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## **Otherness, autonomy and the critical ontology of the contemporary. A theory of the intellectual in the age of globalization**

The adjective intellectual has long been used and is still been used in a general sense (as in “intellectual life”). It was in France during the Dreyfus affair in the 1890's that the noun intellectual caught on and started to circulate widely. “Intellectuals” appeared in the media and discussion broke out over who was and wasn't the true intellectuals. From there the idea quickly spread to most other European cultures, always as a source of controversy and contest. The death, decline or treason of the intellectual has been proclaimed incessantly for more than a century. Yet the intellectual is still in vogue. Why is it that the question of the intellectual became an urgent one rather suddenly in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and has remained so until today? Why do modern societies seem to have a need for such a term, even if the concept as such is by no means clear? This paper will examine critically various concepts of the intellectual that circulate and propose a theory of the intellectual. Drawing examples notably from contemporary debates on globalization, I will seek to explain, in as economical terms as possible, what it is that intellectuals do that nobody else does in modernity and why that function is so controversial.

### **The object of study**

The comparative history of intellectuals has flourished for two decades since the pioneering works of Christophe Charle (1996), Wolff Lepenies (1985), and Fritz Ringer (1992), this despite the unusual epistemic challenges posed by the study of intellectuals. It would be exaggerated to say that there is no agreement at all on what an intellectual is, but opinions certainly differ. Sister fields like art history or political science also have problems in delimitating their objects of study. The field of contemporary art is obliged to entertain the illusion that there is really no specialized art field in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu's sociology, but that the production and enjoyment of art flows so to speak from human nature. Something similar is true of democratic politics which must necessarily entertain the illusion that everyone can participate in political life on equal foot. This even though politics in modern democracies is obviously a highly specialized and hierarcized activity. Key struggles in the art field oppose exclusive and inclusive notions of art just as key struggles of the political field concern issues of technocracy and participation, professionalization and populism. But even if field boundaries are in both cases subjective, fluid and paradoxical, it would still be easy to pick out a kernel of people who are unquestionably artists or politicians. Controversies over who is and who isn't an artist and who is or isn't an actor in the field of politics may never be decidable, but they do have a kind of intersubjective reality due to the fact that they correspond to specialized fields of activity in modern society. The intellectual does not have that kind of institutional anchorage. He or she is by definition a translator and mediator between specialist discourses. “The field of intellectuals” is therefore a more fluid and subjective entity than the “field of art”, “field of literature” or “field of scientists”. It is to a large extent self-reflectively constituted not least through continuous debate about what an intellectual is and who the true intellectuals are. It is very much a field of people proposing concepts that put themselves in the hot spot and marginalize opponents. The struggle to

marginalize involves plenty of paradox as words like “margin” and “marginal” tend to be positive labels among intellectuals. In some cases “intellectual” may be a negative label that one seeks to attach to one’s opponent in order to exclude him or her from the field, this was long the case in Germany. The comparative study of intellectuals is very much a history of a concept, of how “intellectual” (and related notions) has been employed in various contexts since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## Common usages

I will take Collini 2006 as my starting point as this study seems to offer a kind of state of the art for historical reflection on the intellectual in the English speaking countries. In the introductory part of his narrative the author seeks first to map English *usage* of the word intellectual, secondly to develop a *concept* of the intellectual. A third step, not explicitly undertaken by the historian, would be to develop a *theory* of the intellectual. Collini distinguishes four or really five usages of the word intellectual: “The sociological sense” (1), defining the intellectual as a socio-professional category, “the subjective sense” (2), focusing on an individual’s attitude to and degree of interest in ideas, “the cultural sense” (3) involving both a level of achievement in a specific cultural field and the expression of general views, themes or topics to a wider public, and finally “the political sense” (4), emphasising the political “interventions” of the cultural domain. A fifth common usage of the term (mentioned only *en passant* by Collini), is that which focuses on the “free intellectual” understood as self-employed and institutionally independent (5). The distinction between the five usages must be taken as analytical. The senses are not mutually exclusive and are often used together in some mix or other. One may easily imagine an educated person active in the cultural domain (1), having showed persistent engagement in ideas (2), being institutionally independent (5), having achieved a level of recognition in a specialized field of culture (3), intervening in politics (4).

Historians always face this dilemma: How to clarify concepts without straying so far from the usage found in one’s sources as to render archive work pointless. For the intellectual historian it is therefore natural to let the hegemonic usage form the focal of a scholarly concept of the intellectual. According to Collini the hegemonic usage in the English language is number 3. An intellectual is a specialist that generalizes. All the usages observed by Collini have however been sought developed into concepts by scholars. Number 1 is a relatively objective and operative concept of the sort favoured by empirical social science.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately it fails to do justice to the controversies over the nature of intellectuals which has raged ever since the term caught in with the public in the 1890’s. Since the field is to a large extent constituted by struggles over what an intellectual is and who the true intellectuals are, the “objective” concept somehow betrays the nature of the object. A staple of those controversies has for example been the lament over the absence of death of intellectuals. Yet the number of people who make their living working with “culture” and/or who have a university education runs to the millions in larger states, and appears to be constantly expanding. Furthermore, in the “sociological” sense, “intellectual” becomes a very general notion on par with and often

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<sup>1</sup> The first sense, which understand the intellectual as a socio-professional category among others, is defined by Seymour Martin Lipset as “all those who create, distribute and apply *culture* – the symbolic world of man, including art, science and religion.”. In Collini 46. Other sociologists have identified the term with the university educated segment of society.

exchangeable with a series of other concepts of mainstream sociology like professionals, educated middle class, cultural capital, “Bildungsbürgertum”, etc, etc, ). Senses 2 and 5 are certainly naïve from the social scientific point of view as they offer no reflection on the conditions for intellectual practice. (4) is the starting point for one of the most influential French schools for the study of intellectuals, that of Jean-François Sirinelli and his associates. To the Sirinelli school, the history of intellectuals, is a subspecies of political history, dealing with the political interventions of the cultural domain since the time of Dreyfus. Collini notes that this restrictive use is much more common French than in English and besides that it is really a subset of (3), politics being a field of general interest.

Starting from usage 3 he proposes the following criteria:

1. The attainment of a level of achievement in an activity which is esteemed for the non-instrumental, creative, analytical, or scholarly capacities it involves.
2. The availability of media and channels of expression which reach publics other than that at which the initial “qualifying” activity itself is aimed.
3. The expression of views, themes, or topics which successfully articulate or engage with some of the general concerns of those publics.
4. The establishment of a reputation for being likely to have important and interesting things of this type to say and for having the willingness to say them effectively through the appropriate media.

This definition is in line with much contemporary research on the intellectual in that it makes specialization part of the concept. Specialization is not seen as incompatible with the concept of the intellectual but is, on the contrary, intrinsic to it. This usage goes against the grain of a common but certainly uninformed usage which identifies intellectual and “generalist”, thus framing the intellectual as a kind of leftover from a prespecialist stage, constantly threatened by modernization processes. As correctly the fear of specialization actually predates by far the notion of the intellectual, and the intellectual is only one of many answers that have been proposed. To my mind German romanticism and neo-humanism was perhaps the first great cultural current to be motivated largely by fear of specialization. In that movement the ambitious (alternative) notions of philosophy in Kant and Hegel were set to counter the malaise. At the same time Hölderlin proposed to make the *poet* and Humboldt’ the *translator* into the caretaker for the otherness of the other. Comte’s notion of *sociology*, Coleridge’s of the *clerisy* and Arnold’s of *culture* were later answers to problem. It is also common to point to the *critic* as part of the answer to the problem of specialization. To some critique is really the culminating point of a specialized effort of art and scholarship, the work of an author not being complete until the critic has made the author’s insights available for the general public and initiated discussion of them. The influential US notion of the *think tank* denotes another influential strategy that has been proposed in order to mobilize the cognitive achievements of various specialized field for a non-specialist purpose.

Chronology indicates that the intellectual problem emerged as one of several possible answers to modernity’s fear of specialization. The social figure of the intellectual arises with specialization and is concerned with making the fantastic achievements of the specialized fields of modernity available to other fields. This insight makes sense of one of the strangest aspects of the discourse on intellectuals. The rich literature on the comparative history of the intellectual shows us that the death or absence of the intellectual has indeed been deplored or celebrated incessantly across borders ever since the notion was established in the late 19th century. An example among thousands could be one of the first texts to dwell at length on the concept of the intellectual, Maurice Barrès' *Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme* from 1902. Barrès identifies the term with Rosmer in Henrik Ibsen’s 1886 play *Rosmersholm* „La définition se trouve dans *Rosmersholm*. Ulric Brendel dit à Rosmer: 'Mortensgaard est un habile homme, il ne veut que ce qu'il peut.' L'intellectuel est au contraire *l'homme d'art ou de*

*science qui n'a pas le pouvoir et qui pourtant se forme un idéal social.*<sup>2</sup> In Ibsen's play the tortured aristocrat Rosmer, wandering his manor amongst bookshelves and portraits of his distinguished ancestors, is an anachronism, a lofty man of spirit whose vague attempt at political intervention "above party politics" is effortlessly sidelined by headmaster Kroll, the conservative power politician, acting for once in conjunction with his opponent the leftist leader Peder Mortensgaard, editor of a successful popular newspaper.

The complaint that the age of the intellectual has past and that the intellectuals have betrayed their true mission is so common and has changed so little in content and style since the word intellectual first became a houseword of the modern media, that there is reason to ask if it is actually intrinsic to the discourse of the intellectual. The reasons given for the purported decline are of three kinds. Firstly the media and the general public is blamed for celebrity culture, commercialism, superficiality and a decline in literacy (I'll call this the *Mortensgaard effect*). Secondly, finger is pointed at the snobbism and recluse of scholars and scientists and the growing incomprehensibility of the discourse. I'll call this the *Magic mountain effect*. Finally there is the recurring worry over the purported decline of the universal standards and values with which intellectuals are supposed to engage. This could be called the *ULB (Unbearable Lightness of Being) effect*. The first two are just different examples of the process of differentiation and specialization at work. In an age when journalists specialize on using every trick in the book in order to reach large audiences while scholars specialize on ever more inaccessible research, there is, it seems, no room for the generalist addressing the "enlightened public" anymore, or so the argument goes. From the point of view of an advanced social theory like that of Niklas Luhmann, the decline of universals may also be seen a symptom of deepening differentiation. Society is being cognitively decentered by the autopoiesis of functional systems. Science still produces truth (that's what that particular discourse machine has been programmed to do) but in order to be put to use, those truths always need to be renegotiated for non-scientific social contexts like those of law, politics or media discourse, contexts that produce "truths" of their own. That process of negation is proving ever more painful.

The death of the intellectual has followed or even preshadowed the notion of the intellectual in very much the same way as "the death of art" (first developed as a theory in Hegel) has followed or preshadowed the modern art institution from its origins in Romanticism up till the contemporary. "The death of art" is intrinsic to modern art, every art work asks raises the question: Is this art, is art still possible? My claim would be that "the death of the intellectual" is intrinsic to the modern concept of the intellectual because it is a discourse brought on by modern sensibilities for contingency, decenteredness and specialization.

## **The provincialism of everybody**

The "death of the intellectual" is not the only paradoxical trait of the discourse, brought out by the many comparative studies of the intellectual that have appeared over the last decade. Not only has the age of intellectuals always been bygone. One's own country is and was always peculiarly anti-intellectual. Much of the US literature on the intellectual is concerned with deploring the peculiar anti-intellectualism of North-Americans. Brazilians deplore the

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<sup>2</sup> « The definition may be found in *Rosmersholm*. Ulrik Brendel says to Rosmer : 'Peder Mortensgaard never wants more than he can obtain. Peder Mortensgaard is capable of living life without ideals.' The intellectual, on the other hand, is an artist or scientist who does not hold power and yet forms a social ideal. Barrès 1987: 37

peculiar anti-intellectualism of Brazil, Englishmen that of Britain, Norwegians that of Norway. To Belgians Belgium is the land of anti-intellectualism as Hungary is probably for Hungarians.<sup>3</sup> Often this anti-intellectualism is presented with a positive twist. The English may see it in the light of presumed qualities of Englishness like moderation, empiricism and good common sense. Norwegian intellectuals will typically in one phrase deplore the presumed anti-intellectualism of Norwegians, while in the next acknowledging that it may be the price to pay for the anti-elitism and strong democratic cohesion of Scandinavian society. In all cases, the counterexample given is usually France, supposed paradise of intellectuals (the French may not subscribe to that description though). The paradox that intellectuals of all cultures (except possibly France) consider their own culture to be peculiarly anti-intellectual is neatly explained by the theory of the intellectual proposed by the Bourdieu-school (Bourdieu 1992, Sapiro 1999, Casanova 1999). To this school the intellectual gesture typically involves a recycling of *specific* cultural capital, accumulated in the transnational fields of art, science and scholarship, into *general* cultural and political capital, in national contexts. The intellectual, also called *the counterpower of the avant-garde*, is said to have arisen due to the autonomization of art and literature in relation to the nation state in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and as a result of a similar autonomization of philosophy and social science in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A gap arises between the field of power – that is politics, money and the mass media, closely tied in with the nation state, and the more internationalized fields of art- and knowledge production on the other. In this gap space is opened for a specifically intellectual field where artistic, scholarly and scientific avant-gardes actualize themselves relatively to the symbolic capital of the special fields they represent, like Émile Zola, Marcel Proust og André Gide did when intervening for captain Dreyfus. Intellectuals are thus not “free moving” like Karl Mannheim thought, but anchored in transnational art- and knowledge producing networks. The question of intellectuals being about actors from internationalized fields of art, science and scholarship intervening in more national publics, we see why one’s own culture is usually felt to be peculiarly anti-intellectual. Intellectual intervention *is* internationalism (or better transnationalism) faced with the constraints of the national contexts. In the Bourdieu school internationalism (or better transnationalism) is intrinsic to the notion of the autonomous cultural field. In peer to peer talk internationally, discourse may play out a logic of pure science or pure art, when returning to the national scene the impure obligations of politics and commerce make themselves be felt in the cultural domain again. The intellectual is thus structurally disposed to lament the anti-intellectualism of his national context. As shown by Casanova 1999 this has somewhat less been the case in France than elsewhere due to the special status of Paris as “world capital of culture” and the French claims to universalism in culture and politics (Enlightenment values, cradle of the rights of man, avant-garde art etc, etc).

Unlike Collini, the Bourdieu-school builds the issue of internationalization into his very concept of the intellectual. Yet it does not fundamentally question the entity of the nation state. Unlike say Ulrich Beck the bourdieusians presume that nation states are also societies. General – as opposed to specific - cultural capital is the economy of valuation producing the social structure of a nation state. The opposition between the internationalized world of specific cultural capital and the nationalized world of general cultural capital does have great explanatory power as a historical theory. Today, with globalization of politics and the mass media, it seems to be losing relevance. There was a time when art and science was more internationalized than politics and the popular media, but that is less and less the case. Still, as I will seek to show in the final part of this paper, internationalization or globalization remains paramount to the question of the intellectual. One should note that the assumptions

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<sup>3</sup> Multiple examples of this paradox can be found in **Trebitsch/Granjon 1998**.

of Bourdiesian sociology of culture are at odds with the normative assumptions of Habermas. In Bourdieu's reading of the Dreyfus affair, the universalizing values of autonomous literature naturally enters into conflict with the more nationally limited and provincial world of politics. In Habermas, however, politics should be cosmopolitan, subscribing to universally valid procedures (ref\*). Art and literature, on the other hand, become fields for "expression" of personal and national "identity". In Habermas politics is cosmopolitan, art provincial. In Bourdieu, art is, just like science, cosmopolitan in its logic, unlike the more provincial world of politics and the mass media.

### **Intellectuals and "the public sphere"**

The concept of the intellectual proposed by Collini is really very close to the bourdieusians, even though he avoids the trademark concept of capital. Both see the intellectual as a mediator between the achievements of a specialized cultural domain and a more general public. Collini refuses to base his concept of the intellectual on a Habermasian notion of the public sphere, insisting that there are a multitude of different publics, not one "public sphere". Still the concept he proposes of the intellectual presupposes such a theory or at least a tacit or normative consensus as to what does and what does not constitute a "general concern". Let me take a local example, that of the Norwegian modernist novelist Dag Solstad who is also a football commentator. Every four years he publishes, with another writer, a book of reportage and reflection on the latest World cup. The football books are read by a different and wider public than his novels. Solstad generally refuses to express artistic or political views in national newspapers or television, claiming that such media are unfit for the discussion of serious issues. He will however liberally share his views on football issues. In Norway as in most other European countries nothing, except possibly the sex life of celebrities, seems to be of more general interest to various publics than football. The modernist novel is certainly a field which is esteemed for the non-instrumental, creative, analytical, or scholarly capacities it involves. A priced author like Solstad, translated into dozens of languages has achieved a level of achievement that meets Collini's first condition. As football commentator he also expresses himself through media and channels of expression that touch publics other than that at which the initial "qualifying" activity itself is aimed. He has developed a reputation for being likely to have important and interesting things to say about football and for having the willingness to say them effectively through the appropriate media. So is Solstad the perfect intellectual, not only an esteemed experimental artist but also somebody who expresses himself to a different and wider public on a quite different set of issues? Something is wrong with this line of reasoning. If Solstad is an intellectual – and I think he is – it's because he writes novels that deal critically and reflectively with the various languages and media that make up modern societies and with ethical and political issues involved in contemporary life. My point is that the notion of "general concern" presupposes a normative theory on the relative value and importance of different publics. This is especially pressing today when the traditional quality media are clearly on the defensive in relation to New Media and when publics fragment and multiply. Newspapers like *Le Monde*, *El Pais* and the *New York Times* still exist but few people under 50 read them. So must we build our theory of the intellectual starting from Habermas? The concept of the public sphere raises enormous conceptual difficulties at the moment, due to globalization and the rate of media change. Is it really necessary to involve the theory of the intellectual in those difficulties? I'll opt for an alternative approach, tacitly indicated, perhaps, by Roland Barthes in his little essay on the Dreyfus affaire. To Barthes the historical significance of the affaire resides in it being the moment in history when it becomes apparent for everyone that unitary bourgeois culture has been blown apart. The bourgeoisie has lost its cultural voice. The affaire signals the advent of

a society where the elites of finance, politics, the military and the mainstream media “no longer have access to experimental intellectual, literary and artistic languages”. Social elites no longer share common cultural ground. “Une séparation dramatique des langages” has occurred, a dramatic internal untranslatable having arisen in the midst of culture.<sup>4</sup> From now on subcultures will live side by side with no clear cultural hierarchy. The avant-gardes of art and science hold only a friable grip, exposed to the storm of commercial culture. The permanent cultural revolution effected by the avantgardes, commercial culture and by experimental science assures that businessmen, politicians and bureaucrats never share a culture, at best only the fading memory of Hugo, Verdi and Darwin. If this analysis is correct, then one should give up the specialist /generalist framework. The opposite of a specialist is not and cannot be a generalist. So what is the alternative to mindless specialization? How does one respond to this “séparation dramatique des langages”? What do intellectuals do if they cannot step out of discourse and take the panoptic view of things? Surely part of the answer must be translation. One thing which may sound surprising to those not well versed in the history of translation philosophy, is that modern theory of translation began with the discovery of untranslatable, in the thought of Hölderlin, the Schlegel brothers and Wilhelm von Humboldt. Humboldt, the great philosopher of translation writes that “Man lives with his objects chiefly – in fact, since his feeling and acting depends on his perceptions, one may say exclusively – as language presents them to him. By the same process whereby he spins language out of his own being, he ensnares himself in it, and each language draws a magic circle round the people it belongs, a circle from which there is no escape save by stepping out of it into another.” These observations on the un-translatable of linguistic language may be extended to the dramatically separated discourses of modern society. Awareness of untranslatable endows the translator with a major ethical and political mission. He or she becomes the caretaker of the otherness (untranslatable) of the other. Translation aims to expand the recipient language by making otherness felt. This caretaking of the otherness of the other involves an opening up of one’s own language. Translation in this line of thought as developed from Hölderlin, and Humboldt to Benjamin, Derrida and Lévinas is to me a key mission of intellectuals. Intellectuals are often critics and critique whether of art, literature or scholarly works or popular culture involves the ethics and politics of translation that is of sensibility for the otherness of the other and the capacity to make that otherness resound in other discourse, including one’s “mother tongue”. But society is not a book and it’s more than just an array of texts. Therefore the acts of translation performed by intellectuals involve much more than simply linguistic translation or even the didactics of making the achievement of specialist discourse available to wider publics. Even political interventions may from one point of view be seen as acts of translation, in the sense that they “take over” insights and obligations of one discourse to a different context. I’m suggesting the concept of translation as an alternative to the opposition between the instrumental and the non-instrumental which is very often invoked when it comes to defining the intellectual. We saw it occurring in Collin’s first criterion. The opposition between the instrumental and the non-instrumental tends to reinforce humanist prejudices against technologists, natural scientists, businessmen etc. To my mind there is nothing more intellectual about being a book nerd (man of letters) rather than a computer engineer, doctor or nuclear scientist. The intellectual aspect rests not in the specialized activity but in the opening up of that field to foreign languages and horizons and in the conquest of a peculiar freedom of speech in relation to that discourse. Posing as a generalist is favourite power strategy of professionals. It is hardly consistent with the ethics and politics of translation.

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<sup>4</sup> Barthes 1994: 1191.

## Self-reflective critique

Sense 2 and 5 might be called the naïve senses, as they involve no reflection on the social and historical conditions for intellectual practice, but see the intellectual precisely as someone who stands outside of society being an intellectual due to lofty loyalty to the world of ideas. Collini dismisses off hand the romantic notion that the intellectual is someone who stands “outside” society. The intellectual is a role performed by and within a set of historically specific cultural and social relations. It should be noted however that even if idealist notions of the intellectual seem naïve, it has hard to think of an affirmative notion of the intellectual that does not assume that the person so called has some qualifications in terms of personal culture, creativity, reflectivity and mental seriousness. Such qualities must be assumed even if it’s hard to develop objective criteria for identifying them. The romantic opposition between those that depend on social institutions and those that are autonomous and independent is however surely misplaced. Anybody who addresses himself to a public (as intellectuals by definition do) exposes him- or herself to a whole string of social constraints. “Free” writers are not exposed to the same sort of institutional constraints as tenured academics, but constraints there are. But even if it is naïve to think that “independent” intellectuals are by nature more autonomous than state employed scholars or artists, autonomy may still form part of the concept of the intellectual. It is in my opinion hard to think of a notion of the intellectual that entirely disregards the notions of independence and autonomy. This is brought out negatively by the fact that the unfree or dependent intellectual is a contradiction in terms. The unfree thinker appears to betray any conceivable ideal for what an intellectual should be. Intellectuals are by definition among the freest thinkers in the land, somehow unconstrained even by the constraints of a specialized field of activity like art or science. Contemporary cultural theory is, however, largely hostile to the notion of autonomy. It therefore becomes a problem - one of the major problem of this paper - to develop an up to date notion of intellectual autonomy. Any relapse into idealism would be regressive. As Pierre Bourdieu points out it is “on the backdrop of illusionary freedom from social determinations [...] that such determinations are free to compel.” (Bourdieu 1997: 26). The artist, scientist or philosopher is never less free than when he believes himself to be set loose from all determinations. The solution proposed by Kant, to divide man up into two mutually hostile universes, the iron laws of nature, versus the freedom of the “transcendental ego”, convinces few people today depending as it does on metaphysics that are no longer widely shared. We need a framework wherein intellectuals are understood socio-historically while never forgetting that they are by definition free? I will call this framework *reflective autonomy*. Here I may appear to be knocking up open doors, repeating Hegel’s critique of Kant. The Kantian nature/spirit dualism should be replaced that of the freedom of reflective historical man, claimed Hegel. Self-reflection is built into humanist self-conception from Hegel’s historicist critique to the hermeneutics of Gadamer. The problem is that Freud, Nietzsche and Marx – and more recently Bourdieu - have taught us to be wary of the discourse of self-reflection. Can self-critique be anything more than self-projection? Isn’t it just a shiny rhetorical trope serving desire, the will to power and the ideologies of the times? In addition the sociology of Bourdieu may be taken to show that Hegel’s call for the scholar to reflect upon his historical situatedness (*Sittlichkeit*) is empty. The successful intellectual has no history. Only the unsuccessful and therefore silent intellectual has touched upon the limits that patrol access to the discourses of art, science and scholarship. Bourdieu calls for a more radical form of self-reflexion, that of *self-objectification*. The *homo academicus* should objectify himself using the best tools of qualitative and quantitative social science. Bourdieu did so in a series of works, disregarding the warnings of philosophers. To Kantians the freedom of thought is a necessary condition for reason. The freedom of the ego is a transcendental condition of intellectual life. The psychological or sociological objectification of self is thus an instance of

bad faith. The Bourdieusian would counter that the irrationalist is actually the Hegelian or Kantian refusing to scrutinize his self sociologically and psychologically. Self-objectification does lead into a series of paradoxes of self-reference. The eye may observe itself, in the mirror, but it may not in any straightforward way observe *how* it observes. Such paradoxes are sometimes quoted as proof that self-objectification is a faulty strategy. But paradoxes result precisely from a stringency of method not found in “armchair philosophy” and historical hermeneutics. That is why a certain form of deconstruction offers an answer to the challenge raised by the “hermeneutics of suspicion” of Freud, Nietzsche and Marx. The Hegelian-hermeneutic idea that autonomy should be reflective assumes an asymmetry. One demands of the various professions of modernity that they see beyond their own specialities, take a general perspective and reflect politically and historically on their doings. Given the non-transparent and decentered nature of modern society, it might be a much sterner test if those professions were asked to use their own sophisticated tools self-analytically. Take the example of journalism. Who is the true intellectual? Is it the journalist playing social philosopher writing a book on reflecting critically on the nature of the media? Or is it rather the journalist using the powerful tools of the media to scrutinize and uncover the power of the media, thus achieving reflective autonomy in relation to media discourse? In a famous essay on “Modernist painting” Clement Greenberg distinguished between two forms of critique. Enlightenment critique is holistic and totalizing. Modernist critique, however, is based on a *symmetry postulate*. It is specific and self-referential with the characteristic methods of a discipline being used to criticize the discipline, not in order to subvert it but in order to entrench it more firmly in its areas of competence. Modernism in this sense began in philosophy with Kant, and has since become a staple of modern society. Greenberg famously traced it as a major factor in the development of modern painting. The great novelists from Cervantes and Flaubert to Proust and Kafka used the novel to scrutinize the formal characteristics and social effects of romance and novel. Aesthetics has long struggled to come to terms with Marcel Duchamp’s notorious 1917 urinoir. The most influential misreading was that of Arthur Danto. To Danto the *ready made* demonstrates that there is nothing specifically aesthetic about art. It is an institutional question what is and is not art (Danto 1999). But what the Duchampian *gestus* shows is something more and different, namely that it is possible for the avant-gardist to win degrees of liberty in relation to the institution that stages him. Objectifying the institution of art with his ready made, Duchamp is a free artist and a free intellectual at least until the institution catches up with him. A key sensibility of the 20<sup>th</sup> century avant-garde is that of being both at the mercy of institution and beyond its very concepts. “We are writers without literature”, writes Roland Barthes in *The point Zero of literature*. The art historian Ina Blom notes that the field of art has developed a methodology of its own which aims precisely at making the horizon of the art institution perceivable. That methodology is performance art. “As a performance in many cases formulates a kind of borderzone between a life situation and a art situation, it is precisely capable of interfering in the practice of this bodily and emotional adaption to real social situations (And in real time!) (And also with a certain Brechtian estrangement – at the same time as the methodological apparatus itself – that is the performative artistic framing of the situation – appears in broad daylight. Hard to think of better example of reflexivity than this.”<sup>5</sup> The self-referential deconstruction of the artist disclosing the magic of the art institution or of the journalist uncovering the arbitrariness of media power, is to my mind more intellectual than the very general and unconvincing Hegelian-hermeneutic appeal to clarify one’s situatedness through

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<sup>5</sup> Blom, lecture at IAAKs "Perspektiver på Bourdieus kultursosiologi". *Kunsthistories forskningsdag*, UiO:

historical self-reflection. Science critique bites when formulated according to scientific method rather than in the loose terms of philosophy. The symmetry postulate adds a degree of seriousness – even danger - to reflectivity. It's not just non-committing general culture, but becomes specific as it enters the discourse questioned.

As I mentioned in the introduction, the idea that the intellectual is dead and the age of intellectuals bygone, forms part of the very discourse of the intellectual. Maybe that's why self-referential critique is not always mentioned in discussion of the nature of the intellectual. As shown by Lev Manovich, digitization has made "the media universe more self-referential because when all media objects are designed, stored, and distributed using a single machine – the computer – it becomes much easier to borrow elements from existing objects (Manovich 2000: 131)". In addition the decentering of society, notably the weakening of the nation state, described for instance in the social theory of Niklas Luhmann, stimulates reflectivity. Autonomized fields and institutions are obliged to regulate themselves by self-observation and self-regulation, inventing new instruments of critique and evaluation as well as new procedures for deparadoxation (dealing with the paradoxes caused by self-reference). In a sense we have all become Duchampians. Advertising is deconstructing advertising while scientists and scholars perform science critique. The problem is that the self-reflective critiques of modernity often remain ignorant of each other. Philosophers often take the Kantian critique of reason to be the one truly reflective critique. Sociologists of knowledge like Bourdieu tend to absolutize their form of reflective critique. In the growing field of science studies, reflectivity often denotes the use of approaches, of a literary sort, which question the rhetoric of science<sup>6</sup>. But science is more than a set of textual norms and "linguistic turn does not exhaust the concept of reflexivity in science. Artists tend to see science as a unitary block, overlooking the radicality of the critique of science which is such an important aspect of contemporary research and higher education. One lacks awareness of how reflective institutional critique is going in many places in society, often based on the specific competence of the field in the question and in its own language.

Most self-referentiality is not really critical, just playful and inconsequential. That's the case with most of all that contemporary advertising which plays at poking fun at the manipulative techniques of advertising. Symmetry does not guarantee seriousness, unless there is an intention to be critical. Also critique in itself may be a necessary but is not a sufficient condition for a practice to be labelled intellectual, in the sense I'm proposing. Critique is part of the normal function of science specifically and reason in general. The intellectual must at the very least go beyond the normal critical procedures of the field and question their normative content. An atomic physicist is not an intellectual just because he's good at questioning the papers of his colleagues. Sartre famously remarked that "'an atomic physicist is an intellectual only when he signs a petition against nuclear testing'. The quote has been thoroughly discussed in the literature as it strikes a core in very general sensibilities for what an intellectual is. Why is that? Several interpretations have been proposed. To Sartre the remark illustrates his humoristic self-description of the intellectual as "**quelqu'un qui se mêle de ce qui ne le regarde pas**" (someone who interferes with what does not concern him). Collini is in relative agreement with Sartre, taking it to be a case of the renowned specialist addressing a different public on an issue of general concern to it. Unlike Sartre though, he does not make protest integral to his concept: "it is not because the physicist is *against* something that he would be likely to be so described, but because he is here going beyond his specialist activity and speaking out on a matter of general interest [...] (61)." But why does the anti-nuclear protest of nuclear physicist concern us more than would the anti-nuclear protest of a poet or

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<sup>6</sup> Hoppert 1995.

an economist? To Michael Walzer the example raises the question of the marginality of intellectuals: “perhaps we should say straightforward that marginal intellectuals are the only real intellectuals”. The atomic physicist marginalizes himself in the community of nuclear physicists, taking on instead the role of an intellectual. Unlike Collini, I agree with Walzer that marginality should be intrinsic to the concept of the intellectual. Intellectuals exploit the paradox that not being *in* power may, in modern society, be a source of authority and thus of counter-power. One should stress, however, that intellectuals can be marginal in two different ways. To the Bourdieusians the counter-power of intellectuals stems from the relative marginality of the social field in which they specialize. Cultural capital is marginal relative to economic capital, thus there is structural opposition. Bourdieu seems to argue that intellectuals should however be centrally placed in their own specialist fields. This may be interfered from his critique of the “collaborationist intellectuals” who specialize in posing as “artists”, “philosophers” or “writers” in the media being in reality only marginally placed in their supposed fields of speciality. But can marginality in a specialist field in itself be a source of authority? I doubt it. We are concerned with the anti-nuclear protest of the atomic physicist because of the self-referentiality it always. He knows what is talking about, and talking out (one can imagine) involves moral and intellectual courage and sacrifice, precisely because of the self-referentiality involved.

### **The question of time**

The Bourdieu school, and following them – Collini - speak a language of space. The intellectual is thought of as stretched out between two fields or domains, one specialized, in which he or she first achieves recognition, and then a more general domain, in which a reputation for being likely to have important and interesting things to say and for having the willingness to say them effectively through the appropriate media, is developed. I have proposed in this paper to replace the binary distinction between specialization and the general with the triangle, specialization, reflective autonomy and ethics translation. We need now to confront the question of time. Intellectuals are – if anything – men and women of their times. How do we account for the temporal aspect of intellectual practice?

There is in my opinion no interesting and consistent way, even for a sociological approach, of defining intellectual that does not engage with the word “critical”. This is shown negatively be the fact that “uncritical intellectual” is a contradiction in terms. In many languages the concept of “critique” carries with it the sense of Kantian philosophy, critique being self-reflective critique according to the symmetry postulate. That is why avant-garde deconstruction of the art institution is peculiarly intellectual, as is the Bourdieu school’s objectification of the “homo academicus” or the critique of science and education in Foucault, Derrida or Latour. It is carried on by Michel Foucault in his concept of the critical ontology of ourselves understood as “a critique and a permanent creation of ourselves in our autonomy”. (Foucault 1984: 44). The critical ontology of ourselves is in Foucault’s words not a theory or a doctrine and not even a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating. It is rather an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life of a civilization in which the critique of what we are, is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed. Still it is not a utopia but rather a way of making sense of what intellectuals have been doing since Kant began his critical project. The critical ontology of ourselves is the freedom of modern man and notably of the intellectual. A key form of this critique is the critical ontology of the contemporary, pioneered already by Kant himself. It entails a double movement of construction and critique or, if you like, of synthesis and analysis. It is the naming and creation of man by man, but also that the rational critique of that naming. The critical

ontology of ourselves is, writes Foucault, “a historico-practical test of the limits that we may not go beyond, and thus a work carried out upon ourselves as free beings.” (1984: 47) In radical politics, the arts and in social science and social philosophy, there is precisely such a reflective critique of the contemporary going on. Today, for instance, many intellectuals concern themselves with the nature of globalization. We proclaim the difference of today to be globalization and we delve into globalization, transforming and transfiguring it, in the process. The German term *Globalisierungskritik* conveys the nature of the movement better than the Anglo-Saxon “anti-globalisation” or the more Gallic and somewhat idealist utopian term “alternative globalization”.

How does one do the critical ontology of globalization? It is in the instinct of modern men and women to master their time by naming it. Globalization is only the latest in a long series of epochal identities proposed in modernity. Identity is as much a question of time as of place. One is not only of a village, city or nation, but also of an epoch and a generation. Early historical epochs were named only retrospectively. Renaissance scholars called that long, amorphous space of time which separated them from antiquity “the medieval ages”. The Renaissance itself had no name until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Jacob Burckhardt wrote *Die Cultur der Renaissance in Italien*. “Le Baroque” came into circulation as a derogatory term used by the clear, bright and harmonious art and thought of 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment to mock the excesses of its immediate predecessors. The Enlightenment, however, began to speak of itself as *les Lumières* and *die Aufklärung*. In his 1784 essay *Was ist Aufklärung* Kant conceptualized the act of naming one’s times through reflective critique. He proclaimed it to be “Mankind’s coming of age”, its maturity. Since then man has taken upon himself to give name to the times in which he live and to conceptualize these as a new form of experience. The Romantics was the name of a small hyperintellectual and hyperironic literary circle in Jena, Germany, most unrepresentative of its times. What better proof of the prestige of literature in 19<sup>th</sup> century than the fact that the name that Novalis and the Schlegel brothers chose for their aesthetic project has come to denote an entire epoch in European cultural and political life, from the late 18<sup>th</sup> to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century! In Paris in the second half of the nineteenth century Charles Baudelaire and Arthur Rimbaud proclaimed “modernity” and set out to create an artistic language that was peculiarly “modern”. This was also a time when the novel took upon itself to document and narrate the contemporary. “The 19<sup>th</sup> century, as we know it, is largely a creation of Balzac”, observed Oscar Wilde.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the social sciences achieved discursive hegemony within the ontology of the present. The key concepts proposed used by 20th century men and women to grasp their times, concepts like the iron cage, the great depression, the cold war, information society, industrial society, the post-industrial society, risk society and globalization, were to a large extent moulded by sociologists, political scientists and economists. The arts were somewhat marginalized at the same time as hegemony within the arts gradually shifted from literature to the visual arts. Architecture certainly retained its capacity to shape and name the contemporary. The notion of the post-modern, which attracted a lot of attention in the 1980s, came from architectural discourse. It was in turn a reaction to a 20th century discourse on modernism shaped by architects like Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright and Mies van der Rohe. In aesthetics it has been fashionable, since the early eighties, to dismiss the notion of contemporary art. An argument, proposed in various forms by the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard, US philosopher Francis Fukuyama, the Mexican poet Octavio Paz, and, with a twist, by the Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas, claims that we have left history in order to inhabit the pure space of the present, “a time without measure”. If Modernism was about trading in tradition for the future, finding the path from tradition to the future, after the failure of Communism and Progress, we no longer have faith in the future either, or so one says. In my opinion this argument is false. We do not have to choose between the grand narrative of

progress or being abandoned in the permanently temporary present. The obligations of art and social thought to grasping the contemporary may be framed and argued in other modes than that of the grand historical narrative and its dissolution into oblivion.

## Critical ontology

Foucault draws his notion of the critical ontology of ourselves from counterposing two famous essays - Kant's *Was ist Aufklärung?* and Baudelaire's *Le peintre de la vie Moderne* - enriching the discourse of the philosopher with that of the poet and vice versa. In his essay, Kant bestows on philosophy the obligation to think the contemporary. This critical ontology of the contemporary is not the idea that the present should be made to fit with some narrative of past and future, a tale of decadence, the heralding sign of a forthcoming event and so on, or a point of transition towards the dawning of a new world, as in philosophy from Plato to Vico. Kant is not seeking to understand the present on the basis of a totality or a future achievement. He is looking for a difference, observes Foucault. What difference does today introduce with respect to yesterday? The difference made by the *Aufklärung* is the right of men to construct themselves in their autonomy through a continuous critique of the contemporary. Kant's key idea is constructivism, as he makes clear when he famously answers the question *Was ist Aufklärung?* by "Wir sind die Aufklärung". We are the Enlightenment because we chose to be the Enlightenment. Social reality is a constructed rather than a natural one and it is the obligation of the intellectual to think through the conditions of possibility for those constructions. Half a century later, Charles Baudelaire proposed a program for the arts which paralleled that proposed by Kant for philosophy. To be a modern artist, says Baudelaire, is to have the will to "heroize" the present. The *painter of the modern world*, transfigures this world. This transfiguration does not entail an annulling of reality, but a difficult interplay between the truth of what is real and the exercise of freedom; "natural" things become "more than natural", "beautiful" things, become "more than beautiful" and individual objects appear "endowed with an impulsive life like the soul of [their] creator". The high value of the present is in dissociable from a desperate eagerness to imagine it, to imagine it otherwise than it is, and to transform it not by destroying it, but by grasping it in what it is. Baudelarian modernity, notes Foucault, is an exercise in which extreme attention to what is real is confronted with the practice of a liberty that simultaneously respects this reality and violates it. Epochal identity is an identity of difference. Foucault's co-reading of Kant and Baudelaire into a kind of manifesto for the non-historicist avant-garde, does not amount to a Hegelian idealism where concept equals reality. The obligation to seek out the differences of the present stems rather from a Nietzschean reflection on the complex, non-linear relations between power, discourse and social reality. Hegel was right, in a short hand way, that in social life we are what we think we are. If society conceives itself to be, say the age of globalization, it *is* the age of globalization, but the short handing perverts everything. Thought does not become materialist by turning Hegel on his head, it must cut the dialectical movement into pieces.

## Conclusion

It's time summarize our discussions in the form of a theory of the intellectual. Each number indicates a key step in the argument. The theory may start from the Bourdieusian diagnosis on the inherent tensions between the parameters of "three dimensional" social space –economic, political (social) and *cultural capital* and the inherent marginality of groups that specialize in cultural capital relative to economic and political capital (1). The intellectual is in this sense a counter power, entailing a certain *marginalization* (2). One should stress though that even

counter power is a power and that cultural capital is “dirty” in the sense that it is - as capital is by definition – a source of power over people. In a more Luhmannian vein I would also stress the cognitive decentering of societies in this age of globalization (3). Decentering renders the encyclopaedic ideals of Enlightenment reason irrelevant. The alternative to specialization is not “general culture” but new forms of specialization (4). One of those discourses of counterspecialization with which modernity seeks to balance the negative effects of specialization is that on the intellectual. In the best tradition of the German mandarin professors, Luhmann, shrugs off the concept of the intellectual as a sham of media discourse (Luhmann 1996). We are however not obliged to stay with Luhmann by the magic mountain of pure theory, however brilliant the theory. Autonomy is intrinsic to the concept of the intellectual(4). As is independence and freedom of thought. I have argued that this autonomy must be a *reflective autonomy* (5). This is in line with Bourdieu’s theory of the intellectual, except that the Frenchmen overstates the importance of sociological critique. I have stressed instead the peculiar importance of that *symmetric self-critique* (6) pioneered originally by Kant in philosophy and of which the science critique of a Bourdieu or Foucault may be said to offer modern examples along with avant-garde critique of the art institution and journalistic critique of the media (framed according to the methodology of investigative journalism, that is, not in form of newspaper essayism). The intellectual appears on the scene of history to confront a three headed ogre. I’ve named them the *Mortensgaard effect*, the *magic mountain effect* and the *ULB effect*. Without ogre no intellectual and, on the face of it, the ogre comes out on top wins their deadly struggle. The ogre is part of prOGREss and no modern society can be thought without it. Thus the death of the intellectual must be intrinsic to the discourse to the intellectual just as the death of art is intrinsic to contemporary art (7). Having achieved his or her reflective autonomy the intellectual may counter specialization not with totalizing reason but with an ethics and politics of translation in the tradition from Humboldt to Lévinas (8). The intellectual must, as Foucault says, be specific rather than totalizing (9). The critical ontology of ourselves is a work on limits and difference (10). It should also be a work of experiment, drawing on the creativity (notably of art) as well as reflective critique (notably of science and philosophy). There is no dualism here, art can and should be critical and critique can and should be creative. The critical ontology of the contemporary is essential to the concept of the intellectual understood as someone who is of his times and in his times and who helps shape the very conception of time and times. It creates social reality as it reasons critically on that very reality. Such ontology is what we do when, for instance we construct our age to be that of globalization, while at same time mobilizing our best creative and analytic powers in critique of it.

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2. Kritik av den rene autonomi. Ibsen, verden og de norske intellektuelle. (Unipub forlag 2006, ISBN: 8274772288) [A Critique of pure autonomy, Ibsen, the world and the Norwegian intellectual] 579 pages. (Drawing on the global literature on the comparative study of intellectuals, the book investigates Henrik Ibsen's legacy as founding figure of the Norwegian tradition for critical intellectuals).
3. "Maktutredning: kunnskapsregime eller motmakt?", i Meier, Siri og Myklebust, Sissel (red) *Kunnskapsmakt*, Oslo 2002. [The social scientist as critical intellectual in post-war Scandinavia]. 37 pages.
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