

**THE IDEA OF THE INTELLECTUAL IN THE AGE OF
THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY**

‘The Intellectual’—A Short Genealogy

The term intellectual has come down to us, as J. L. Austin put it, trailing clouds of etymology. The prehistory of the term goes back as far as the origins of Western culture, and indeed plays a central role in the mythology of its classical foundations. As Hannah Arendt tells us the term begins life as a means of drawing a sharp distinction between the life of the mind-bios theoretikon or *vita contempliva*, and the life of the body politic-bios politikon or *vita activa* (Arendt 1958).

Subsequently this opposition got overlaid by a religious—and specifically Christian one between sacred and profane knowledge. St Augustine’s ‘*intelligentiae*’ were angels with special powers or faculties of discernment, judgement, comprehension and understanding. They had a special vocation to know things in their essence, rather than in their mundane appearance.

Throughout the Middle Ages and well into early modern times the clerisy remained unchallenged as guardians of both classical and Christian cultural heritage. Their authority derived from the exegesis of canonical texts and their power from the

system of belief they superintended in the university and the church. Their intellectual power and authority rested on a series of linked distinctions between the discourses of high culture (Latin and Greek) and the vernacular language of the common people, between holy orders and lay congregation, and of course between orthodoxy and heresy. The Protestant Reformation, far from undermining these distinctions gave them a new lease of life and even further privileged the intellectual autonomy of the clerisy (Leonard 1996).

Throughout the early modern period we find plenty of references to scribes, teachers and travelling scholars who earn a good living from their erudition, and their skills of reading or writing (remember we are talking about societies in which the bulk of the population were illiterate), but they called themselves poets, scribes, philosophers, story tellers—in the title of Michel Serres' book “the troubadours of knowledge “not ‘intellectuals’” (Serres, 1994).

During the 19th century, the code of religious distinctions was increasingly, if unevenly secularised or otherwise subsumed and reworked in terms of the new lines being drawn between scientific/ and un or pre-scientific knowledge. It is at this juncture, and under the sign of the opposition between modernity and tradition, that the figure of the intellectual for the first time takes on its local habitation and a name (Walzer, 1988).

But in different countries this took different forms. In France the word entered into

common parlance with the publication of the *Manifeste des Intellectuels* in 1895. The manifesto was signed by self-described ‘intellectuals’ Daniel Halevy, Emile Zola, Anatole France, Lucien Herr and Leon Blum (a historian, a novelist, a literati, a scientist and a politician); the tract attacked the French government for its prosecution and conviction of Alfred Dreyfus—a Jewish officer in the French army arrested on trumped up charges of treason and helped make the case a cause celebre. The term was then taken up and used in an entirely derogatory sense by Maurice Barres and other anti Dreyfusards. In their polemics against these ‘self proclaimed intellectuals’ they talked disparagingly of “these men who live in libraries and laboratories, who think of themselves as aristocrats of thought, poor boobies ashamed to think like ordinary Frenchmen”. The notion of the intellectual as a social critic, alienated from or opposed to the established order, and hence from the point of view of conservatives, a disloyal anti patriotic citizen, was born’ (Lawrence and Dobler, 1996 : 104).

In Eastern Europe, especially in Poland and Russia the intellectual wore a similar Janus face. Initially the term held the connotations of educated elite who held progressive political ideas in contrast to a backward mass mired in traditional superstition. Here again the term was used in the context of debates around the Jewish question. The word ‘intelligentsia’—which is Polish in origin—was used to refer to freethinking artists and writers whose overriding loyalty to their respective cultural trades was considered unpatriotic by sections of the nationalistic bourgeoisie.

In Eastern Europe the role of the intellectual became associated with the figure of the emancipated Jew as constructed in popular anti-Semitic discourse of the period. The proverbial links between Jewish cleverness, duplicity, amorality and mobility provided the template for this early characterisation of 'intellectuals' as being rootless and parasitic, bearers of a dissident cosmopolitan culture that was undermining the traditional moral values of family, church, and state (Mendes-Flohr 1991; Gilman, 1996).

The subsequent history of the term pivots around the question as to how far, if at all, this special 'race apart' could be transformed into a reliable backbone of the nation, people, class or party. The omens were not good. Carrying all the freight of its negative Jewish connotation the term was imported into the political discourse of the European workers movements, where it has continued to underpin latent, and sometime manifest forms of anti-Semitism up to the present day. In vulgar Marxist lexicon and workerist rhetoric the term 'intellectual' continues to connote a declassé individual who lacks any organic connection to the class struggle and whose cultural work is consequently either parasitic or irrelevant to the serious business of transforming society.

At any rate it is against this background we have to consider the major contributions to the debate on intellectuals in the work of Julien Benda, Antonio Gramsci and Edward Said.

Benda

Julien Benda's book *La Trahison des Clercs*, remains the classic 20th statement about the intellectual's special vocation and the moral dilemmas that flow from it. The context and conjuncture in which the book was written – the Dreyfus case and the rise of popular nationalist and racist sentiment articulated by sections of the press, has continued to have resonances up to the present day; each generation rereads the text from the vantage point of its own concerns (Benda, 1975).

For Benda, the intellectual is defined not as a sociological category or function but in terms of a moral economy of knowledge. The intrinsic value of knowledge is contrasted with the political and ideological uses to which it is often put. Benda contrasts the intellectual's qualities of mind: curiosity, playfulness, scepticism and critical discrimination with those of the 'politician', whom he associates with loyalty, pragmatism and worldly interest. Clearly if that is the choice, there is no contest. For Benda the intellectual should have no country or race, his loyalty is to the pursuit of truth. False intellectuals, he writes, undertake the intellectual organisation of political hatreds; true intellectuals undertake the dispassionate and disinterested analysis of just such perversities. Equally once intellectuals venture into the market place of ideas they are in danger of betraying their true vocation; the desire to know and the passion for truth is put at the disposal of the search for influence, power, prestige or wealth. His main target is those intellectuals who pursue self interest under the guise of the common

good. Benda's true intellectual is a solitary, like the lone ranger in the American western, he rides into town to uphold justice, truth and the Cartesian Way, gets rid of the villains (ideologues) and then rides out again into the sunset of the Western Enlightenment.

We can see in Benda's formulation an echo of the classical distinction between *vita contempliva* and *vita activa*. He constructs a realm of absolute intellectuality and pure reason - of which the academy or monastery would be the institutional location as against a realm of passionate mindlessness which characterises for him the domain of ideology (Nicholls, 1978).

Michael Walzer in his reading of Benda argued that in principle, he is committed to this dualism but in practice is unable to live within its terms (Walzer, 1988). Benda was not only a Dreyfusard, but in 1940 became an active member of the French resistance. To which I would add a negative rider Benda may despise the passion to identify and belong, which he sees as associated with nationalism and racism but he ignores the fact that to adopt a position of such Olympian detachment as a badge of intellectual superiority is to indirectly underwrite a position of more or less tyrannical omniscience fully complicit with forms of cultural elitism historically associated with the Right, as well as with the totalitarian claims to knowledge of the Far Left.

In part Benda's confusion over the terms and conditions of proper intellectual engagement may stem from his ambivalence towards his own Jewish background. His

distance from the religious community of Judaism (he was a devout atheist and secularist) was coupled with an equally strong identification with the state of exile, or homelessness associated with Jewish diasporic culture. In fact one way to read *La Trahison des Clercs* is as a concerted attempt to conserve the notion of the intelligentsia as 'a race apart' but to give to it a positive rather than a negative force by investing that position with signs of cultural superiority rather than inferiority. The 'Jewish' traits that anti-Semites see as symptoms of the intellectual's self alienation or degeneracy are thus converted into marks of a special avocation for maintaining a standpoint of independent critique transcending claims on political allegiance. In this way a Jewish thinker, traumatised by the Dreyfus Affair and its aftermath, created a model intellectual in whom elements of Talmudic tradition and free thinking rationalism are fused to constitute a version of European civilisation that, he felt, (over optimistically as it proved), might be strong enough to withstand the pull of racist or nationalist sentiment.

The tradition of analysis stemming from *La Trahison Des Clercs* stresses the contradictory location of intellectuals in the social structure and the patterns of ambivalence that flow from that. On the one hand intellectuals are servants, clients or active members of an established cultural order and, as such, enmeshed in its networks of patronage; on the other, they are its severest critics floating free of normative allegiances, exploiting their very marginality as a means of asserting independence of thought and action. They are advocates of particularistic values, ideologies, and interests, and at the same time represent the quest for universal truths. They are perennially caught

between the social responsibilities of the public intellectual or critic and the selfish imperatives of the private scholar (Shils, 1980; Michael, 2000).

One of the favourite games played by armchair critics is to create typologies in which this or that group, or individual is assigned to one position or the other in order to consider the moral evasions and intellectual shortcomings that supposedly flow from it. Those more existentially inclined concern themselves with the moral dilemmas of dual consciousness engendered by the intellectual's special place in the power structure; they ponder the bad faith of charismatic outsiders (poets, prophets and philosophers) who secretly long to become part of the traditional cultural establishment; they trace the duplicities of intellectuals in the corridors of power towards the institutions that have given them their privileged relation to modernity; or they analyse the coded forms of special pleading inscribed between the lines of their apparently value free texts (Bauman, 1987). However the next main contributor to the debate threw a spanner in the works, by suggesting that far from a moral choice between mutually exclusive positions, there was in fact a principle of active complicity between them.

Gramsci

Antonio Gramsci's intervention into the debate not only drew a fresh distinction between different types of intellectual or intellectual strategy, but suggested that there was a dialectical link between them, a process of historical evolution of one into the

other (Gramsci, 1967). He argued that those who claim to live the life of the mind are in first and last the creation of political and social interests; they give the group whose interests they serve a sense of homogeneity, an awareness of their own function not only in the economic but in the social and political spheres. But over time these so called 'organic intellectuals' become increasingly specialised (as bureaucrats, scholars, scientists); they then appear as traditional intellectuals because they seem to represent a principle of historical continuity in their discipline uninterrupted by even the most complicated and radical changes in political and social life. They see themselves as independent, autonomous and endowed with a special character of their own—inhabitants of a community of scholars, a social utopia of their own creation.

Nevertheless, for Gramsci, such assumptions are the rationalisation of the ideological power which intellectuals exercise in the complex of superstructures of which they are precisely the functionaries. In other words knowledge claims based on value freedom, or the disinterested pursuit of truth are nothing but a cynical cover story for the pursuit of forms of political and economic self-interest.

From this starting point Gramsci called for the recognition of new forms of intellectualism that were not specialised but *directive*. He stated: "The basis of the new type of intellectual must be industrial labour, even at the most primitive and unqualified level. So that in this new social utopia all men might be intellectuals rather than having this function performed by a specially educated elite" (Gramsci, 1967: 38).

Gramsci's revolutionary subject is thus the industrial working class - the class whose practical activity supposedly contains the seeds of the future socialist society, *vita contempliva* and *vita activa* united in a new dialectical synthesis. During the heroic period of the workers council's movement in Turin, in the 1920's, he proclaimed "the socialist state already exists potentially in the institutions of social life characteristic of the exploited labouring class" (cited in Bernhard, 2000: 44).

Gramsci's view of the role of intellectuals is initially equally optimistic. In stark contrast to Benda, whose work he seems not to have known or read. Gramsci started from a radically egalitarian proposition: all men are intellectuals, there is no human activity from which intellectual participation can be excluded; *homo faber* cannot be separated from *homo sapiens*; the philosophy of praxis unites *bios theoretikon* and *bios politikon* (Bhadhuri, 1995).

Yet ten years later writing in prison and in the context of the triumph of Mussolini and the fascist movement he has a very different story to tell. Pessimism of the intellect has taken over from optimism of the will. In the *Prison Notebooks* he makes an absolute—and Leninist—distinction between intellectual vanguards, the party intellectuals who have mastered the most advanced ideas, and the 'intellectuals of everyday life' who are still operating within the framework of common sense. He wrote: 'The new civilisation carried by the industrial working class can only be properly articulated through the

medium of the intellectual vanguard. The common culture of the masses is an amalgam of old prejudices, superstitions and primitive, backward looking ideas' (Gramsci, 1967: 104). He now takes a very dim view of the proletariat. He stated: 'as a class it is poor in organising elements, does not have and cannot form its own stratum of intellectuals except laboriously and only after the conquest of state power' (Gramsci, 1967: 105). His disappointment with the political outcome, the defeat of socialism, the fact that a sizeable section of the industrial working class went over the fascists, led him to drastically revise his view of its capacity for independent thought and autonomous action (Fiori, 1975).

Still all is not lost, because in the midst of all this cultural and political backwardness there also exists 'in waiting' a principle of articulation from outside, the intimations of something radically new. To draw out this potential becomes the special task of a new kind of directive intellectual. Gramsci wrote:

The evolution of critical self consciousness means the creation of an elite of intellectuals—there is no organisation without intellectuals, without the existence of a group of people specialised in the elaboration of ideas' (cited in Forgas 1995: 67).

He has come a long way from his original egalitarian view of intellectual dispositions.

What he has actually done is to postpone its achievement until 'after the revolution, until after the conquest of state power has inaugurated a new cultural era' (cited in Forgas, 1995: 67).

In the meantime he imposes a demanding agenda on party intellectuals: they must be at once missionaries, comrades in arms and teachers of the working class. As comrades they aim at a union of manual and intellectual work; as teachers they develop a critique of common sense by means of an inventory of its elements. As missionaries they relay the theoretical ideology of the party in a manner which articulates scientifically, conceptually, and consciously, what is expressed only practically and unconsciously in the masses

Gramsci is very aware of the tension between these different roles but he remains optimistic about the possibility of reconciling them. If intellectuals are positioned between the high culture of the 'old society' (including modern science) and the common sense of the national/popular culture then by that very reason they are uniquely placed to mediate between them. Although it was the party that was supposed to provide the institutional space for this to happen, Gramsci also thought it incumbent on intellectuals to undertake some more subjective bridge building on their own account. He wrote:

The popular element feels but does not know or understand; the intellectual knows but does not always feel. The intellectual's error consists in believing that one can be an intellectual if distinct and separate from the people-nation - that is without feeling the elementary passions of the people, understanding them and connecting them dialectically to the laws of history and to a superior conception of the world, scientifically and coherently elaborated knowledge (Gramsci 1995: 105).

Thus it was the task of the new type of 'organic' intellectual, to bridge the gulf between the world of elementary feeling and common sense, and the absolute knowledge and reason guaranteed by Marxism (Bloggs, 1993).

I have stressed that Gramsci's notion of the new intellectual is a prototype for the future 'after the conquest of state power'. Yet his model drew heavily on the past and he used a reference which Julian Benda might well have supported albeit from a different standpoint. Gramsci wrote approvingly of the preaching friars of the middle ages as being organised through an iron discipline that prevents them from separating themselves too much from the ordinary people, without for a moment losing sight of their special mission to win their hearts and minds. Gramsci here operates in terms of the same split as Benda, but saw it as the role of the new organic intellectual to bridge it, rather than, as intellectuals of the Benda type had done, to maintain and even strengthen it as a way of securing their privileged hold on objectivity and truth.

Edward Said

In Edward Said's work we see an attempt to square the circle, to bring the perspectives of Benda and Gramsci together, as a means of considering the place of the intellectual in the post colonial world. Edward Said has been called the Palestinian Gramsci, in the sense that much of his intellectual work has been a meditation on the dominant culture of the west and on the strategies that are required to challenge its global hegemony (Said, 1983). But equally, he has been concerned to explore the links between different states of intellectual exile in a way that brings him close, as an Arab, to Benda's own vision of the special vocation of the Wandering Jew.

In his Reith lectures devoted to the issue, Said argued that the secular intellectual has no gods. He opposed the kinds of thought policing associated with political correctness, whether on the left or right (Said, 1994). At the same time the intellectual has a fundamental moral choice—he can either be a servant or critic of the establishment. As we might expect Said plumps for the latter position which he associates with outsider/ liminal status; he extolled the intellectual's secret weapons of silence, exile, and cunning faced by the overwhelming power of the state apparatus and the mass media. In constructing his argument Said draws heavily on Benda's transcendent vision of a small band of super-gifted individuals, philosopher kings, or independent scholars set apart and dedicated to the disinterested pursuit of truth in arts or sciences. But he turns this elitist position upside down by associating this distance from power with a critical standpoint on society that comes from the margins.

For this purpose he drew on Gramsci's model of the organic intellectual whose role he recasts as the narrator of the dreams of powerless and oppressed minorities destined one day to inherit, if not the whole earth, then at least that little bit of it they call home. Said's intellectual is not a privileged subject-who-knows but one who makes raids on the inarticulate to give voice to the collective will of the people/nation. In this way a position of radical disengagement is turned into its opposite a strategy of radical re-engagement.

In the second Reith lecture Said laid down some rules of conduct for the committed scholar in the post colonial age. He rejected the intellectual narcissism and time-serving

he associates with attempts to escape, into some transcendental realm of 'value free objectivity' or pure self referential real of ideas. Instead he argued for the immanence of the politics of nation or ethnicity as an objective correlate of the post colonial intellectual's existential predicament. He made much of the alienated condition of the diasporic intellectual, and links the nomadism of thought, or travelling theory, metaphorically to the situation of stateless migrants, as sharing a common exilic condition. Here he invoked Kristeva's notions of freedom of the orphan and the stranger. Dual consciousness, he argued, is the true condition of the modern intellectual.

Said's answer to the crisis of dis/affiliation he viewed as characteristic of the post modern condition, is to revert to principles of filiation, bound up with membership of both real and imagined communities of the oppressed. His public intellectual is 'organic' not to the major class formations or public institutions, but to racial, ethnic and national minorities.

In his final lecture, Said attacked the cult of narrow expertise, academic specialism and professionalism that has come to prevail in the political economy of knowledge in the West. He stressed the double edged nature of this process. It involves at once the localisation of the public sphere of intellectual life: the intellectual is authorised as the bearer and spokesperson of a distinctive historical individuality, and speaks by, to and for specific communities of interest that she is made, willy nilly to represent. At the same time the intellectual is an agent of the globalisation of knowledge, crossing national

cultural boundaries to create a truly international, but also thoroughly commodified space of intellectual exchange in bringing her ideas to the world market.

In issuing a call for a return to the general intellectual, someone who functions as a social critic and engages in wide ranging public debate, Said comes close at times to Mathew Arnold's vision of the public intellectual as someone who gives voice to the interests of the commonweal, in a way that transcends sectional interests of every kind (Said 1983: op cit). Yet at the same time, some critics have heard behind this appeal to universalism, the echo of special pleading associated with the roots radical who wants to privilege a particular local state of oppression as somehow paradigmatic of a global struggle for social justice. Whatever in/justice there is in this comment, subsequent events have both given Said's model its proper scope and drastically undermined its appeal in the Arab world. For 9/11 has invested his so called local struggle with a true world historical significance, and, by strengthening the oppositional forces of religious Islamism, isolated the political intelligentsia to which Said's work so eloquently.

Glimpses across the Divide

In the context of its UK reception, Said's Reith lectures were widely welcomed as highlighting the salience of issues of race, nation and ethnicity, to the question of intellectuals. I now want to look looks briefly at how this question has played in more recent debates within and between Jewish and Black intelligentsias in the Anglo-

American world.

Benda's book left the elision between the Jewish question and the intellectual's predicament intact. For his generation of Jewish intellectuals the pursuit of careers and vocations through the liberal professions or more bohemian walks of life, offered a limited measure of acceptance into intellectual and even political circles; from this vantage point tickets were issued which allowed many to travel, on both real and imaginative journeys, between the world of the village shtetl and the metropolis (Hoffman, 1998). Yet it might still be a one way ride with no homecoming guaranteed. It was ever possible to be repudiated as a traitor to one's own religious community whilst still being denied entry to the promised land of gentile society. At another level of representation, therefore, such moves reinforced the negative stereotype of the Wandering Jew as a rootless cosmopolitan whose cleverness was not to be trusted. As a result, Jewish intellectuals found themselves caught in a vicious double bind, having to disavow their intellectuality in order to keep faith with a 'tough' Jewish attitude, or to dissociate themselves from their cultural backgrounds in order to maintain the pretence of engagement in an entirely value free and disinterested pursuit of truth. Whichever way they jumped, they provided 'confirmation' of innate Jewish duplicity (Gilman ,1996).

If Jews have had to deal with a racism that condemned them for being too clever for their own or anyone else's good, Blacks have had to deal with the opposite problem - a racism that considered them congenitally stupid. Perhaps what attracted W. E. Du Bois

to Benda's model was the chance it offered to repudiate the calumny of black intellectual inferiority. In best Marxist/Hegelian fashion, he turned the idea off its head and onto its feet, by making intellectuals que 'race apart' into the backbone of a new black nation. As he stated it:

the negro race, like all races is going to be saved by its exceptional men. The problem of education then among the Negroes must first of all deal with the talented tenth- the problem of developing the best of this race that they may guide the mass away from the contamination and death of the worst in their own and other races' (Du Bois, 2002: 39).

Cornell West has pointed out that Du Bois's notion of the talented tenth is drawn from a highly traditionalist view of the intellectual's role (West, 1993). In this, as in much else, Du Bois was eminently Victorian; his construct evokes Coleridge's notion of a secular clerisy, Carlyle's Strong Heroes, Matthew Arnold's disinterested aliens, the Webb's vision of socialist government by an elite of enlightened experts, and even Lenin's notion of the 'leading cadres' of the vanguard party, to put forward his own vision of an aristocracy of talent and character.

Later in life, Du Bois revised his talented tenth into a 'guiding hundredth' - a group he describes as consisting of 'predominantly active virile men of middle age and settled opinion who have finished their education and begun their life work' (Du Bois, 2002: 56). Like all great leaders, who become champions of a Great Cause, and the focus of projective identifications on a large scale, it was perhaps difficult for him to envisage those who would carry on the struggle after his days as other than a replication of a certain idealised version of himself!

In practice, Black advancement has not been achieved by such elitist means. The leading role, played by poets, preachers and musicians, in both cultural and political liberation struggles, has ensured that primacy was given to the performative powers of the vernacular; the evolution of these charismatic or bohemian figures from everyday intellectuals (in Gramsci's sense) into 'organic' or roots, radical intellectuals of race, followed a quite different path from the one mapped out by Du Bois, as the history of the Harlem Renaissance made clear (Gilroy, 1994). Today if there is a talented tenth, it is perhaps to be found amongst the gangsta rappers and the ghetto gangs with an analysis; to rephrase Du Bois' formula, these are predominantly 'active virile men in the prime of youth, of highly unsettled opinion' (Du Bois, 2002: 56), many of whom have dropped out of education in favour of starting their life work amongst the black urban underclass.

This situation may change with the current emergence of an expanded, university educated, black middle class. In the USA at least the profession of blackness has increasingly been transformed into a blackening of the professions: black doctors, lawyers, teachers, accountants, academics, journalists, administrators, civil servants, and the like. Their individual advancement may still be sentimentally 'in the name of the race', but for all that it does not structurally entail any redistribution of cultural or social capital to the brothers and sisters in the hood. This in turn has produced what has been called the crisis of the black intellectual (Hooks, 1991).

The lack academic success story is under enormous pressure to assert organic links with

an authentic cultural heritage that is 'in the bones' in order to magically collapse the social distance that education has created vis a vis those it has failed and left behind ; at the same time there is a countervailing need to maintain social distance from white colleagues and to avoid becoming assimilated into positions within the prevailing hierarchies of academic knowledge/power that render them liable to attack as enemies of their own people. Whatever they do, black intellectuals are thus likely to find themselves castigated on all sides for failing to strike the right balance between social responsibility towards their communities of origin and independence of scholarly thought (Hall, 2002).

The situation of Jewish and Black intellectuals has thus much in common. In terms of moral/cognitive standpoint, we tread the same fine line between too much or too little intellectual detachment from and emotional attachment to the 'race.' In struggling to transform that position from an infernal *huit clos* of undecidability into something more like a workable space of critical reflection, there are many lessons we have to teach and learn from one another. One is how easily binarisms of race, nation and ethnicity may furnish a set of reference points for both representing and disavowing the structural ambivalence of intelligentsias as being both part of and apart from the apparatus of cultural power in society. The second is the extent to which these terms may serve to authorise particular strategies of intellectual elitism, especially by investing professors of reason with a special vocation to deliver the rest of the world from ignorance and superstition by virtue of some superior endowment that the less educated inherently lack. Finally it should alert us to the competitive uses to which histories of oppression can be

put when cultural foundation myths based on claims to unique or exceptional suffering are used to underwrite claims to privileged knowledge/power.

After 'Modernity'?

So far we have looked at some of the classic statements about the role of intellectuals in relation to the project of modernity (Bloggs, 1993). But as we enter the contemporary period we have to ask: are the moral binarisms and social dislocations traced in these classical accounts being definitively transcended, or are they being reproduced in a new guise?

Zygmunt Bauman has argued that we are in the midst of a decisive restructuring of knowledge power relations, and that this has profound implications both for the social role of intellectuals and the kinds of strategies they can pursue (Bauman, 1989). He suggested that the original conjuncture which threw up the notion of the intelligentsia as a special category was characterised by a new type of state power with the resources and will to shape and administer civil society according to a preconceived model of rational order. This development coincided with the creation of a relatively autonomous self regulating discourse that was both able to generate such a model and superintend its implementation in and through social policy. Modernity's view of the world was that of an ordered totality about which adequate knowledge can be obtained in order to secure mastery over its processes. Within this frame the intellectual functioned as a legislator—someone who knows how to establish the laws

governing the social totality, and can intervene to arbitrate authoritatively in public controversy by virtue of the superior objectivity of their standpoint, embedded in universal norms of Reason.

In contrast once the relationship between state power and autonomous knowledge begins to pull apart, a space opens up in which a typically post modern view of the world can become established. This is a view in which there are an unlimited number of models of order, each generated by a specific relatively autonomous set of discursive practices. Order does not precede practices and hence cannot serve as an external measure of their validity. Systems of knowledge may therefore only be validated from inside their particular regimes of truth and that constitutes the limits and conditions of the intellectual's authority. The role or strategy most appropriate to the post modern intellectual is thus that of an interpreter, rather than a legislator. The hermeneutic aim is to facilitate translation between one system of knowledge or culture and another – with the minimum distortion. It does not claim to judge which system is best placed to legislate for the social totality, but it does put in question the ambition of all grand narratives to lay down universal laws of history, nature, culture, economy and society.

Bauman was careful to avoid suggesting that the post modern condition has superseded the project of modernity in any simply linear sense. He insists that these are two distinct sets of intellectual strategies which work to establish certain limits and conditions of each other's existence. Useful though this is as a get out clause against charges of

reductionism, Bauman's line of argument has remained entirely abstracted from any detailed consideration of what these different strategies actually entail in terms of specific rhetorics of power or the performance of knowledge.

Beyond Dislocation?

A case can certainly be made that the knowledge power games people play are changing, as is the role of intellectuals in public life (Gouldner, 1979; Small, 2002). Race, nation and ethnicity for example no longer furnish transcendent points of reference for cultural avant gardes or support the search for universals amongst major schools of thought. The symbolic power of intellectuals as inventors and guardians of cultural heritage has been decentred as much by a profound public dis-enchantment with the role of 'high priests' as by the rise of new communications technologies which have both deskilled and democratised the practice of cultural trades (Debray, 1996; Robbins, 1993).

For a good deal of the 19th and most of the 20th century the symbolic narcissism which is endemic to the cultural trades has been sublimated within protocols of professional or political allegiance. Membership of the communist party for example used to ensure that any form of intellectual self promotion would be roundly condemned as a symptom of petty bourgeois individualism (Chryssis, 1997). Yet even and especially within the left

intelligentsia, there was always a certain return of the repressed.

Here the position of critical detachment associated with high culture/high theory was no longer adopted as an end in itself but as a means to establish a superior strategic standpoint from which to re-engage transformatively with the 'real world'. The task was to seek out objective correlates for particular projects of 'world-historical domination', so that the political vision could become embedded in social institutions and grounded in real struggles (Chryssis, 1997). In circumstances where actual strategies of implantation were difficult to pursue, rhetoric inevitably tends to take over from reality. By exalting the potential power of the powerless, the hegemony of the subaltern, the creativity of the marginal, the self possession of the dispossessed, intellectual elites in waiting could pursue a quasi religious identification with groups which lent credence to their counter hegemonic vision, without having to give up their own imperious standpoint- or its associated privileges.

The underdogs recruited for this purpose tend to have histories of oppression that are easily inscribable in teleological tales guaranteeing that one day they will inherit the earth (if only under the tutelage of the generalissimos of the Grand Narrative). Until quite recently the industrial working class, or its outriders, figured prominently in these scenarios. But with the withering away of a distinctively proletarian public realm, intellectuals who neither wish to remain closeted within the comforts of bourgeois solipsism, nor retire hurt to the sidelines of private, aesthetic or academic practice have

had to search for other revolutionary subjects to carry the burden of their dreams (Zizek, 2001).

Intelligentsias belonging to ethnic and national minorities have not had to look far to find their 'doubles': communities of resistance in whose invented traditions they can find mirrored aspects of their own struggle for creative autonomy. It has been a more difficult task for cultures historically implicated in the prosecution of racism and colonialism to find an alternative image of them. One solution has been to identify with The Other within : social outcasts and deviants, the criminal and insane, the vagrant and unemployed, all those whose faces do not fit in 'polite society' and whose marginality and insecurity serve as sites of projective identification for intellectuals or artists who feel that they too do not belong. In similar vein the dissenting Academy has explored its elective affinities with popular cultures in whose 'common' vernaculars it discovers a rejection of the Civilising Mission that resonate powerfully with its own repudiation of the High Culture Establishment to which, however tangentially, it still belongs. In this way even quite old fashioned aristocracies of taste or learning can dress up in modern clothes, disavow their elitist tendencies and proclaim their solidarity with forms of philistinism that in other respects is the living negation of their own cultural preferences. As for attitudes nearer home, the proliferation of ethnic goods and services on a world scale has created a buoyant consumer market that exploits, without entirely satisfying, the genuine articles of multicultural curiosity.

In the present highly mediatised cultural economy where conjoint processes of wising up and dumbing down are creating an expanded arena of intellectual exchange, such games of trading places are understandably popular. More significant, I suggest, is the creation of a new para-intelligentsia that moves with great facility across a whole range of sites and strategies without homing in on any one. I am not talking here about academics who become video artists, lawyers who also make a living as stand up comics, or doctors who double as performance poets. These are familiar if still exceptional figures in the cultural landscape. Rather we are seeing the emergence of a new kind of free lance cultural labourer who has a portfolio of transferable skills to do with symbolic impression management without for all that possessing the equipment to perform the connective, generalising role associated with the traditional public intellectual. They are not opinion makers, but they are opinion disseminators, and in the contemporary world of focus group politics they play an increasingly important, if indirect, role in shaping the agendas of public policy. At the same time, as I suggested earlier, by virtue of the fact that they travel across and blur so many boundaries they problematise many of the distinctions (vis that between 'high art' and 'low commercialism') that underwrite the residual snobberies and provincialism of intellectual life.

An equally important development runs the other way. The professionalisation of knowledge coupled with the intense specialisation of research through the academic division of labour has produced a proliferation of more or less self contained communities of intellectual expertise, each with its own jargons, journals and juries of

peer review. A forthcoming encyclopaedia of race and ethnic relations, for example, will have over a thousand entries each one written by a specialist in the field.

Runaway specialisation at the cutting edge of research means there is a growing need for popularisers and translators of 'big ideas' and this in turn has helped to enlarge the power and prestige of the Debray's mediocracy. In the contemporary spectacle of knowledge, the egghead look is definitely out. The role models are Gore Vidal, Camilla Paglia and Naomi Klein, not Raymond Williams, Simone De Beauvoir or Cornel West! Sharp minds in even sharper dresses, combining street cred with a certain aristocratic disdain for hard mental graft, now lead the intellectual fashion houses of the world. But without them - and in lieu of any renaissance in popular education- a lot of people would know a lot less about what the eggheads are up to!

We can see then, how the collapse of attachment to wider political or intellectual projects has released the symbolic narcissism hitherto contained within institutional structures, and fuelled the rampant individualism and careerism that characterises so much of contemporary post modern culture. At the same time, the more fragmented, specialised, and mediated intellectual work becomes, the greater the longing for totalising visions, quick fixes and final solutions to intractable problems. The search for grand narrators, for prophets, masterminds, polymaths, or geniuses who can fill the void left by the death of grand narratives has never been more intense. Those lists of 'The Hundred Greatest Philosophers' or 'ten most influential books of all time' which the

media increasingly organise—often with viewers or readers voting for their preferred candidate—is not so much a popular plebiscite of intellectual influence, or a platform for a public battle of ideas, as a marketing device to promote books up the best sellers list. Yet the very popularity of the listings does I think speak to a deep yearning for authoritative texts that will somehow provide a comprehensive grasp on contemporary complexity.

There have been a number of responses to this new conjuncture on the cultural left. One significant reaction takes the form of ethnic credentialism. Asian intellectuals write about issues of Asian history, culture and identity, black intellectuals about 'black' issues, Jewish or Irish intellectuals about the problematics of Jewish or Irish identity. Each sticks to their own culture as a source of primary authorization, because it is here that knowledge claims can be most easily validated, intellectual property rights asserted, and cultural capital made. Credentialism is underwritten by strategies of citation that authorise the citee as well as the cited and by networks of internal patronage and preferment that legitimate entitlement over public resource, such as research funding.

This strategy has played a major role in overcoming long histories of cultural exclusion and marginality, but its successes have been bought at a price. One of the worst effects of collective self referentiality is to impose a self denying ordinance on what individual authors write, sing, paint or perform about; for example few 'Jewish' writers dare write about slavery and even fewer 'black' historians write histories of anti-Semitism. If

someone does cross the race line then they are attacked from all sides for being interlopers, colonisers, outsiders.

Another response has been to attack the cerebral, the cognitive and the rational, as belonging to an alienated, disembodied male WASP culture. A new kind of intellectual steps forward, whose critical faculties are either subsumed under a sensorium organised around the interface with information technologies or directly articulated through the libidinised body (Haraway, 1997). Those who possess this more emotionally and physically grounded intelligence, who can think with their hearts, souls, and guts, are also, it seems, better placed to launch their minds prosthetically into the virtual community of hyper-space (Plant, 1990). Women, blacks, gays and youth- the usual suspects- are often cast as standard bearers for this new *gaya scientzia* centred around body politics and are indeed often its leading advocates and practitioners. These are new 'organic intellectuals' of the information society.

Much of the authority of this cyborg intelligentsia is derived not from any shared community of origin or faith but from its own charismatic self image linked to 'alternative' life styles often organised around transgressive sexualities or hybrid racialities. It does not produce ideas or ideologies in the traditional sense, but icons, iconographic texts or images that celebrate its own advent as the spirit of new times.

Despite its often perverse anti- intellectualism this movement does at least try to address

the problem of how to generate new forms of knowledge, forms that are open, not closed, democratic not elitist, connective not hierarchical, immediate not mediated, gendered feminine, not masculine. This is also a project at the heart of the final and most interesting attempt to reconfigure the role of the post modern intellectual- that of the cultural trickster.

Having it both ways

In earlier times, tricksters were the heroes of a popular cross cultural literature that delighted in cutting the great and the good down to size by showing that they were not so great or so good after all. Trickster figures combine the rhetorical arts of indirection with street survival skills as they outwit the powerful, humble the arrogant and generally turn the tables on injustice. In trickster stories underdogs still manage to somehow come out on top, by turning the world upside down if only for a day (Bakhtin, 1988).

The theoretical appropriation of the trickster as a paradigm of post modern intellectual engagement, especially with issues of identity politics, was pioneered by Henry Louis Gates and Gerald Vizenor in the 1980's (Gates, 1987; Vizenor, 1991). They found in their own respective African American and Native American vernaculars a rich canon of stories that spoke powerfully to the predicament of the post colonial intellectual. The trickster offered a model of cultural hybridity, combining elements of masculine and

feminine, good and bad, high and low into a single complex figure. In the tricksters hands irresolvable either/or dilemmas dissolve magically into a both/and version of dual consciousness; deployed into the field of race and ethnicity the effect was to deconstruct the essentialised identities and fixed binaries that were still dominating debate; developed as a style of discourse the result was a travelling theory that shifted with lightning speed from topos to topos, weaving a seamless web of interpretations across the flux of events in a way that made it virtually impossible to stop long enough to pin down the argument or derive it from any pre-established position.

The trickster swings both ways, an outsider who tells the inside story of knowledge/power, an insider who celebrates the liminal and transgressive. a charismatic who invents new cultural traditions in order to cast modernity into the dustbins of history. In this respect intellectual tricksterism has much in common with the strategies of dada and situationism (Plant, 1990). At a time when universities were being transformed into business corporations, student cultures were involuting into identity politics and homo academicus ruled OK (Bourdieu, 1988), cultural tricksterism introduced a joker into the pack who threw the cards up in the air and demanded a fresh and altogether more improvisatory game.

Partly this was possible because of the high premium put on performativity. Tricksters are nothing if not performers ; what could now connect professors of poetry with rappers, media personalities with philosophers was the fact that they could all make

things happen simply by what they said (Butler, 1997).

It has been argued then that what emerged at this point was a genuinely subversive style of cultural adversarialism that combated the withdrawal of intellectuals from public life by transforming the debased protocols of political debate into rules for new and more imaginative language games; rap artists and dj's developed the black vernaculars of toasting, sounding and signifying into a lingua franca of youth culture around the world. En passant the total incorporation of the Academy into the profane commerce of think tanks, media consultancies and lobbying agencies, was resisted by exposing the absurdity of their claims to embody more desirable regimes of truth.

But that predictably is only one side of the story. The moral entrepreneurialism associated with trickster style makes it seductively easy to eschew the rigours of independent scholarship or a lifelong commitment to social justice in favour of more superficial, opportunistic, short term and personally profitable goals. Tricksters are tricky customers, and to employ an appropriately mixed metaphor, they tend to be poachers turned gamekeepers who run with the foxes and hunt with the hounds. Tricksterism makes trading places fun and allows cultural and intellectual capital to be made out of oppression en route. Now at last you can be both sides of the line at once; for example play the race card when it suits you - for instance to put liberal intellectuals back in their neo-colonial place as nearly dead white men—while repudiating its use by others—for instance radical Africentrics—when you don't approve of what they do with it. It is not

that such contradictory moves are not necessary and indeed tactically inevitable, but that a certain version of tricksterism elaborates them into a full blown political strategy, makes it seem desirable and even dignifies it with a new name: strategic essentialism (Spivak, 1995).

The liberatory aspect of tricksterism, its capacity to put irony or critical disenchantment to constructive use in creating inter-ludic spaces of reflexivity thus all too easily becomes enmeshed in its opposite: an intellectual sleight of hand that provides a cover story for acts of political bad faith; a cynical and devious manipulation of other people's desire to know in order to maintain a one up position and stay ahead of the game. There are many styles of tricksterism and it is important to be able to discriminate between the true trickster and the con artist. Here is a rich but still underdeveloped field of critical endeavour and debate.

The idea of the intellectual in the age of the knowledge economy

Each of these three strategies - ethnic credentialism, body politics and cultural tricksterism represent sustained attempts to reinvent the idea of an intelligentsia equipped to deal with contemporary conditions of knowledge production.

It has been widely argued that globalization has not only transformed the international networking of commodity production, but has created the conditions for the transition to

a 'knowledge economy' or even a 'knowledge society'. By this is meant the fact that not only have knowledge based activities entered into every aspect of manufacturing through new technologies of product design, and production control, but that knowledge itself has become reflexively embedded in its own specific forms of research and development, in the university, the laboratory, and in a multiplicity of other sites. The application of knowledge to its own management and dissemination has become the prime focus of intellectual activity (Delanty, 2002).

The impact of this on traditional ideas of the intellectual have been profound (Lyotard 1984). For as knowledge in its commodified form becomes every more socially ramified and embedded, intellectuals, as the customary agents for the independent production and dissemination of ideas have been made increasingly redundant. As norms of productivity penetrate into every nook and cranny of scholarly activity and the pursuit of academic careers becomes an ever more cut throat business, it is increasingly difficult to pursue the kind of public intellectual activity for which Edward Said was renowned (Small, 2002; Cohen, 2003; Waters, 2004). Knowledge may have become auto-telic, a self regenerating force which is transforming economy and society, but the space – and even the time – for independent intellectual critique has been increasingly closed down.

But there are still two sides to this story. Although the advent of intellectual capitalism has certainly spelt the death of the liberal university, the new forms of inter and trans

disciplinarity sponsored by the knowledge economy are making conversations between natural scientists and social scientists, theoreticians and practitioners, happen in ways which would have seemed impossible even ten years ago.

We may be nostalgic for the old forms of intellectual life, we may regret the demise of the gentleman or the gypsy scholar, we may mourn the passing of the working class autodidact, the lack roots radical, or the bohemian - and we may deplore the rise of the professional expert and the mediocrat in their place. But it is premature in my view to announce the 'death of the intellectual' as has been done again and again over the last quarter century (Jacoby, 1987; Gouldner, 1979; Furedi, 2004). In fact, as I've suggested, prognostications of the intellectual's demise began almost as soon she was born, but the creature continues to persist and evolve into a multiplicity of new forms.

There are always new sites of intellectual production opening up – the role of bloggers on the Internet is one that immediately comes to mind - and new hybridised networks of critical intellectual activity are continually emerging, both inside and outside the Academy (Strathern, 2004). As Bruno Latour has argued convincingly, it is never a question of how near or far a particular site of knowledge production is from a given formation of 'society', or 'culture', or what stances of ideological dis/engagement with its preferred object of study might be read of from that. This is because the practices of any investigation are simply the conduits through which that specific form of the object—and objectivity—is pursued (Latour, 2005).

From this standpoint the real enemies of intellectual promise are the theories which always and already know the answers, or so frame the questions that researchers only ever reach foregone conclusions: namely that it is racism, or class struggle, or the Unconscious 'what dunnit'. As Isiah Berlin argued many years ago the hedgehogs – those who are captivated by one single big totalising idea, end by reducing everything to it, whilst the foxes, who pursue a multiplicity of small lines of investigation as these converge on concrete issues, are more likely to come up with the interesting questions – and even answers (Berlin, 1988). The so called 'post modern turn' could be described as in part as the revenge of the foxes against the hedgehogs, even if the emergence of new forms of ideological fundamentalism, no longer linked to the Big Ideas of Science, Progress and Enlightenment, but precisely to their opposite, shows that the Day of the Hedgehog is far from over. This struggle takes different forms in different parts of the world, and the outcome has never been more uncertain. But, as Bakhtin showed, even and especially where we think there is closure, there is always some element in the discourse which interrupts the eternal repetition of the same, because it bears the trace of the other, and so keeps the critical engagement with ideas going. The vocation of the intellectual, if there is one, is to keep that moment, which Bakhtin called the dialogical imagination, alive and kicking against the mono--logics of Power, whenever and wherever possible.

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