices to be made from amongst the various

versions of the truth. Such intellectuals, through their elaboration of universal Reason, provided the basis for the unification of politics, morality and culture. In each sphere, the rational, universalisable character of an action or phenomenon became the measure of its value.

The transition to postmodernity, however, and thus to the predominance of a new self-awareness on the part of societies and cultures – an awareness, indeed, of the plurality of forms of social and cultural life – has, according to Bauman, brought a new type of intellectual, a new intellectual function into being – the *interpreter*. For Bauman,

The typically post-modern strategy of intellectual work is one best characterized by the metaphor of the ‘interpreter’ role. It consists of translating statements, made within one communally based tradition, so that they can be understood within the system of knowledge based on another tradition. Instead of being orientated towards selecting the best social order, this strategy is aimed at facilitating communication between autonomous (sovereign) participants. (1987: 5)

In the interpretive role the intellectual is concerned above all with the act of *communication*, rather than tuition, with *facilitation*, rather than selection. In postmodern philosophical and social thought *community* is the ‘central concept.’ (1987: 145), according to such thought, there is no longer a singular “way things are”, or a social order towards which all should aspire and for which they should work, but rather, a *plurality* of communities and traditions, a differentiated set of social and cultural belongings and identities. Community ‘has come to replace

reason and universal truth, and the one method leading to both' (1987: 145) as that in which contemporary society seeks its meanings, and upon which intellectuals hope to find a foundation for their role. The new world, as represented in postmodern thought, 'is cut to human size, homely, cosy, comfortable like a family home. Like Marx's moths, we are attracted by the light of the candle on the family table once the universal sun fades.' (1987: 145)

This resurgence of domesticity within social and cultural thought finds its embodiment in the characteristic activity of interpretive intellectuals as outlined by Bauman. The task of such intellectuals is to deploy their specialist 'discursive skills' in order to enter into 'civilized conversation' with their counterparts rooted in other 'cultural traditions.' (1987: 143) It is up to these intellectuals now to apply themselves to the problems of translation across the divides of pluralism and socio-cultural specificity. Grouped together around their respective family tables, the intellectuals are called upon '[t]o talk to people rather than fight them', to draw upon the experiences and traditions of others, rather than shutting off the flow of ideas. (1987: 143) For 'the art of civilized conversation is something the pluralist world needs badly. It may neglect such art only at its peril. Converse or perish.' (1987: 143)

It is the intellectuals' own tradition, their specialisation in the ways and means of discursive exchange, which prepares them for such a task. But this recognition prompts a further recognition on the part of Bauman of a potential source of tension or conflict in the exercise of one or the other intellectual role. For intellectuals are members and participants both within their own community - that is, that of the intellectuals, professional practitioners of knowledge, *per se* - and within wider communities grouped around specific ethnic, cultural, sexual

identities, and the like. According to Bauman, in order to retain effectiveness acting as a member of these latter communities as an interpretive intellectual, it is the intellectuals' 'right', even their 'duty' (1987: 145) to maintain the legislative function with regard to their own tradition. 'While the postmodern strategy entails the abandonment of the universalistic ambitions of the intellectuals' own tradition, it does not abandon the universalistic ambitions of the intellectuals towards their own tradition.' (1987: 5) In the latter instance, intellectuals are obliged to secure 'the dominion of reason' and 'the survival of certainty' (1987: 145) on the basis of the demonstrative force of their work, which carries within it a universalising impetus. Outside of that work, however, outside of the fields of expertise, the disciplines, the professional community, the intellectuals act to foster a non-totalising discourse, do not seek to impose their ideas upon others, but act as *modest citizens*.

There is, therefore, a distinction to be made within the intellectuals' activity, between 'the intrinsic (intra-communal) and extrinsic (inter-communal) role of the intellectuals.' (1987: 146) The problem is, though, as Bauman acknowledges, where does one community begin and another end? How does one determine communal boundaries and thus determine the intellectual mode (legislative or interpretive) appropriate in any particular situation? Without the possibility of appealing to an independent authority with the powers of socio-cultural arbitration, such boundaries would seem only to be determinable through such legislative action as, so Bauman tells us, is appropriate in an *intra-communal* context. But in fixing limits the intellectual are also acting *inter-communally*,

because in so doing they are fixing limits for others *not* of the community. Intellectuals are thereby pre-empting judgement.

Thus, the distinction drawn between intrinsic and extrinsic activity, between the two roles of the intellectual as authority and citizen may in actuality be impossible to sustain, because the two faces of the intellectual - one turned inwards, towards the characteristic problems and procedures of his or her work, the other turned outwards, towards the world at large - are not in fact distinguishable. This is tacitly acknowledged within Bauman's argument, in that there the community which the intellectual may be said to be inside of (and thus in which he or she may fulfil a legislative function) seems to slip between the homogeneous community or tradition of the professional intellectuals, and an heterogeneous community of shared meanings and identity - a national, class or ethnic community, for instance.

As Bauman says, the boundaries of a community are difficult to locate, and this difficulty seems to extend into his own argument. This may be, one might say, because the specific cultural identity of the intellectual - his or her membership of a particular social group - is simultaneously the source or foundation for his or her identity as an intellectual, but is also that which he or she attempts to overcome in intellectual practice. The individual who *works* within a particular field, and the individual who *lives* in the outside world with others are inseparable.

A World of Difference

Such a statement, however, finds little agreement in the thought of Richard Rorty, to whose work I want now to turn. I choose to look at Rorty because he has made the question of the public status and social function (or the *lack* of both)

of the philosopher central to his thought, and in so doing, he continues the debate, in different terms, about the nature of the most appropriate mode of activity for the contemporary intellectual.

For Rorty, the function of the contemporary philosopher is most decidedly not public or social in character. In an essay on Foucault, he devises an answer for the latter to the questions "Where do you stand? What are your values?":

"I stand with you as a fellow-citizen, but as a philosopher, I stand off by myself, pursuing projects of self-invention which are none of your concern. I am not about to offer philosophical grounds for being on your side in public affairs, for my philosophical project is a private one which provides neither motive nor justification for my political actions." (1991: 198)

The trouble with Foucault, Rorty tells us, is that he succumbed to the temptation 'to find a public, political counterpart' (1991: 196) for his private search for autonomy. Instead, he should have attempted to separate one from the other, avoiding the effort to provide a universal political foundation for his private "projects of self-invention"

This emphasis upon separation, this rejection of a foundational role for philosophers echoes Bauman's distinction between citizen and professional. Moreover, in his assertion that 'we stop assuming the function of the intellectual is *radical* criticism of existing institutions' (1992: 5), Rorty endorses the declaration made by Baudrillard cited at the head of this chapter. Such a radical critique, according to Rorty, constitutes 'an unfortunate residue of the scientific conception of philosophy' (1991: 25), wherein philosophy is seen 'as penetrating to a reality behind contemporary appearances' (1991: 25). Intellectuals - and

especially intellectuals of the Left - have thus viewed philosophy as being essentially social and political in character, because its proper function is to yield certain knowledge of the functioning of society at its roots.

Over against this conception, Rorty situates the intellectual within the details of everyday life, within the private sphere of 'the different sorts of little things around which individuals or communities center their fantasies and their lives.' (1989: 93) Again, this insertion of the intellectual into the community takes up Bauman's emphasis upon the "civil" interpretive role of the intellectual. But Rorty's version has a more explicit existential or experiential emphasis than that of Bauman. The intellectual retains no legislative professional authority upon which his or her interpretive function can be built. Rather, the intellectual as envisaged by Rorty engages, in accord with Baudrillard, in "the game of life". His or her characteristic activity is strangely reminiscent of that of Sartre and Havel described in the last chapter; it is concerned not with illuminating a pre-existent reality but with deepening and widening the experience of the individual. The intellectual does not seek to uncover the existence of 'one general common reality' (1989: 94), which can provide the basis for a universal human identity, but seeks to describe, *both in his or her life and work*, a plurality of realities.

The Liberal Ironist

The scientific philosophy of the liberal-humanist culture of modernity is seen by Rorty as "metaphysical", insofar as it is predicated on the idea that there is a reality "out there" which exists independently of our attempts to describe it, and about which we seek to find the "truth". In his conception of a "post-philosophy", however, Rorty argues that science should give way to *literature* as that upon

which the philosophical enterprise should centre. Whereas the 'liberal metaphysician' of modernity looks to explain human behaviour by referring to a universal level of 'moral motivation - rationality, or the love of God, or the love of truth', the 'liberal ironist' is possessed only of a 'skill at imaginative identification', which enables him or her to describe and re-describe the plurality and variety of "little things" which give meaning to individual and communal lives (1989: 93) The ironist is a thoroughgoing textualist because he or she thinks of words as referring to nothing beyond themselves, and thus as infinitely open to rearrangement. Whereas the metaphysical thinkers of modernity try to make their scientific philosophical vocabularies stand as the foundations for social arrangements and political systems, the liberal ironist seeks to sensitise his or her own vocabulary to a plurality of other vocabularies in such a way as to enable him or her to notice suffering when it occurs, and to be aware and tolerant of differences (1989: 93)

Like Bauman, in the figure of the liberal ironist Rorty offers a modest, scaled-down conception of the intellectual's role. The ironist does not seek to perform a public function, legislating a rational social order into being, but instead, equipped with an ironic self-awareness of the contemporary intellectual's limitations, the fact that he or she has no access to a privileged "final vocabulary", enters into multiplicitous private conversations with other cultures and traditions. The philosopher has metamorphosed into the "literate" interpreter of often incommensurate private vocabularies; his or her task is not to make the world transparent to one and all but to complicate, to complexify our experience of that world by exposing it to a whole variety of different experiences. 'Within a liberal metaphysical culture', Rorty writes,

the disciplines which were charged with penetrating behind the many private appearances to the one general common reality - theology, science, philosophy - were the ones which were expected to bind human beings together, and thus to eliminate cruelty. Within an ironist culture, by contrast, it is the disciplines which specialize in thick description of the private and idiosyncratic which are assigned the job. In particular, novels and ethnographies which sensitize one to the pain of those who do not speak our language must do the job which demonstrations of a common human nature were supposed to do. (1989: 94)

In place of a penetrative scientific theory, which "liquidates the particularity" of its objects, Rorty elevates a multifarious cultural practice which respects the integrity of its objects, which allows them to retain their differentiated, irreducible character, and which thus erases the boundaries between self and other, subject and object. The narratives of an "ironist culture" are multi-layered and multi-dimensional, replete with a diversity of experience; as such, they are acts of *collective self-creation*

However, in describing such a practice of self-creation, Rorty makes clear that he is talking of an *ideal* liberal society, and points out that this might only be achieved on the back of minimum social, political and economic conditions. Such a society would be held together by a 'social glue' which consisted in 'little more than a consensus that the point of social organization is to let everybody have a chance at self-creation to the best of his or her abilities, and that that goal requires, beside peace and wealth, the standard "bourgeois freedoms".' (1989: 84)

Within the ideal liberal society would prevail the belief not in a metaphysical, transcendent guarantee for current social arrangements but a more modest, pragmatic and contingent awareness of their efficacy. Such a belief would be based on 'nothing more profound' than the evidence of history that 'something like the institutions of bourgeois liberal society' provide the most favourable context for people to go about their private business of self-creation. (1989: 84-85) People do not need intellectuals to perform a "public service" of criticism and justification, they do not need them to create grandiose conceptual or ideological systems which are able to explain all social phenomena. Bourgeois liberal society, for Rorty, has already developed institutional instruments and structures sufficient to the tasks of public life, understood as balancing competing requirements for economic and civil opportunities. What are needed in this respect are only suggestions for practical, concrete schemes and programmes towards which those institutional resources should be put. Innovative and creative activity, the questioning, ironic activity of the autonomous intellectual, in the ideal liberal society is re-located within the private sphere, but at the same time, paradoxically, becomes that which is a source of 'social hope', rather than providing the consolations of 'private perfection' (1989: 94) In this ideal society, the public, as the sphere of social and political legitimation, is no longer required, and it is the private which provides *collective, communal meanings*

Intellectuals and Sentiment

Rorty's identification of the social significance of private acts in one respect is consonant with Havel's notion of dissident activity. Indeed, in his article "The Intellectuals at the End of Socialism" (1992), Rorty writes very approvingly of

Havel's example in being prepared 'to go all the way in substituting groundless hope for theoretical insight', in 'emphasiz[ing] his lack of interest in underlying forces and historical trends.' (11) However, as in the case of Foucault, Rorty is perturbed by Havel's adherence to a quasi-Heideggerian ontological foundationalism, by his notion of existential revolution and his need for an unimaginable other. (1992: 15) In holding to these, Havel persists in the activity of radical critique, only substituting 'Heideggerian vacuity for Marxist vacuity' (1992: 15), and thus persists in interfering in what, as an intellectual, shouldn't concern him.

In considering the charge levelled at Havel of pursuing the metaphysical fallacy, however, one may raise the question of how he could have managed to act as he did without a foundation in a level of reality at least some way "above" the purely contingent. Furthermore, one may then go on to ask how sufficient continuing the "conversation of humankind" itself might be for providing a basis for even the sort of contingent, pragmatic action required to bring a more equitable, more decent liberal society into being.

These are questions which Rorty puts to himself, responding to objections that the "social glue" binding a society together necessarily needs a metaphysical "thickening agent" in order to provide itself with "moral motivation". (1989: 85) He answers these objections by pointing to the general irrelevance of systematic philosophical beliefs to the practical, everyday conduct of societies, as evinced in the decline of religion and religious viewpoints in the nineteenth-century. For Rorty, '[t]he idea that liberal societies are bound together by philosophical beliefs seems to me ludicrous. What binds societies together are common vocabularies and common hopes. The vocabularies are, typically, parasitic on the hopes.'

(1989: 86) Hence, what Rorty argues for is an idea of *sentiment* as central to the organisation and functioning of society. People do not need grand theoretical schemes to give them a *reason* to hope, or to care about the future of the society in which they live, such hope, according to Rorty, is the very substance of what it means to live and to give a meaning to living, as an individual and as a member of a particular community, within society. Hope does not need to be grounded because it itself constitutes the ground for the stories we create for ourselves about our lives.

The difficulties in privileging sentiment in such a way are manifest. Chief among these, and crucial with regard to this discussion, is, as Norman Geras points out, that sentiment is an unreliable variety of social cement, that its 'objects... can be very particular', and that exposure to the fact of the communality of sentiments (that different peoples, though they should be recognised as different, share the same hopes for their children, are liable to suffer humiliation, just as we are, when their differences aren't recognised) provides an insubstantial basis for *positive* 'moral and practical commitment' (1995: 98). It may be possible that feeling may supply us with the necessary basis for *identifying* with others - feeling ourselves attached to a particular community or tradition in and by which our individual lives are given greater experiential depth - and it may be the case that through specialising in "imaginative identification" intellectuals could become the purveyors of "social hope", making available the cultural resources for as wide a solidarity as humanly possible, though stopping short of humanity as a whole (see Geras, 1995: 76-77). However, it seems likely that in order to *act against* a dominant - an *exclusively* dominant - tradition - a tradition which represents itself as the inevitable product of history - it would be necessary for an individual to

step beyond the contingency of sentiment and to find a *reason* to act. Or better, it would be necessary for such an individual to become convinced, in the face usually of moral, legal and physical opposition, that they *must* act as they do. As with Gramsci and with Havel, contingent feeling is united in such instances with a universalist component sustained in reflection.

Rorty's avowed concern is with the functioning and potential of liberal societies specifically, and with the place of the intellectual in such societies. Moreover, insofar as he attempts to practise just the sort of pluralist interpretive intellectual activity that is so often recommended in his work, it may seem unfair to tax him with not trying to provide general moral or political formulations which are valid across a whole range of incommensurable traditions. For Rorty, after all, this should not be the affair of the liberal intellectual; like Havel, he believes that the trouble with intellectuals lies precisely in their attempt to prescribe universal solutions to concrete problems. Intellectuals should give up on their pretensions to curing social and political ills by means of scientific elixirs.

However, as I argued in the last chapter, Havel's attack on rationalist universalism was carried out on the basis of a higher, more comprehensive universalism, one ontological and religious in character. For Havel, like Rorty, the primary focus of the intellectual's activity should not be the public sphere, but for the former the intellectual's task was to provide an *alternative* foundation for civil life in a society in which the official public sphere reached down into all aspects of everyday life. For Rorty, on the other hand, the rejection of a foundational role for the intellectual in public life signifies the rejection of *any* foundational role. The public is not that which needs to be resisted but should simply be left to itself,

there is no need to provide alternatives because in its basic structure the liberal public sphere provides the institutional and conceptual wherewithal for an equitable society

The *universal* character of liberal society is revealed in the fact that it no longer has a viable alternative to itself *in toto*. The "superiority" of liberalism for Rorty resides not in its offering positive solutions to social and political problems but in its potential for providing a conceptual and institutional framework within which a *plurality* of alternative ways of life and of conceiving the world may be chosen and lived. This "fact" of liberalism's universalism is taken for granted by Rorty, and constitutes the foundation of his anti-foundationalism. The liberal intellectual's role need no longer be one of working in public to gain universal legitimacy for particular social or political arrangements because that "game" has already been played out, and won, in liberal democracies. To seek to find a justification for the activity of the intellectual in terms of a game all the moves in which have already been made is no more than mere nostalgia and repetition. The issue for Rorty is thus not so much about doing without the foundations for a just society, but rather recognising that we already have grounds sufficient to our social and political purposes. The task, then, becomes for him one of persuading intellectuals to give up their grand justificatory projects in order to focus upon the details of everyday private life.

Life Politics and Reflexivity

In the political sociology and social theory of Anthony Giddens and Alberto Melucci there has been an effort to identify a politics specific to complex

contemporary liberal societies, which focuses upon the centrality of a reflexive *politics of life* in such societies. The vocabulary, the specific cluster of meaningful terms, is different to that employed by Rorty, or by Bauman, but there is a commensurate concern with the specific place and function of reflexive consciousness in societies characterised by pluralism and a high degree of institutionalised reflexivity. The reference in the work of these theorists is not to a multiplicity of communities or traditions but to a plurality of *internally referential systems* (institutional and experiential in make-up) which compose individual and social life - moments of the simultaneously personal and social-structural elaboration of (and between) the self and society.

Giddens writes of the development within "late modernity" of the self's becoming a 'reflexive project' (1991: 215); the life of the individual is seen from this perspective, as it is by Rorty, as a *narrative* to be constructed, a story to be told by the individual in and through the socially available identifications he or she chooses. The extension of "abstract systems", systems of socially structured and/or institutionally organised knowledge, into areas of life formerly beyond such systems has made them now subject to social control and intervention. The external "facts" of Nature - the natural environment, animal and human biology, human psychology - have been incorporated into internally referential systems. The managerial interventionism which Bauman considers characteristic of the modernist reflexive or intellectual mode, adverted to above, for Giddens has been extended to all areas of what becomes only nominally "personal" life. Such life can no longer be unequivocally regarded as ours alone, the repository of an authentic self. The boundaries between personality and impersonality, between social and individual action have dissolved. Or rather, these boundaries are now

seen as fluid and as fixed by self-reflexive (and hence also socially reflexive) decisions.

Like critics of mass society such as those of the Frankfurt School, Giddens identifies the dangers of increased anomie and of an increasingly centralised control over all aspects of individual lives as consequent upon the extension of internally referential systems. (1991: 224) There is the potential within late modernity for the *hyper-socialisation* of the individual self, whereby that self becomes little more than the reflex of forces beyond itself, and in the process of self-identity in fact perpetuates *self-domination*. However, the expansion of institutional-systemic structures and centralising forces across the whole terrain of personal and social life is seen as a two-way process, opening the way for new opportunities for action on the part of individuals. Thus, for Melucci, mass education and the wholesale introduction of civil and political rights, rather than simply leading to the incorporation of individuals into the dominant culture, or securing the unchallengeable domination of elite politics and ideologies, have led to new possibilities for social and political action. (1989: 113) Giddens writes of the 'globalising influences [which] intrude deeply into the reflexive project of the self' (1991: 214) as thereby connecting the person and the planet - events which take place, and conditions which inhere, at one level have an effect upon, and a significance for, events and conditions at the other. Power, *a la* Foucault, is seen by Giddens to be *generative*, not merely the exercise of domination of masses by an elite group but the very means by which all groups, all members of a society create meanings for themselves.

In the contemporary reflexive order, in which the production and reproduction of the social order is dependent upon reflexive activity, self and society are

interdependent, and both become subject to *choice*. One can choose the sort of life one leads according to the sort of person one judges oneself to be from amongst the repertoire of socially available identities; or, in Rortean terms, one can sort amongst the multiplicity of vocabularies current within society in order to increase one's imaginative capacity, and thus to create one's individuality.

However, this scenario of choice is also dependent upon the establishment of boundaries or limits between the self and the social world. If we are now capable of choosing, of actualising ourselves, we are also in danger of being swamped by rapidly changing conditions and experiences. It is, therefore, necessary to ensure a *continuity* of identity, of life-narrative. Melucci writes of '[t]he fragile hinge between inner and outer', the individual's reflexive capacity, which acts as 'the meeting point between the internal and external signals that the individual must decode in order to situate him- or herself in relation to changes within that individual and in his or her interactions with the world' (1989: 117). It is the *individual* who sets his or her own boundary between inner and outer experience, who acts as his or her own "gatekeeper", in order to ensure the continuity and coherence of '[t]he narrative of self-identity' in 'rapidly changing circumstances on a local and global scale' (Giddens, 1991: 215).

The fixing and reflexive sustenance of boundaries and divisions between different sectors of experience constitutes an intrinsic part of what Giddens terms "life politics". The politics of life is concerned with the conditions that enable us to make choices within our everyday lives. However, for both Giddens and Melucci, the sphere of life-choices which such a politics seeks to expand and enable is *moral-existential* in character. Giddens speaks of the era of life politics

as that which sees the 'return of the institutionally repressed', and as marked by the 'remoralising of social life.' (1991: 224) Melucci writes of the limits of conventional institutional politics and identifies an essentially existential space in which are present 'structures and interests which precede, delimit and condition politics' (1989: 167). It is within this space that the "rights of everyday life", rights to autonomy 'relating to space, time, birth and death' (1989: 173), can be identified, and the freedom to *be* and the right to *difference* (1989: 177-178) reflexively guaranteed. It is thus this space which is the sphere of life-political action: action which enables individuals to guarantee an autonomous space within their selves and lives which is free from external necessities and pressures, and which, in turn, situates the preservation of such freedom at the heart of social life.

Social Movements and the Intellectual

In their re-introduction of a moral-existential dimension into politics and society, their general conception of reflexive practice as existentially- and morally-directed, Giddens and Melucci articulate in sociological terms a concern with the sphere of "fundamental ends" and "core values" which has been articulated in the discourse of the intellectual. This connection is made more explicit, in terms of the intellectual in relation to so-called "new social movements", in the work of Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison. I will come to some of this work below, but first I want to consider social movements from the perspective of their knowledge practice.

The new social movements - the green and women's movements, those centred upon issues of race and sexuality - are often characterised as being concerned with

"making the personal political", that is, in less sloganeering fashion, with elaborating a politics of everyday life. They articulate "qualitative", "post-material", rather than simply "quantitative" concerns, and are typically gathered around issues of identity and choice, and the creation of an alternative life-politics. They incorporate 'everyday cultural and personal as well as material concerns' (Boggs, 1986: 47) within their political purview. Insofar as they try to articulate the personal and impersonal aspects of social life, the new movements are centred upon the moral-existential implications and ends of politics, and upon the relationship between experience and knowledge.

As examples of this latter emphasis, one may look to the focus within the green and women's movements upon questions of knowledge, of consciousness, and upon producing kinds of knowledge based upon experiences hitherto ignored or not valued. For its part, the green movement has often affirmed intuitive, even mystical modes of understanding as either a necessary supplement to, if not a replacement for, a too rule-bound, instrumentalist scientific rationality. And feminists have taken the latter to task for its pretension to a fundamentally patriarchal omniscience, its representation of itself as wholly disengaged and thus as originating nowhere, rather than somewhere, as unlocalisable, rather than situated, as disembodied, rather than embodied in a specific community's experience and understanding of the world (see Haraway, 1988).

For Hilary Wainwright, the epistemological innovation which has taken place within such social movements constitutes a large part of their significance, and provides the basis for, and necessitates further elaboration of, a *politics of knowledge*. She writes 'social movement activists, in much of their more innovative practice, have pioneered an approach to knowledge which, like Hayek,

appreciates its practical and tacit aspects but, unlike Hayek, treats these and its theoretical aspects as social products' (1994: 13). These tacit and practical aspects of knowledge, those elements of knowledge attached to 'the particular circumstance of time and place' (Hayek, 1949: 80), the 'personal' dimensions of knowledge (Polanyi, 1967: 20), for Hayek demonstrated the limitations of a scientific objectivity which arrogated to itself the capacity to explain and to make clear all social, and especially economic, phenomena. Within the sphere of the economy, individuals showed themselves as able to act, and to act correctly, with only the partial and practical knowledge peculiar to the specific circumstances of time and place. (1949: 86) To act effectively, one did not need to aspire to a total knowledge of society and its functioning but only exploit one's practical knowledge of one's situation.

Within social movements, according to Wainwright, there has been an emphasis upon the experiential, necessarily situated character of knowledge which is similar to that of Hayek. "Informal" and affective modes of understanding, such as intuition and kinds of awareness issuing from a felt sense of identity, previously relegated to the realm of the merely "subjective", for Wainwright are recognised and valued as legitimate sources of knowledge within social movement practice. However, unlike Hayek, rather than seeing this recognition of the situatedness of knowledge as invalidating a knowledge *of* society, knowledge practice within social movements preserves the possibility of an experiential, "subjective" knowledge which is simultaneously theoretical and "objective". The challenge for a politics of knowledge based upon the experience of social movements is not to sink into an extreme individualism which entails calling off the search for a *social* account of social phenomena but to develop a pluralistic, differentiated and

practical, but still fundamentally collectivist, theory of society and its functioning. If, for Wainwright, 'the existence of different forms of being requires different kinds of knowing' (1994: 104), that pluralistic state of affairs does not negate the objective validity of each of the latter, for each is objective *in relation to* the various forms of the former.

Wainwright's conception of a politics of knowledge deriving from social movement knowledge practice in many respects continues the concerns and the theoretical-methodological aspirations of Mannheim's sociology of knowledge. As seen in the opening chapter, Mannheim attempted to articulate a sociology - a cultural sociology - that incorporated the particularity and partiality of experiential modes of understanding into a synthetic-structural mode of thought. For Mannheim, experience was already theoretical, and thus at least potentially generalisable. Informal knowledge - incomplete knowledge - could provide the basis for a new kind of synthetic objectivity which was objective to the degree that it acknowledged its relational character and reflected partiality back into itself.

However, though Mannheim (and Scheler) acknowledged the legitimacy, the productive character of "non-rational", practical, situated modes of thought (*Weltanschauungen*, ideologies) as that upon which a sociology could be built, he still treated them as that which had to be overcome. The intellectual-as-social-scientist, as dynamic synthesist, was the figure assigned to this task. But ultimately this resulted in the splitting off of theory, or, the level of theory (that is, social science) from the level of practice. It was Mannheim's intention to get beyond the Marxist idea of politics as "preparation for insurrection", as

necessarily activist, but in the process he ended up presenting a synthetic and distanced political science as the only legitimate form of political practice.

In contrast to Mannheim sociology, Wainwright's politics of knowledge is not intended as a synthesis within a scientific consciousness of experiential and situated knowledges but is seen as elaborated within the collective political practice of specific social activists. Moreover, Wainwright does not make the intellectual *per se* - that is, as a distinct social identity - central to her conception of knowledge politics. But, in her discussion of the women's movement she does situate feminist activists within the context of the tradition of the intellectual: '[t]he women's movement, especially in the West, is in an historically rare position: the majority of its activists combine the position of being part of the intelligentsia, with the tools and confidence for public critical reasoning, *and* being themselves part of an oppressed group.' (1994: 138)

One of the strengths of the women's movement, according to this account, is that in it there is no longer a "gap" of representation between the individual who suffers and the individual who protests; the individual who experiences and the individual who thinks are one and the same. Thus, the intellectual fulfils the criteria expressed in the Foucauldian conception discussed in the previous chapter, she (most definitely a "she") is specifically situated as a member of an identifiable social group with a very real experience of social struggle, and has found a voice for herself which enables her to speak from and about that experience. Unlike the peasants of Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire*, the women who participate in the women's movement no longer have to be represented but represent themselves theoretically and organisationally. Their modes of life and thought are identical.

Cognitive Praxis

In their work on social movements, largely concerned with the green movement, Eyerman and Jamison, like Wainwright, also place movement activists within the context of the tradition of the intellectual. They are, however, more directly concerned with re-inventing the intellectual identity as a type of key social actor. They make the creation of intellectuals a core activity of the new social movements, drawing upon Melucci's and Giddens' ideas about the reflexive formation of social identities, and Habermas' conception of knowledge interests.

Eyerman and Jamison originate the concept of "cognitive praxis" to describe the reflexive activity carried on within social movements. Like Wainwright's politics of knowledge, this is seen as a process whereby activists produce knowledges, ideas and ideals, and forms of consciousness through their participation in movements. For Eyerman and Jamison, this process constitutes the key significance of social movements: 'it is our claim that a social movement *is* its cognitive praxis, that is what distinguishes one movement from another, but also, and more importantly, what gives a social movement its significance for broader social processes (1991: 54). The social movements, as 'temporary public spaces' (1991: 4), are places where new norms and new identities arising from particular collective experiences (primarily experiences of oppression) can be tried out and contested over.

Such an idea of the social movement is in accord with a Habermasian conception of the public sphere as an institutional and quasi-institutional space where specific knowledge interests are articulated for the purpose of achieving legitimacy. One may also compare Eyerman's and Jamison's idea of the social

movement as a 'cognitive territory' (1991: 55) with Bauman's notion of the intellectual as a 'spot' on the social terrain (1987: 19) where an identity is located, for dominion over which a variety of individuals and groups compete. The social movement is important as a public space where 'everyday' and 'professional' knowledges (1991: 52) are brought together, through cognitive praxis, in dialectical relation. It is the intellectuals who, 'as historical actors,...make visible' that praxis (1991: 44) That is to say, it is the intellectuals who work within the spaces opened up for them by movements, by exploiting the opportunities which become available for new roles and identities, thereby giving *existential* (personal-biographical) substance and force to the "deep-structural" (1991: 44) extra-personal cognitive currents - or, in Habermasian terms, knowledge interests (1991: 54, 68-69) - active within a movement.

In this conception of the intellectual's role in the social movement Eyerman and Jamison relate closely to Mills' vision of the sociological intellectual as formulated in *The Sociological Imagination*, which, as we saw in chapter four, depicted the intellectual as self-consciously connecting macro- and micro-levels of sociological analysis, as uniting the psychological and the social in his or her work. Indeed, Eyerman and Jamison refer to the Millsian task of turning private troubles into public issues as a central function of social movement intellectuals (1991: 56) Furthermore, in making reference to the origins of their own political and intellectual motivations in the '60s student movement, they write of their desire to play the part of 'partisan theorists', public intellectuals in the Millsian mould (1991: 8), and make such personal experience and desire a key determinant in their configuration of the social movement intellectual. For the social movement does not come spontaneously into existence, the two authors tell us, but is

dependent upon the wills, expressed in commitment and motivation, to bring it into being. (1991: 56)

In a later work, Eyerman writes of the three-dimensional constitution of the intellectual as the self-referential element of subjective reflection mediating between deep-structuring and surface processes realised in cognitive and institutional forms and practices. (1994: 20) The intellectual becomes in this account one who articulates the two levels by realising and re-inventing his or her identity as simultaneously private and public, individual and collective. In this respect, the movement intellectual is the contemporary (re-)enactment of this concurrently psychological and social process. Hence, for Eyerman and Jamison, such intellectuals 'are movement intellectuals because they create their individual role at the same time as they create the movement, as new individual identities and a new collective identity take form in the same interactive process.' (1991: 98)¹

The Organic Intellectual Re-visited

The intermediary character of the activist movement intellectual refers us back to Gramsci's organic intellectual, who, as shown in chapter three, was conceived as articulating the masses and an élite, specific experiences and practices and deeper historical trends, as conjoining spontaneous and revolutionary

¹ In *Disarming Patriarchy* (1995), Sasha Roseneil has taken the concept of cognitive praxis, as the reflexive process of the formation of identities within social movements, and applied it to the experience of women at the Greenham Common peace camp. According to Roseneil, the camp provided an alternative public space in which 'new forms of consciousness and new identities' (2) could surface and flourish. From examining women's experiences of a life of protest at the camp, Roseneil identifies those new forms of consciousness and identity as 'both the medium and the outcome of feminist politics.' (136) In this way, the personal (one's identity) becomes the public end of one's activity as the elaboration of the individual identity itself becomes a public collective-political process.

It is worth pointing out that Roseneil also quotes approvingly from Mills' *The Sociological Imagination* at the beginning of her work, and stresses the central methodological importance of personal experience to sociological work.

consciousnesses. The organic intellectual - or, rather, the creation of the organic intellectual - performs the articulating function objectively *and* subjectively - that is, such an intellectual *makes* the link through his or her organisational and agitational activity, and *is* that articulation, in his or her social existence and identity. From this perspective, therefore, the organic intellectual may be seen as a precursor to the type of movement intellectual as described by Eyerman and Jamison - the creation of his or her individual identity is simultaneously, as part of the same "interactive process", work towards the origination of a broader, collective identity. The organic intellectual's individual knowledge practice, reverting to the term employed by Wainwright, is necessarily a politics of knowledge, because it is constituted by, and constituent of, collective knowledge interests.

The distinction made between "old" social movements, specifically the workers' movement, concerned with the material issues of production and the redistribution of wealth, and the new movements fixed upon qualitative, post-material concerns for Eyerman and Jamison necessitates drawing an additional distinction, between types of movement intellectual. This latter distinction revolves around the relationship between intellectuals and masses. The labour movement spawned and was the preserve of the 'partisan intellectual [who] as ideologist and teacher often played the role of gatekeeper, deciding what was relevant for discussion and who was competent to participate.' (1991: 113) Such an intellectual, according to Eyerman and Jamison, took on a leaderly function, seeing it as his or her task, upon the basis of privileged insight gained from a grounding in high culture, to enlighten and lead "blind" social forces.' (1991: 113) As such, he or she was a type of "universal" intellectual, as described by Foucault.

Gramsci's significance, from this point-of-view, in originating the organic intellectual, lay in detaching critical thinking from its association with particular groups and, in theory, at least, making it 'open to all.' (1991: 111) The organic intellectual was - or, would be - both the product of this process, and the process itself. Eyerman and Jamison, in their conception of the cognitive praxis of the movement intellectual, take this process of opening up critical thought further. They seek 'to "translate" [Gramsci's] terms into the more general language of sociology' (1991: 95), thereby going beyond the specifically *class* genesis, context and identity of the organic intellectual, and detaching critical cognitive praxis from a purely Marxist conception of its functioning. New movement intellectuals are formed on a different basis to the partisan intellectuals of the labour movement - they come into being on a certain "cognitive territory", rather than the terrain of class struggle, and articulate structural knowledge interests, rather than being the representatives of collective material interests in the cultural and ideological spheres. In this way, Eyerman and Jamison may be seen as situated within the tradition of Mannheim's sociology of knowledge (and more obliquely that of Critical Theory) which attempted to preserve Marxism's emphasis upon the materiality of ideas and cultural formations such as identities without retaining what was considered to be the reductive logic of class analysis.

There is no longer the intention of securing the universal hegemony of the working-class in the creation of the intellectuals of the new social movements; these new organic intellectuals are more modest and (self-)limited in their competence and the scope of their aspirations. These intellectuals elaborate certain specific meanings (in Rortean parlance, speak certain vocabularies) for particular groups or communities. Their role is specialised and often provisional,

coming into being for a while to occupy the social space opened up for - and by - them. (1991: 113, 98) It is the movement, according to Eyerman and Jamison, which as a newly accessible terrain of identities and meanings 'lead[s] and direct[s] intellectuals' (1991: 99), rather than the other way round. Echoing Melucci's assertion concerning the levelling and empowering effects of the spread of education, Eyerman and Jamison claim that the 'gap between the educated leaders and the "masses" has been significantly diminished, and the claim to privileged insight on the basis of a higher cultural understanding is, justifiably, regarded with skepticism if not totally discredited as "ideology".' (1991: 114)

Contemporary social movements may in fact be regarded as 'largely movements of intellectuals', though, paraphrasing Gramsci, the authors also proclaim that while all activists may be regarded as intellectuals, they do not all have 'the function of intellectuals in social movements.' (1991: 114, 94) Following Gramsci, therefore, the intellectual is regarded by Eyerman and Jamison as a *situated social practice*, that is, as a fundamental human capacity manifested and enacted in a specific social identity existing in a systems of relations with other such identities. However, the conception of the society and its system of relations in which the intellectual is situated has now altered; that society is now considered to be fundamentally *pluralistic* in character, and constitutionally resistant to - or perhaps, intolerant of - universalisation. Contemporary society is thus seen as consisting of a multiplicity of co-existing communities and groups, each with its own traditions and interests, for which intellectuals, as spokespersons, organisers, publicists, perform tasks of interpretation and facilitation of respective meanings and identities. It is a society

which, as in Rorty and in Bauman (and for that matter, as in Mannheim), is essentially *liberal* in nature.

The Corporatism of the Universal

The examples taken so far of contemporary configurations of the intellectual exhibit a dual movement: i) the dissolution of the boundary between specific social and moral experience and the domain of reflection, and ii) the fixing of limits upon the range and capacity of intellectual action. These two dimensions are intimately connected: being of a specific "community of meaning", enacting and enunciating particular meanings, uniting the cognitive with the affective, such intellectuals are grounded in specificity and can no longer entertain notions of universalism, or "fantasies" of representing all of society, enabling its total self-apprehension. The interpretive intellectual (the ironic intellectual) enables communities and traditions to understand something of one another, to be able to live together in a state of mutual tolerance without seeking to subsume one another under one dominant set of meanings, or socio-political paradigm.

However, Pierre Bourdieu offers an in many ways different version of the contemporary intellectual. His is a sociological - or, 'realist' (Karabel, 1996: 206) - account, but one which has retained a significant normative dimension. Bourdieu makes use of a 'conceptual toolbox' (Ross, 1990: 206) of theoretical and analytical categories and concepts derived from Marxism, but the economic character of the latter is translated into more specifically cultural terms. (Fagleton, 1992: 120-121) Thus, the key term in Bourdieu's analysis of the intellectual is *cultural capital*, conceived as comprising the means and mode of cultural

production which constitutes the basis and context for intellectual activity. For Bourdieu, therefore, cultural activity - production and consumption - shares the *class* character of economic activity, with capital in the cultural sphere disposed in order to yield "symbolic profits" for those who control it. Economic production and cultural reproduction are moments within the same historical-materialist movement.

On the strength of this class analysis of culture, George Ross draws a comparison between Bourdieu's perspective and that of the Frankfurt School (1990: 224, fn.30). For Ross, in Bourdieu there is the same 'pessimism', the same 'eternalization of domination' (1990: 224, fn.30) as found in the Critical Theorists. He writes: 'Bourdieu's class analytical model is one of deep pessimism about change. What characterizes "reproduction" over time, to Bourdieu, is that the upper classes always win.' (1990: 225, fn.46) Like the Frankfurt School, Bourdieu's cultural materialism is redolent of Marxism, but without supplying the possibility for agency, the motor for change. Hence, Bourdieu is in the train of Western Marxism - characterised by pessimism, exhibiting the "hallmark of defeat", as identified by Perry Anderson. By transplanting the economic into the cultural, class domination in the one is transported, is extended and magnified into the other. Creativity, the possibilities for a choice of life-narratives, the opening up of possibilities for new identities, for alternative public spaces - all such moves, according to this account, merely confirm existing domination.

Bourdieu's work *Distinction*, published in France in 1979, appears to confirm the above account of his position. According to Ross, it is in this text that Bourdieu's 'affinity' with the Critical Theorists 'is most obvious' (1990: 224, fn 30). Thus, there he writes of the counter-cultural lifestyles of the young and of

the predominant "fun ethic" of the petite bourgeoisie as 'a practical utopianism which was...[once] the privilege of intellectuals, and as 'a sort of dream of social flying, a desperate effort to defy the gravity of the social field.' (1984: 370) This is lifestylism in the most pejorative sense. The 'new intellectuals' of the petite bourgeoisie is seen as indulging itself in a cod bohemianism, 'inventing an art of living which provides them with the gratifications and prestige of the intellectual at the least cost.' (1984: 370) In effect, they adopt poses, postures, superficial forms of what was once an integral intellectual identity and practice - 'the distinctive poses, the distinctive games and other external signs of inner riches previously reserved for the intellectuals.' (1984: 371) The adoption of the fun ethic, defined as the refusal of the 'finite, definite, final' (1984: 370) (as in Rorty) and as the rejection of the ready-made and the predetermined in favour of the "liberatory" circulation of values and meanings, results in the perfection of consumption, and hence the reproduction of the economic order.

For Bourdieu, lifestylism breaks down experiential boundaries and structures built up *collectively* (such structures as were the concern of Gramsci and Thompson) as the foundations of political and ethical identities, and leaves behind isolated consumers 'free (or forced) to confront in extended order the separate markets.' (1984: 371) The "new intellectuals'" rejection of hierarchical classificatory systems (of knowledge, particularly) (1984: 370) dissolves the boundary between everyday life and intellectual activity (public reflection upon core values, modes of life, dominant systems of ideas and beliefs) and opens the way to the complete penetration of both by commercial forces.

Bruce Robbins sees in this analysis of lifestylism and consumer culture a hostility to and rejection of the pluralisation and democratisation of culture. Robbins argues in *Secular Vocations* (1993) for the public-political relevance of the discipline of cultural studies as rooted in the value of popular culture and forms of experience. The pessimistic scenario offered by Bourdieu, according to Robbins, is founded upon universal, homogenising cultural capital, which reduces all moves in the social-cultural "game" to being determined by *interest* - an interest in increasing the stock of such capital. For Robbins, however,

The threat to cultural capital posed by cultural studies is clear. For Bourdieu, culture is necessarily empty of any popular or democratic input. Its contents are arbitrary, fixed in advance by the state, and ruled only by the dominant class to win at the "main social games" and thus maintain its privileges (1993: 208)

Because cultural studies credits cultural producers (especially popular cultural producers) with the competence - the *agency* - to engage in "symbolic exchanges" and thereby create "surplus value" (of meaning, of legitimacy, of symbolic power) (Baudrillard, 1995: 82) which they can themselves appropriate, it undermines the notion of an all-encompassing, "eternalising" domination on the part of the state. However, precisely because Bourdieu's analysis is *statist*, according to Robbins, it seeks to subvert the credibility of cultural studies as expressive of cultural-political radicalism. Cultural studies becomes 'a form of populism' (Eagleton, 1992: 119), which is seen by Bourdieu as 'inverted ethnocentrism' (1984: 374), that is, no more than a conservative mystificatory strategy which elevates the particular and local to the status of the universal and global.

According to Robbins, Bourdieu dismisses the legitimization of intellectual practice on the basis of "the people" as the utilisation of so much cultural capital at the same time as himself drawing upon 'the limitless credit of the state' (1993: 208) and thereby trumping one authority with another. Bourdieu's pessimistic view of contemporary cultural radicalism involves raising the state to the status of 'a superhuman power' (1993: 209) and in the process legitimates in perpetuity his *own* project of intellectual opposition to it. Bourdieu's pessimistic universalisation confirms itself and the loss of that agency and efficacy which the contemporary intellectual, as cultural activist, claims for cultural producers.

However, recent work - and *activity* - by Bourdieu adds more to the narrative of outright pessimism offered by Ross and Robbins. That work also shows Bourdieu attempting to re-formulate the statist, universalist conception of the intellectual as identified by Robbins, affirming as he does a dialectic operating in intellectual practice between "modesty" and "ambition", the particular and the universal. Whereas the dissolution of the boundary between the public and the profession ('There can be no clear border...between speaking to ourselves and speaking to others' (1993: 88-89)) for Robbins leads to a self-limited conception of the intellectual - the professional ("secular") practitioner adhering to the public value of his or her practice -, the *maintenance* of the separation between the autonomous field of the intellectual and the heteronomous forces pressing upon it (1996: 346-348) for Bourdieu provides the foundation for action *outside* of that field. It is the *autonomy* of the cultural producer in his or her own field that lays the basis for efficacy in other fields.

In his analysis of contemporary intellectual practice, Robbins constructs a paradigm of *universal corporatism* according to which contemporary professionalism offers the possibility of superseding the established oppositions between interest and disinterest, private and public, inside and outside in the various fields of knowledge practice. It is no longer possible to see a stark opposition between the universal state and corporate professions: '[b]oth state and profession are sedimented composites of past social forces, democratic and anti-democratic, which the same forces continue to shape and reshape.' (1993: 218) Specific fields of knowledge seek to articulate private and public interest in much the same way as does the state.

For his part, Bourdieu offers up the possibility of a *corporatism of the universal*. This is understood as residing in the intellectuals' aspiration for autonomy to defend their own interests, to resist the heteronomous forces of commerce, becoming a defence of the universal interest. For Bourdieu, the 'antinomy' 'between autonomy and commitment, between pure culture and politics' (1996: 340) is precisely that which the intellectual tries to overcome, is that which *makes* the intellectual. He proposes that the appearance of the possibility of 'a *politics of purity*' (1996: 342) was coterminous with the appearance of the intellectuals themselves. That is to say, at that point (identified by Bourdieu with Zola's intervention in the Dreyfus Affair (1996: 342) there appeared the possibility of making political interventions on the basis of the "pure" cultural field which conferred upon the intellectual an authority purified of all external interests.

After C. Wright Mills and William James, Bourdieu talks of the potential available at the present time for the formation of an '*Internationale of*

intellectuals' (1996: 344) which would constitute a collective mobilisation of intellectuals to take control of the means of cultural production. Thus, he writes in conclusion:

Cultural producers will not find again a place of their own in the social world unless... they agree to work collectively for the defence of their own interests. This should lead them to assert themselves as an international power of criticism and watchfulness, or even of proposals, in the face of the technocrats, or - with an ambition both more lofty and more realistic, and hence limited to their own sphere - to get involved in rational action to defend the economic and social conditions of the autonomy of these socially privileged universes in which the material and intellectual instruments of what we call Reason are produced and reproduced. (1996: 348)

Again, it is the limits and boundaries of intellectual action which provide the grounds for action *beyond* them ("an ambition both more lofty and more realistic"). To the *raison d'état* is counterposed the '*Realpolitik of reason*' (1996: 348) After the *philosophes*, as conceived by Gramsci, after Zola, and most importantly, after Sartre, the universalising, autonomous, pure character of rational practice supplies the foundation for impure activities. To mind one's own rational business - as specialist, as expert, as cultural producer - is to mind everyone else's business.

Professionals and Intellectuals

The distinction between the notions of cultural production proposed by Robbins and Bourdieu may be seen to be less analytical and methodological in nature, and more a matter of *attitude and tradition*, those areas in which the intellectual principally is constituted. Each rejects an absolute opposition between purity and impurity, engagement and detachment, closeness and distance. Thus, for Robbins, disembodied theory in actuality embodies the eye of the public already placed within a discipline (1993: 107), and for Bourdieu, the purity of culture constitutes its very material, very impure embodiment. However, there is a difference between these two in that Robbins and Bourdieu offer "alternative historical narratives" of the intellectual – narratives which give present form to specific traditions of a national, political and conceptual character, and which provide the contextual foundations for certain kinds of identity and practice.

The key division between these alternative narratives revolves around the respective attitudes taken towards the place of the *state* in Left political culture, and towards the relationship between the state and the professions. As such, the division between Bourdieu and Robbins with regard to the contemporary identity and practice of the intellectual exemplifies 'the current debates between modernists and postmodernists' written of by Nicholas Garnham (1995: 365), which are concerned not only with determining just which particular paradigm of the intellectual should be subscribed to in present circumstances but whether the intellectual as a category of cultural-political actor is any longer of any relevance at all.

In making a comparison between Left culture in the United States and in Britain, Robbins refers to 'the lack of an American counterpart to that positive faith in the State...[found in] the British' (1993: 213) This faith, one may say, may also be found in French Left culture. According to Robbins, in the United States professionalism became relatively more important and gained a firmer hold because there the state (the administrative apparatus) developed relatively late, thus allowing corporate groups to seize the opportunities to organise production and take control of the economic sphere. (1993: 214) (One may draw an interesting contrast here with the development of the Russian intelligentsia, as described in the previous chapter, which sought to clear a space for itself free from state regulation and intrusion)

One can think here again of C. Wright Mills. Mills persistently argued for the assumption of responsibility by members of the social-science professions. As seen in chapter four, *The Sociological Imagination* centred on the task of turning academic-professional practice into *craftsmanship*, construed as a labour of personal or biographical investment in one's work, and thus giving it, paradoxically, public relevance and value. Mills sought the integration of the public person - that is, the person who participates in the everyday life of the polis and society - and the member of the corporate or professional body.

I have already written of Eyerman's and Jamison's attempt, in the form of a *partisan professionalism*, to perform the task identified by Mills, and one can count them among the '60s legatees of Mills' 'alternative professionalism.' (Eyerman and Jamison, 1994: 17) In his account of a publicly relevant professionalism, Robbins also places the struggle of American student radicals in this Millsian frame, claiming that 'the institutional and ideological structure of the

professions was not simply and ironically what the radicals of the 1960s were fighting against, but also a major influence in defining what they were fighting *for*.' (1993: 53) Rather than being a "Fall" from disinterested political commitment into compromised institutionalisation, Robbins sees the story of professionalism as a more complicated tale of the repeated attempt to synthesise the two.

Robbins points to the example of the development of feminist literary studies as just such a case in point: that development has not been a history of transformation from "pure" commitment to an "impure" institutional placement but rather, in the words of Jane Gallop, 'an ongoing history of divided loyalties' (cited 1993: 53). And elsewhere Gallop elaborates on this point: 'Again and again [from the earliest days of feminist criticism] the academic feminist critic... strive[s] for a synthesis of feminism and intrinsic literary study, trying to resolve a conflict between her feminist identity and her institutional identity, between valuing women and valuing literature.' (1992: 88) One may find in this an echo of Hilary Wainwright's earlier quoted comment that feminists are simultaneously an oppressed group *and* its intellectuals, suggesting that in the identity of the feminist activist experience and reflection, thought and action come together – that, in fact, that identity is itself the dialectical elaboration of the unity of theory and practice

However, in her conception of feminism and of the women's movement as a social and political movement Wainwright presupposes the existence of a "classic" modern public realm of political discourses and institutional bodies and practices which exists independent of the specific instances out of which it is composed. Her purpose is the transformation of "governmentality" by bringing the public

sphere of governmental politics closer to the experience of situated social groups and 'the institutions of everyday life.' (1994: 273) Gallop's concern, on the other hand, is with the nature of professionalism as embodied in academic feminism, as that in which the conventional distinction or opposition between the inside of the profession and the outside of the public is inappropriate. The feminist literary professional, according to this view, has a 'double view-point' as an academic *and* as a feminist, has a 'contradictory identity' in which the other of the professional is itself. (1992: 90) But whereas in Sartre such self-division signified the recognition of the limits of the professional identity which simultaneously called for its (self-)transcendence, here it signifies the confirmation of the limits of the professional as that beyond which one can not venture. The professional now includes the *non-professional* within itself and thus constitutes the limit of both.

It is such a conception of a contradictory professionalism that has underpinned more broadly the academic activist strategy of "political correctness", which grew up on American campuses particularly during the 1980s, and which may be thought of as a strategy of the partisan professional. Though it is difficult to place it under one heading or paradigm (something, moreover, I would be reluctant to do, in view of the fact that hostile commentators often resort to reductionist representations for their own purposes) political correctness in general represents an attempt to bring issues of race, gender and sexuality (and to a lesser extent, class) into the classroom by way of curricular and pedagogical reform, and policy proposals which address issues of social exclusion on campuses more generally. As such, it can be seen as anti-Weberian in its tendency to politicise the classroom and to tip the scales of debate (and tuition) in favour of the most disadvantaged social groups. The dissolution of boundaries between the plurality of social

subjectivities – “subject positions” – and objectivity, between the practical situated consciousness of a member of a specific “experiential community” and generalising theoretical consciousness has led to the validation of a professional practice as having a public, extra-professional significance and efficacy. At the same time, however, academic activism, to the extent that it seeks to incorporate substantive social and political issues into its institutional discourses and practices, provides the possibility of those discourses and practices being legitimated as the *sole context* in which those issues can be adequately articulated and addressed. The aspiration to dissolve the boundary between the classroom and the wider society, to transform academic practice into a form of political practice carries with it the danger of its becoming the privileged form of that practice, if the profession is not located within the context of a broader public sphere.

The representation of professionalism offered by Robbins and Gallop is one where the world “outside” is brought into academic practice; like the Critical Theorists of chapter two, they may be said to present theory itself as a kind of *practice*, though here without the prevailing mood of pessimism, the sense of loss of potency that characterised the former. In Bourdieu, however, there is a movement in a counter direction: the professional practitioner seeks to purify his or her practice in order to make it effective in the world beyond it.

As we have seen, Robbins equates state and profession as those locations where the private and the public, the personal and the impersonal come into relation, are shaped by, and themselves shape social life. However, even if we may agree broadly with this claim, it is necessary to point out that that relationship takes on a different, and opposed, form in each case. If in the profession the

boundary between private and public may be said to have been broken down, so that the inside of the profession can no longer be separated from the outside of the world which is supposed to constitute its referent, this has the effect only of confirming the profession's legitimacy within the state. That is to say, the outcome of this reflexive operation is the *mutual confirmation* of the positions of both: the state is confirmed in its legitimacy by allowing such an "impure" and encompassing profession within its borders, a profession that includes within the compass of its competence the whole range of political, moral and existential problems and issues proper to the lives of its heterogeneous and divided citizenry. The profession, meanwhile, is confirmed in its *particularity* precisely because in its scope it is a whole world unto itself. The competence of such a professional is a *worldly* competence, and therefore there is no need for him or her to aspire to get beyond it.

In the state, on the other hand, the relationship between private and public is inclusive of both professional and non-professional practices and bodies, encompasses institutional and quasi- or non-institutional forces. These exist within the state as distinct, *bounded* phenomena, which, as such, seek to overcome each other and in identifying themselves with the state get beyond their own limits. The state becomes thereby the location for the expression of an aspiration to go beyond the limits of the particular, while at the same time holding those boundaries in place. Or, one may say, the state both *produces* that aspiration, offering the possibility of universal transformation, and thus of its own negation, and in its very impurity, the fact that it is the site of a *plurality* of self-confirming aspirant entities, *negates* it.

This analysis allows one to develop a more complex and positive view of Bourdieu's "statist" intellectual, as that which represents a contemporary manifestation of that tradition, than that offered by Robbins. From this point-of-view, the statism of the intellectual does not simply consist in the fact that he or she draws upon the universalist symbolic credit of the state in order to legitimate and support his or her corporate intellectual identity and interest. Rather, the state provides the intellectual with a foundation for an aspiration or ambition to go beyond his or her competence which is at the same time integral to that competence. This, however, does *not* add up to the confirmation of the professional specialism as that which has overcome *in itself* the opposition between theory and experience, public and private. For, the very existence of an aspiration to transcend the limits placed upon the autonomy of the intellectual, the ambition to escape the forces that transform the intellectual into one corporate interest amongst others, signifies an absence within the profession that can only be addressed by transforming the *extra-professional conditions* in which it exists.

The intellectual's orientation upon the state as that which is both the expression of concrete class interests and forces, and the context in, and the means by, which those interests might be transcended provides the basis for the identity and role of the intellectual as a certain kind of professional and the transcendence of that identity and role. From this perspective, the characteristic activity of the "statist" intellectual – the institution of independent public bodies, campaigns and committees, the formation of political and cultural movements (for Bourdieu's recent participation in this sort of activity, see Jennings, 1997: 79-80) – is not only dependent upon the extra-professional in concrete terms (as a membership, signatory, audience) but also in the sense of constituting an *ideal* which the

intellectual, as intellectual, attempts to realise, but, simultaneously, recognises as beyond his or her competence.

The contemporary emphasis upon the necessary limits of intellectual practice based upon the recognition of the specificity of a plurality of knowledges to certain communities of experience is seen as exemplifying the postmodern moment in politics and culture. Bauman's interpreter, Rorty's ironist, the reflexive individual of Giddens and Melucci, the fluid and provisional intellectuals of the social movements described by Eyerman, Jamison and Wainwright, the academic activist of Robbins and Gallop – all are seen as coming into existence in a milieu in which the supposed "givens" of social and political life have been called into question and found wanting. The "fixed" boundaries between subjective and objective modes of life and thought, between a singular "way things are" and a plurality of partial approximations to that truth are thought to have broken down, probably irretrievably.

As part of this general dissolution, the intellectual can no longer claim a special subjectivity that allows him or her to legislate authoritatively between competing versions of the truth, or offer universalist "solutions" to social and political problems. Indeed, as just this sort of social subject the intellectual is now regarded in many quarters as inextricably bound to the fate of *modernity*, being deemed to having been a central protagonist in that particular narrative of state-formation and social and cultural centralisation. The rejection of one, therefore, necessarily entails the rejection of the other.

Naturally enough, according to this logic, the *recognition* of the continuing validity of the category of the intellectual as elaborated by Bourdieu above is also a recognition of the continuing relevance of the modern. To endorse a "statist"

universalising role for the intellectual in a pluralist society that is becoming apparently increasingly fragmented and heterogeneous, a globalised society in which the state seems to be of less and less relevance, would appear to be no more than "nostalgic", as Baudrillard would have it. As such, it would amount to making a demand upon contemporary society which it could no longer deliver, seeking to play a "game" the rules of which no longer apply.

However, in answer to this, one can say that the intellectual has always been divided against itself, that it has been characterised by contradiction and a dialectic of the universal and the particular. It is, therefore, difficult, if not incorrect, wholly to identify the "universal" intellectual with an overweening repressive modernity (that which is to be rejected) and the "specific" intellectual or situated knowledge practitioner with a fluid, democratic postmodernity (that which is to be accepted). For the intellectual, as I have tried to show, is that which has arisen out of the conflict between a specialist professional competence and the transcendent aspirations attendant upon that competence, is that which has sought to articulate and to overcome the tension between an "impure" situated identity and the "pure" practice of that identity. The intellectual is not only that which is "told" in "alternative historical narratives" but is also that diverse process of telling itself. As long as we acknowledge this dialectic of identity and practice, "form" and "content" as reflexively operative in the constitution of social subjects the intellectual may remain a valid category.

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