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## The Public Role of Writers and Intellectuals

EDWARD SAID

Twenty-one years ago, *The Nation* magazine convened a congress of writers in New York by putting out notices for the event and, as I understood the tactic, leaving open the question of who was a writer and why he or she qualified to attend. The result was that literally hundreds of people showed up, crowding the main ballroom of a midtown Manhattan hotel almost to the ceiling. The occasion itself was intended as a response by the intellectual and artistic communities to the immediate onset of the Reagan era. As I recall the proceedings, a debate raged for a long period of time over the definition of a writer in the hope that some of the people there would be selected out or, in plain English, forced to leave. The reason for that was twofold: first of all, to decide who had a vote and who did not, and second, to form a writer's union. Not much occurred in the way of reduced and manageable numbers; the hearteningly large mass of people simply remained immense and unwieldy, since it was quite clear that everyone who came as a writer who opposed Reaganism stayed on as a writer who opposed Reaganism.

I remember clearly that at one point someone sensibly suggested that we should adopt what was said to be the Soviet position on defining a writer, that is, a writer is someone who says that he or she is a writer. And, I think that is where matters seem to have rested, even though a National Writer's Union was formed but restricted its functions to technical professional matters like fairer standardized contracts between publishers and writers. An American Writer's Congress to deal with expressly political issues was also formed, but was derailed by people who in effect wanted it for one or another specific political agenda that could not get a consensus.

Since that time, an immense amount of change has taken place in the world of writers and intellectuals and, if anything, the definition of who or what a writer and intellectual is has become more confusing and difficult to pin down. I tried my hand at it in my 1993 Reith Lectures, but there have been major political and economic transformations since that time, and in writing this essay I have found myself revising a great deal and adding to some of my earlier views. Central to the changes has been the deepening of an unresolved tension as to whether writers and intellectuals can ever be what is called nonpolitical or not, and if so, how and in what measure. The difficulty of the tension for the individ-

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ual writer and intellectual has been paradoxically that the realm of the political and public has expanded so much as to be virtually without borders. Consider that the bipolar world of the Cold War has been reconfigured and dissolved in several different ways, all of them first of all providing what seems to be an infinite number of variations on the location or position, physical and metaphorical, of the writer and, second of all, opening up the possibility of divergent roles for him or her to play if, that is, the notion of writer or intellectual itself can be said to have any coherent and definably separate meaning or existence at all. The role of the American writer in the post-9/11 period has certainly amplified the pertinence of what is written about “us” to an enormous degree.

Yet, despite the spate of books and articles saying that intellectuals no longer exist and that the end of the Cold War, the opening up of the mainly American university to legions of writers and intellectuals, the age of specialization, and the commercialization and commodification of everything in the newly globalized economy have simply done away with the old somewhat romantic-heroic notion of the solitary writer-intellectual (I shall provisionally connect the two terms for purposes of convenience here, then go on to explain my reasons for doing so in a moment), there still seems to be a great deal of life in the ideas and the practices of writer-intellectuals that touch on, and are very much a part of, the public realm. Their role most recently in opposing (as well, alas, as supporting the Anglo-American war in Iraq) is very much a case in point.

In the three or four quite distinct contemporary language cultures that I know something about, the importance of writers and intellectuals is eminently, indeed overwhelmingly, true in part because many people still feel the need to look at the writer-intellectual as someone who ought to be listened to as a guide to the confusing present, and also as a leader of a faction, tendency, or group vying for more power and influence. The Gramscian provenance of both these ideas about the role of an intellectual is evident.

Now in the Arab-Islamic world, the two words used for intellectual are *muthaqqaf*, or *mufakir*, the first derived from *thaqafa* or culture (hence, a man of culture), the second from *fikr* or thought (hence, a man of thought). In both instances the prestige of those meanings is enhanced and amplified by implied comparison with government, which is now widely regarded as without credibility and popularity, or culture and thought. So in the moral vacancy created, for example, by dynastic republican governments like those of Egypt, Iraq, Libya, or Syria, many people turn either to religious or secular intellectuals for the leadership no longer provided by political authority, even though governments have been adept at co-opting intellectuals as mouthpieces for them. But the search for authentic intellectuals goes on, as does the struggle.

In the French-speaking domains the word *intellectuel* unfailingly carries with it some residue of the public realm in which recently deceased figures like Sartre, Foucault, Bourdieu, and Aron debated and put forward their views for very large audiences indeed. By the early 1980s when most of the *maîtres penseurs* had disappeared, a certain gloating and relief accompanied their absence, as if the new redundancy gave a lot of little people a chance to have their say for the first time since Zola. Today, with what seems like a Sartre revival in evidence and with

Pierre Bourdieu or his ideas appearing almost to the day of his death in every other issue of *Le Monde* and *Libération*, a considerably aroused taste for public intellectuals has gripped many people, I think. From a distance, debate about social and economic policy seems pretty lively, and is not quite as one-sided as it is in the United States.

Raymond Williams's succinct presentation in *Keywords* of the force field of mostly negative connotations for the word "intellectual" is about as good a starting point for understanding the historical semantics of the word as we have for England.<sup>1</sup> Excellent subsequent work by Stefan Collini, John Carey, and others has considerably deepened and refined the field of practice where intellectuals and writers have been located. Williams himself has gone on to indicate that, after the mid-twentieth century, the word takes on a new somewhat wider set of associations, many of them having to do with ideology, cultural production, and the capacity for organized thought and learning. This suggests that English usage has expanded to take in some of the meanings and uses that have been quite common in the French, and generally European, contexts. But as in the French instance, intellectuals of Williams's generation have passed from the scene (the almost miraculously articulate and brilliant Eric Hobsbawm being a rare exception) and, to judge from some of his successors on the *New Left Review*, a new period of Left quietism may have set in, but especially since New Labour has so thoroughly renounced its own past and joined in the new American campaign to re-order the world, a renewal of the European writer's dissenting role has been enhanced. Neoliberal and Thatcherite intellectuals are pretty much where they have been (in the ascendancy), and have the advantage of many more pulpits in the press from which to speak, for example, to support or criticize the war in Iraq.

In the American setting, however, the word "intellectual" is less used than in the three other arenas of discourse and discussion that I've mentioned. One reason is that professionalism and specialization provide the norm for intellectual work much more than they do in Arabic, French, or British English. The cult of expertise has never ruled the world of discourse as much as it now does in the United States, where the policy intellectual can feel that he or she surveys the world. Another reason is that even though the United States is actually full of intellectuals hard at work filling the airwaves, print, and cyberspace with their effusions, the public realm is so taken up with questions of policy and government, as well as with considerations of power and authority that even the idea of an intellectual who is driven neither by a passion for office nor by the ambition to get the ear of someone in power is difficult to sustain for more than a second or two. Profit and celebrity are powerful stimulants. In far too many years of appearing on television or being interviewed by journalists, I have never *not* been asked the question, "What do you think the United States should do about such and such an issue?" I take this to be an index of how the notion of rule has been lodged at the very heart of intellectual practice outside the university. And may I add that it has been a point of principle for me *not ever* to reply to the question.

Yet it is also overwhelmingly true that in America there is no shortage in the public realm of partisan policy intellectuals who are organically linked to one or another political party, lobby, special interest, or foreign power. The world of the

Washington think tanks, the various television talk shows, innumerable radio programs, to say nothing of literally thousands of occasional papers, journals, and magazines—all this testifies amply to how densely saturated public discourse is with interests, authorities, and powers whose extent in the aggregate is literally unimaginable in scope and variety, except as that whole bears centrally on the acceptance of a neoliberal post-welfare state responsive neither to the citizenry nor to the natural environment, but to a vast structure of global corporations unrestricted by traditional barriers or sovereignties. The unparalleled global military reach of the United States adds to the new structure. With the various specialized systems and practices of the new economic situation, only very gradually and partially being disclosed, and with an administration whose idea of national security is preemptive war, we are beginning to discern an immense panorama of how these systems and practices (many of them new, many of them refashioned holdovers from the classical imperial system) assembled together to provide a geography whose purpose is slowly to crowd out and override human agency.<sup>2</sup> We must not be misled by the effusions of Thomas Friedman, Daniel Yergin, Joseph Stanislas, and the legions who have celebrated globalization into believing that the system itself is the best outcome for human history, nor in reaction should we fail to note what in a far less glamorous way globalization from below, as Richard Falk has called the post-Westphalian world system, can provide by way of human potential and innovation. There is now a fairly extensive network of NGOs created to address minority and human rights, women's and environmental issues, movements for democratic and cultural change, and while none of these can be a substitute for political action or mobilization, especially to protest and try to prevent illegal wars, many of them do embody resistance to the advancing global status quo.

Yet, as Dezalay and Garth have argued, given the funding of many of these international NGOs, they are co-optable as targets for what the two researchers have called the imperialism of virtue, functioning as annexes to the multinationals and great foundations like Ford, centers of civic virtue that forestall deeper kinds of change or critiques of longstanding assumptions.<sup>3</sup>

In the meantime, it is sobering and almost terrifying to contrast the world of academic intellectual discourse in its generally hermetic, jargon-ridden, unthreatening combativeness, with what the public realm all around has been doing. Masao Miyoshi has pioneered the study of this contrast, especially in its marginalization of the humanities.<sup>4</sup> The separation between the two realms, academic and public, is, I think, greater in the United States than anywhere else, although in Perry Anderson's dirge for the Left with which he announces his editorship of the *New Left Review* it is all too plain that in his opinion the British, American, and Continental pantheon of remaining heroes is, with one exception, resolutely, exclusively academic and almost entirely male and Eurocentric.<sup>5</sup> I found it extraordinary that he takes no account of nonacademic intellectuals like John Pilger and Alexander Cockburn, or major academic and political figures such as Chomsky, Zinn, the late Eqbal Ahmad, Germaine Greer, or such diverse figures as Mohammed Sid Ahmad, bell hooks, Angela Davis, Cornel West,

Henry Louis Gates, Miyoshi, Ranajit Guha, Partha Chatterjee, to say nothing of an impressive battery of Irish intellectuals that would include Seamus Deane, Luke Gibbons, Declan Kiberd plus many others, all of whom would certainly not accept the solemn lament intoned for what he calls the "the neo-liberal grand slam."

The great novelty alone of Ralph Nader's candidacy in the 2000 American presidential campaign was that a genuine adversarial intellectual was running for the most powerful elected office in the world using the rhetoric and tactics of demystification and disenchantment, in the process supplying a mostly disaffected electorate with alternative information buttressed with precise facts and figures. This went completely against the prevailing modes of vagueness, vapid slogans, mystification, and religious fervor sponsored by the two major party candidates, underwritten by the media, and paradoxically by virtue of its inaction, the humanistic academy. Nader's competitive stance was a sure sign of how far from over and defeated the oppositional tendencies in global society are; witness also the upsurge of reformism in Iran, the consolidation of democratic antiracism in various parts of Africa, and so on, leaving aside the November 1999 action in Seattle against the WTO, the liberation of South Lebanon, the unprecedented worldwide protests against war in Iraq, etcetera. The list would be a long one, and very different in tone (were it to be interpreted fully) from the consolatory accommodationism Anderson seems to recommend. In intention, Nader's campaign was also different from those of his opponents in that he aimed to arouse the citizenry's democratic awareness of the untapped potential for participation in the country's resources, not just greed or simple assent to what passes for politics.

Having summarily assimilated the words "intellectual" and "writer" to each other a moment ago, it is best for me now to show why and how they belong together, despite the writer's separate origin and history. In the language of everyday use, a writer in the languages and cultures that I am familiar with is a person who produces literature, that is, a novelist, a poet, a dramatist. I think it is generally true that in all cultures writers have a separate, perhaps even more honorific, place than do intellectuals; the aura of creativity and an almost sanctified capacity for originality (often vatic in its scope and quality) accrues to them as it does not at all to intellectuals, who with regard to literature belong to the slightly debased and parasitic class of critics. (There is a long history of attacks on critics as nasty niggling beasts incapable of little more than carping and pedantic word-mongering.) Yet during the last years of the twentieth century the writer took on more and more of the intellectual's adversarial attributes in such activities as speaking the truth to power, being a witness to persecution and suffering, and in supplying a dissenting voice in conflicts with authority. Signs of the amalgamation of one to the other would have to include the Salman Rushdie case in all its ramifications, the formation of numerous writers' parliaments and congresses devoted to such issues as intolerance, the dialogue of cultures, civil strife (as in Bosnia and Algeria), freedom of speech and censorship, truth and reconciliation (as in South Africa, Argentina, Ireland, and elsewhere), and the special symbolic role of the writer as an intellectual testifying to a country's or region's expe-

rience, thereby giving that experience a public identity forever inscribed in the global discursive agenda. The easiest way of demonstrating that is simply to list the names of some (but by no means all) recent Nobel Prize winners, then to allow each name to trigger in the mind an emblemized region, which in turn can be seen as a sort of platform or jumping-off point for that writer's subsequent activity as an intervention in debates taking place very far from the world of literature. Thus, Nadine Gordimer, Kenzaburo Oe, Derek Walcott, Wole Soyinka, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Octavio Paz, Elie Wiesel, Bertrand Russell, Gunter Grass, Rigoberta Menchu, among several others.

Now it is also true, as Pascale Casanova has brilliantly shown in her synoptic book *La République mondiale des lettres*, that, fashioned over the past 150 years, there now seems to be a global system of literature in place, complete with its own order of literariness (*litterarité*), tempo, canon, internationalism, and market values.<sup>6</sup> The efficiency of the system is that it seems to have generated the types of writers that she discusses as belonging to such different categories as assimilated, dissident, translated figures, all of them both individualized and classified in what she clearly shows is a highly efficient, globalized quasi-market system. The drift of her argument is in effect to show how this powerful and all-pervasive system can even go as far as to stimulate a kind of independence from it, in cases like those of Joyce and Beckett, writers whose language and orthography do not submit to the laws either of State or of system.

Much as I admire it, however, the overall achievement of Casanova's book is nevertheless contradictory. She seems to be saying that literature as globalized system has a kind of integral autonomy to it that places it in large measure just beyond the gross realities of political institutions and discourse, a notion that has a certain theoretical plausibility to it when she puts it in the form of "un espace littéraire internationale," with its own laws of interpretation, its own dialectic of individual work and ensemble, its own problematics of nationalism and national languages. But she doesn't go as far as Adorno in saying, as I would too (and plan to return to briefly at the end), that one of the hallmarks of modernity is how at a very deep level, the aesthetic and the social need to be kept in a state of irreconcilable tension. Nor does she spend enough time discussing the ways in which the literary, or the writer, is still implicated, indeed frequently mobilized for use in the great post-Cold War cultural contests provided by the altered political configurations I spoke of earlier.

In that wider setting then, the basic distinction between writers and intellectuals need not therefore be made since, insofar as they both act in the new public sphere dominated by globalization (and assumed to exist even by adherents of the Khomeini fatwa), their public role as writers and intellectuals can be discussed and analyzed together. Another way of putting it is to say that I shall be concentrating on what writers and intellectuals have in common as they intervene in the public sphere. I do not at all want to give up the possibility that there remains an area outside and untouched by the globalized one that I shall be discussing here, but do not want to discuss until the end, since my main concern is with what the writer's role is squarely within the actually existing system.

Let me say something about the technical characteristics of intellectual intervention today. To get a dramatically vivid grasp of the speed to which communication has accelerated during the past decade I'd like to contrast Jonathan Swift's awareness of effective public intervention in the early eighteenth century with ours. Swift was surely the most devastating pamphleteer of his time, and during his campaign against the Duke of Marlborough from 1713 to 1714, he was able to get 15,000 copies of his pamphlet "The Conduct of the Allies" onto the streets in a few days. This brought down the Duke from his high eminence but nevertheless did not change Swift's pessimistic impression (dating back to *A Tale of a Tub*, 1694) that his writing was basically temporary, good only for the short time that it circulated. He had in mind of course the running quarrel between ancients and moderns in which venerable writers like Homer and Horace had the advantage of great longevity, even permanence, over modern figures like Dryden by virtue of their age and the authenticity of their views. In the age of electronic media, such considerations are mostly irrelevant, since anyone with a computer and decent Internet access is capable of reaching numbers of people quantum times more than Swift did, and can also look forward to the preservation of what is written beyond any conceivable measure. Our ideas today of archive and discourse must be radically modified, and can no longer be defined as Foucault painstakingly tried to describe them a mere two decades ago. Even if one writes for a newspaper or journal, the chances of multiplying reproduction and, notionally at least, an unlimited time of preservation have wrought havoc on even the idea of an actual, as opposed to a virtual, audience. These things have certainly limited the powers that regimes have to censor or ban writing that is considered dangerous, although, as I shall note presently, there are fairly crude means for stopping or curtailing the libertarian function of online print. Until only very recently, Saudi Arabia and Syria, for example, successfully banned the Internet and even satellite television. Both countries now tolerate limited access to Internet, although both have also installed sophisticated and, in the long run, prohibitively interdictory, processes to maintain their control.

As things stand, an article I might write in New York for a British newspaper has a good chance of reappearing on individual websites or via email on screens in the United States, Japan, Pakistan, Middle East, South Africa, as well as Australia. Authors and publishers have very little control over what is reprinted and recirculated. For whom then does one write, if it is difficult to specify the audience with any sort of precision? Most people, I think, focus on the actual outlet that has commissioned the piece, or on the putative readers we would like to address. The idea of an imagined community has suddenly acquired a very literal, if virtual, dimension. Certainly, as I experienced when I began ten years ago to write in an Arabic publication for an audience of Arabs, one attempts to create, shape, refer to a constituency, now much more than during Swift's time, when he could quite naturally assume that the persona he called a Church of England man was in fact his real, very stable, and quite small audience.

All of us should therefore operate today with some notion of very probably reaching much larger audiences than any we could have conceived of even a

decade ago, although the chances of retaining that audience are by the same token quite chancy. This is not simply a matter of optimism of the will; it is in the very nature of writing today. This makes it very difficult for writers to take common assumptions between them and their audiences for granted, or to assume that references and allusions are going to be understood immediately. But, writing in this expanded new space strangely does have a further unusually risky consequence, which is to be encouraged to say things that are either completely opaque or completely transparent, and if one has any sense of the intellectual and political vocation (which I shall get to in a moment), it should of course be the latter rather than the former. But then, transparent, simple, clear prose presents its own challenges, since the ever present danger is that one can fall into the misleadingly simple neutrality of a journalistic World-English idiom that is indistinguishable from CNN or USA Today prose. The quandary is a real one, whether in the end to repel readers (and more dangerous, meddling editors), or to attempt to win readers over in a style that perhaps too closely resembles the mind-set one is trying to expose and dismiss. The thing to remember, I keep telling myself, is that there isn't another language at hand, that the language I use must be the same used by the State Department or the president when they say that they are for human rights and for fighting a war to "liberate" Iraq, and I must be able to use that very same language to recapture the subject, reclaim it, and reconnect it to the tremendously complicated realities these vastly over-privileged antagonists of mine have simplified, betrayed, and either diminished or dissolved. It should be obvious by now that for an intellectual who is not there simply to advance someone else's interest, there have to be opponents that are held responsible for the present state of affairs, antagonists with whom one must directly engage.

While it is true and even discouraging that all the main outlets are, however, controlled by the most powerful interests and consequently by the very antagonists one resists or attacks, it is also true that a relatively mobile intellectual energy can take advantage of and, in effect, multiply the kinds of platforms available for use. On one side, therefore, six enormous multinationals presided over by six men control most of the world's supply of images and news. On the other, there are the independent intellectuals who actually form an incipient community, physically separated from each other but connected variously to a great number of activist communities shunned by the main media, but who have at their actual disposal other kinds of what Swift sarcastically called "oratorical machines." Think of the impressive range of opportunities offered by the lecture platform, the pamphlet, radio, alternative journals, the interview form, the rally, church pulpit, and the Internet to name only a few. True, it is a considerable disadvantage to realize that one is unlikely to get asked on to PBS's *Newshour* or ABC's *Nightline*, or if one is in fact asked, only an isolated fugitive minute will be offered. But then, other occasions present themselves not in the sound-bite format, but rather in more extended stretches of time. So rapidity is a double-edged weapon. There is the rapidity of the sloganeeringly reductive style that is the main feature of expert discourse—to-the-point, fast, formulaic, pragmatic in

appearance—and there is the rapidity of response and format that intellectuals and indeed most citizens can exploit in order to present fuller, more complete expressions of an alternative point of view. I am suggesting that by taking advantage of what is available in the form of numerous platforms (or “stages-itinerant,” another Swiftian term) and an alert and creative willingness to exploit them by an intellectual (that is, platforms that either are not available to or are shunned by the television personality, expert, or political candidate), it is possible to initiate wider discussion.

The emancipatory potential—and the threats to it—of this new situation must not be underestimated. Let me give a very powerful, recent example of what I mean. There are about four million Palestinian refugees scattered all over the world, a significant number of whom live in large refugee camps in Lebanon (where the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacres took place), Jordan, Syria, and in Gaza and the West Bank. In 1999 an enterprising group of young and educated refugees living in Deheisheh Camp, near Bethlehem on the West Bank, established the Ibdaa Center whose main feature was the Across Borders project; this was a revolutionary way through computer terminals of connecting refugees in most of the main camps—separated geographically and politically by impossible, difficult barriers—to each other. For the first time since their parents were dispersed in 1948, second-generation Palestinian refugees in Beirut or Amman could communicate with their counterparts inside Palestine. Some of what the participants in the project did was quite remarkable. Thus the Deheisheh residents went on visits to their former villages in Palestine, and then described their emotions and what they saw for the benefit of other refugees who had heard of, but could not have access to, these places. In a matter of weeks, a remarkable solidarity emerged at a time, it turned out, when the so-called final status negotiations between the PLO and Israel were beginning to take up the question of refugees and return, which along with the question of Jerusalem made up the intransigent core of the stalemated peace process. For some Palestinian refugees, therefore, their presence and political will was actualized for the first time, giving them a new status qualitatively different from the passive objecthood that had been their fate for half a century. On August 26, 2000, all the computers in Deheisheh were destroyed in an act of political vandalism that left no one in doubt that refugees were meant to remain as refugees, which is to say that they were not meant to disturb the status quo that had assumed their silence for so long. It would not be hard to list the possible suspects, but it is equally hard to imagine that anyone will either be named or apprehended. In any case, the Deheisheh camp-dwellers immediately set about trying to restore the Ibdaa' Center, and seem to some degree to have succeeded in so doing.

To answer the question “why” in this and other similar contexts, individuals and groups prefer writing and speaking to silence, is equivalent to specifying what in fact the intellectual and writer confront in the public sphere. What I mean is that the existence of individuals or groups seeking social justice and economic equality, and who understand (in Amartya Sen's formulation) that freedom must include the right to a whole range of choices affording cultural, politi-

cal, intellectual, and economic development, ipso facto will lead one to a desire for articulation as opposed to silence. This is the functional idiom of the intellectual vocation. The intellectual therefore stands in a position to make possible and to further the formulation of these expectations and wishes.

Now every discursive intervention is, of course, specific to a particular occasion and assumes an existing consensus, paradigm, episteme, or praxis (we can all pick our favorite concept that denotes the prevailing accepted discursive norm), say, during the Anglo-American war against Iraq, during national elections in Egypt and the United States, about immigration practices in one or another country, or about the ecology of West Africa. In each of these and so many other situations, the hallmark of the era we live in is that there tends to be a mainstream-media-government orthodoxy against which it is very difficult indeed to go, even though the intellectual must assume that alternatives can clearly be shown to exist. Thus, to restate the obvious, that every situation should be interpreted according to its own givens, but (and I would argue that this is almost always the case) that every situation also contains a contest between a powerful system of interests on the one hand and, on the other, less powerful interests threatened with frustration, silence, incorporation, or extinction by the powerful. It almost goes without saying that for the American intellectual the responsibility is greater, the openings numerous, the challenge very difficult. The United States after all is the only global power; it intervenes nearly everywhere, and its resources for domination are very great, although very far from infinite.

The intellectual's role generally is dialectically, oppositionally to uncover and elucidate the contest I referred to earlier, to challenge and defeat both an imposed silence and the normalized quiet of unseen power wherever and whenever possible. For there is a social and intellectual equivalence between this mass of overbearing collective interests and the discourse used to justify, disguise, or mystify its workings while also preventing objections or challenges to it.

Pierre Bourdieu and his associates produced a collective work in 1993 entitled *La Misère du monde* (translated in 1999 as *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*) whose aim was thereby to compel the politicians' attention to what, in French society, the misleading optimism of public discourse had hidden.<sup>7</sup> This kind of book, therefore, plays a sort of negative intellectual role, whose aim is, to quote Bourdieu, "to produce and disseminate instruments of defense against symbolic domination which increasingly relies on the authority of science," or expertise or appeals to national unity, pride, history, and tradition, to bludgeon people into submission. Obviously India and Brazil are different from Britain and the United States, but those often striking disparities in cultures and economies should not at all obscure the even more startling similarities that can be seen in some of the techniques and, very often, the aim of deprivation and repression that compel people to follow along meekly. I should also like to add that one need not always present an abstruse and detailed theory of justice to go to war intellectually against injustice, since there is now a well-stocked internationalist storehouse of conventions, protocols, resolutions, and charters for national authorities to comply with, if they are so inclined. And, in the same con-

text, I reject the ultra-postmodern position (like that taken by Richard Rorty while shadowboxing with some vague thing he refers to contemptuously as “the academic Left”), which holds, when confronting ethnic cleansing, or genocide as was occurring in Iraq under the sanctions-regime, or any of the evils of torture, censorship, famine, ignorance (most of them constructed by humans not by acts of God), that human rights are cultural or grammatical things, and when they are violated, they do not really have the status accorded them by crude foundationalists, such as myself, for whom they are as real as anything we can encounter.

I think it is correct to say that depoliticized or aestheticized submission, along with all of the different forms of in some cases triumphalism and xenophobia, in others of apathy and defeat, has been principally required since the 1960s to allay whatever residual feelings of desire for democratic participation (also known as “a danger to stability”) still existed. One can read this plainly enough in *The Crisis of Democracy*, coauthored at the behest of the Trilateral Commission a decade before the end of the Cold War.<sup>8</sup> There the argument is that too much democracy is bad for governability, which is that supply of passivity that makes it easier for oligarchies of technical or policy experts to push people into line. So if one is endlessly lectured by certified experts who explain that the freedom we all want demands deregulation and privatization or war and that the new world order is nothing less than the end of history, there is very little inclination to address this order with anything like individual or even collective demands. Chomsky has relentlessly addressed this paralyzing syndrome for several years.

Let me give an example from personal experience in the United States today of how formidable the challenges to the individual are, and how easy it is to slip into inaction. If you are seriously ill, you are suddenly plunged into the world of outrageously expensive pharmaceutical products, many of which are still experimental and require FDA approval. Even those that are not experimental and are not particularly new (like steroids and antibiotics) are life-savers, but their exorbitant expense is thought to be a small price to pay for their efficacy. The more one looks into the matter, the more one encounters the corporate rationale, which is that while the cost of manufacturing the drug may be small (it usually is tiny), the cost of research is enormous and must be recovered in subsequent sales. Then you discover that most of the research cost came to the corporation in the form of government grants, which in turn came from the taxes paid by every citizen. When you address the abuse of public money in the form of questions put to a promising, progressively minded candidate (e.g., Bill Bradley), you then quickly understand why such candidates never raise the question. They receive enormous campaign contributions from Merck and Bristol Meyers, and are most unlikely to challenge their supporters. So you go on paying and living, on the assumption that if you are lucky enough to have an insurance policy, the insurance company will pay out. Then you discover that insurance company accountants make the decisions on who gets a costly medication or test, what is allowed or disallowed, for how long and in what circumstances, and only then do

you understand that such rudimentary protections as a patient's genuine bill of rights still cannot be passed in Congress, given that immensely profitable insurance corporations lobby there indefatigably.

In short, I find myself saying that even heroic attempts (such as Fredric Jameson's) to understand the system on a theoretical level or to formulate what Samir Amin has called delinking alternatives, are fatally undermined by their relative neglect of actual political intervention in the existential situations in which as citizens we find ourselves—intervention that is not just personal but is a significant part of a broad adversarial or oppositional movement. Obviously, as intellectuals, we all carry around some working understanding or sketch of the global system (in large measure thanks to world and regional historians like Immanuel Wallerstein, Anwar Abdel Malek, J. M. Blaut, Janet Abu-Lughod, Peter Gran, Ali Mazrui, William McNeill), but it is during the direct encounters with it in one or another specific geography, configuration, or problematic that the contests are waged and perhaps even winnable. There is an admirable chronicle of the kind of thing I mean in the various essays of Bruce Robbins's *Feeling Global: Internationalism in Distress*, Timothy Brennan's *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now*, and Neil Lazarus's *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World*, books whose self-consciously territorial and highly interwoven textures are in fact an adumbration of the critical (and combative) intellectual's sense of the world we live in today, taken as episodes or even fragments of a broader picture that their work as well as the work of others like them is in the process of compiling. What they suggest is a map of experiences that would have been indiscernible, perhaps invisible two decades ago, but which in the aftermath of the classical empires, the end of the Cold War, the crumbling of the socialist and nonaligned blocks, the emergent dialectics between North and South in the era of globalization, cannot be excluded either from cultural study or from the somewhat precincts of the humanistic disciplines.

I've mentioned a few names not just to indicate how significant I think their contributions have been, but also to use them in order to leapfrog directly into some concrete areas of collective concern where, to quote Bourdieu for the last time, there is the possibility of "collective invention." He continues by saying that

the whole edifice of critical thought is thus in need of critical reconstruction. This work of reconstruction cannot be done, as some thought in the past, by a single great intellectual, a master-thinker endowed with the sole resources of his singular thought, or by the authorized spokesperson for a group or an institution presumed to speak in the name of those without voice, union, party, and so on. This is where the collective intellectual [Bourdieu's name for individuals the sum of whose research and participation on common subjects constitutes a sort of ad hoc collective] can play its irreplaceable role, by helping to create the social conditions for the collective production of realist utopias.

My reading of this is to stress the absence of any master plan or blueprint or grand theory for what intellectuals can do, and the absence now of any utopian

teleology toward which human history can be described as moving. Therefore one *invents* goals abductively—in the literal use of the Latin word “*inventio*” employed by rhetoricians to stress finding again, or reassembling from past performances, as opposed to the romantic use of invention as something you create from scratch. That is, one hypothesizes a better situation from the known historical and social facts. So, in effect, this enables intellectual performances on many fronts, in many places, many styles that keep in play both the sense of opposition and the sense of engaged participation that I mentioned a moment ago. Hence, film, photography, and even music, along with all the arts of writing can be aspects of this activity. Part of what we do as intellectuals is not only to define the situation, but also to discern the possibilities for active intervention, whether we then perform them ourselves or acknowledge them in others who have either gone before or are already at work, the intellectual as lookout. Provincialism of the old kind—for example, I am a literary specialist whose field is early seventeenth-century England—rules itself out and, quite frankly, seems uninteresting and needlessly neutered. The assumption has to be that even though one cannot do or know about everything, it must always be possible not only to discern the elements of a struggle or tension or problem near at hand that can be elucidated dialectically, but also to sense that other people have a similar stake and work in a common project. I have found a brilliantly inspiring parallel for what I mean in Adam Phillips’s recent book *Darwin’s Worms* in which Darwin’s lifelong attention to the lowly earthworm revealed its capacity for expressing nature’s variability and design without necessarily seeing the whole of either one or the other, thereby, in his work on earthworms, replacing “a creation myth with a secular maintenance myth.”<sup>9</sup>

Is there some nontrivial way of generalizing about where and in what form such struggles are taking place now? I shall limit myself to saying a little about only three of these struggles, all of which are profoundly amenable to intellectual intervention and elaboration. The first is to protect against and forestall the disappearance of the past, which in the rapidity of change, the reformulation of tradition, and the construction of simplified bowdlerizations of history, is at the very heart of the contest described by Benjamin Barber rather too sweepingly as Jihad versus McWorld. The intellectual’s role is to present alternative narratives and other perspectives on history than those provided by combatants on behalf of official memory and national identity and mission. At least since Nietzsche, the writing of history and the accumulations of memory have been regarded in many ways as one of the essential foundations of power, guiding its strategies, charting its progress. Look, for example, at the appalling exploitation of past suffering described in their accounts of the uses of the Holocaust by Tom Segev, Peter Novick, and Norman Finkelstein or, just to stay within the area of historical restitution and reparation, the invidious disfiguring, dismembering, and disremembering of significant historical experiences that do not have powerful enough lobbies in the present and therefore merit dismissal or belittlement. The need now is for de-intoxicated, sober histories that make evident the multiplicity and complexity of history without allowing one to conclude that it moves

forward impersonally according to laws determined either by the divine or by the powerful.

The second struggle is to construct fields of coexistence rather than fields of battle as the outcome of intellectual labor. There are great lessons to be learned from decolonization which are that, noble as its liberatory aims were, it did not often enough prevent the emergence of repressive nationalist replacements for colonial regimes, and that the process itself was almost immediately captured by the Cold War, despite the nonaligned movement's rhetorical efforts. What's more, it has been miniaturized and even trivialized by a small academic industry that has simply turned it into an ambiguous contest between ambivalent opponents. Benita Parry has addressed this matter in her recent work as a deformation of postcolonial studies.<sup>10</sup> In the various contests over justice and human rights that so many of us feel we have joined, there needs to be a component to our engagement that stresses the need for the redistribution of resources, and that advocates the theoretical imperative against the huge accumulations of power and capital that so distort human life.

Peace cannot exist without equality; this is an intellectual value desperately in need of reiteration, demonstration, and reinforcement. The seduction of the word itself—peace—is that it is surrounded by, indeed drenched in, the blandishments of approval, uncontroversial eulogizing, sentimental endorsement. The international media (as has been the case recently of the unsanctioned war in Iraq) uncritically amplifies, ornaments, unquestioningly transmits all this to vast audiences for whom peace and war are spectacles for delectation and immediate consumption. It takes a good deal more courage, work, and knowledge to dissolve words like “war” and “peace” into their elements, recovering what has been left out of peace processes that have been determined by the powerful, and then placing that missing actuality back in the center of things, than it does to write prescriptive articles for “liberals” à la Michael Ignatieff that urge more destruction and death for distant civilians under the banner of benign imperialism. The intellectual is perhaps a kind of counter-memory with its own counter-discourse that will not allow conscience to look away or fall asleep. The best corrective, as Dr. Johnson said, is to imagine the person whom you are discussing—in this case the person on whom the bombs will fall—reading you in your presence.

Still, just as history is never over or complete, it is also the case that some dialectical oppositions are not reconcilable, not transcendable, not really capable of being folded into a sort of higher, undoubtedly nobler synthesis. My third example, and the one closest to home for me, is the struggle over Palestine which, I have always believed, cannot really be simply resolved by a technical and ultimately janitorial rearrangement of geography allowing dispossessed Palestinians the right (such as it is) to live in about 20 percent of their land that would be encircled and totally dependent on Israel. Nor, on the other hand, would it be morally acceptable to demand that Israelis should retreat from the whole of former Palestine, now Israel, becoming refugees like Palestinians all over again. No matter how I have searched for a resolution to this impasse, I cannot find one, for this is not a facile case of right versus right. It cannot be right ever to deprive

an entire people of their land and heritage. But the Jews too are what I have called a community of suffering and have brought with them a heritage of great tragedy. But unlike the Israeli sociologist Zeev Sternhell, I cannot agree that the conquest of Palestine was a necessary one. The notion offends the sense of real Palestinian pain, in its own way, also tragic.

Overlapping yet irreconcilable experiences demand from the intellectual the courage to say that *that* is what is before us, in almost exactly the way Adorno has throughout his work on music insisted that modern music can never be reconciled with the society that produced it, but in its intensely and often despairingly crafted form and content, music can act as a silent witness to the inhumanity all around. Any assimilation of individual musical work to its social setting is, says Adorno, false. I conclude with the thought that the intellectual's provisional home is the domain of an exigent, resistant, intransigent art into which, alas, one can neither retreat nor search for solutions. But only in that precarious exilic realm can one first truly grasp the difficulty of what cannot be grasped, and then go forth to try anyway.

## NOTES

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