

stories, singular exemplifications which (to speak like Nelson Goodman) are like samples of the real world. These representative and representational samples, exemplifying very concretely, like swatches of cloth, the reality described, thereby present themselves with all the appearances of the commonsense world, which is also inhabited by structures, but ones dissimulated in the guise of contingent adventures, anecdotal accidents, particular events. This suggestive, allusive, elliptical form is what makes the literary text, like what is real, deliver up its structure, but by veiling it and by snatching it from our gaze. In contrast, science tries to speak of things as they are, without euphemisms, and asks to be taken seriously, even when it analyses the foundations of this quite singular form of the *illusio* which is the scientific *illusio*.

POSTSCRIPT

For a Corporatism of
the Universal

Once the Sophists spoke to a small number of men; today, the periodical press allows them to lead a whole nation astray.

HONORÉ DE BALZAC

Unlike the preceding chapters, this one – intentionally – takes a normative position based on the conviction that it is possible to use a knowledge of the logic of the functioning of the fields of cultural production to draw up a realistic programme for the collective action of intellectuals. Such a programme has a particular urgency in these times of restoration: as a result of a whole set of convergent factors, there is a threat to the most precious collective achievements of intellectuals, starting with the critical dispositions which were simultaneously the product and the guarantee of their autonomy. It is fashionable to proclaim everywhere, amid a great fanfare, the death of intellectuals, that is, the end of one of the last critical countervailing powers capable of opposing the forces of economic and political order. And the prophets of evil are, of course, recruited from among the people who have most to gain from this disappearance: pen-pushers, driven by their 'impatience to see themselves printed, performed, known, vaunted', as Flaubert said, to make every sort of compromise with the powers of the day (journalistic, economic or political), would like to be rid of the people who obstinately defend or incarnate the virtues and values which are endangered, but which are still threatening their nothingness. It is significant that one of the most representative of these 'journalist philosophers', as Wittgenstein called them, expressly attacked Baudelaire, and went on to make a television history of intellectuals in which (like that character of Walter de la Mare's who only saw the lower part of the world – plinths, feet, shoes) he singled out from this immense adventure only the parts he could grasp – cowardice, treachery, baseness, small-mindedness.

Those I am addressing here are not all those who conceive of culture as a patrimony, a dead culture to be made into an obligatory cult of ritual piety, or as an instrument of domination and distinction, cultural bastion and Bastille, to be erected against the Barbarians within and without (who these days often seem to the new defenders of the West to be one and the same), but rather those who

conceive of culture as an instrument of freedom presupposing freedom, as a *modus operandi* allowing the permanent supersession of the *opus operatum*, of the desolate, cultured 'thing'. These people will grant me, I hope, the right I grant myself here to call for the modern incarnation of the critical power of intellectuals, a 'collective intellectual' who might be capable of making a discourse of freedom heard, a discourse that recognizes no other limit than the constraints and controls which each artist, each writer and each scholar, armed with all the acquisitions of his or her predecessors, enjoin upon themselves and all others.

Intellectuals are paradoxical beings who cannot be thought of as such as long as they are apprehended through the obligatory alternative between autonomy and commitment, between pure culture and politics. This is because intellectuals are constituted, historically; in and through their overcoming of that opposition: writers, artists and scholars asserted themselves for the first time as intellectuals, at the time of the Dreyfus Affair, when they intervened in political life as *intellectuals*, meaning with a specific authority founded on their belonging to the relatively autonomous world of art, science and literature, and on all the values associated with that autonomy – disinterestedness, expertise, etc.

Intellectuals are two-dimensional figures who do not exist and subsist as such unless (and only unless) they are invested with a specific authority, conferred by the autonomous intellectual world (meaning independent from religious, political or economic power) whose specific laws they respect, and unless (and only unless) they engage this specific authority in political struggles. Far from there existing, as is customarily believed, an antinomy between the search for autonomy (which characterizes the art, science or literature we call 'pure') and the search for political efficacy, it is by increasing their autonomy (and thereby, among other things, their freedom to criticize the prevailing powers) that intellectuals can increase the effectiveness of a political action whose ends and means have their origin in the specific logic of the fields of cultural production.

To be in a position to define what the major directions of a collective action by intellectuals might be it is necessary and sufficient to repudiate the tired alternative between pure art and engaged art which we all have in our minds, and which periodically arises in literary debates. But it is formidably difficult to banish like this the forms of thought we apply to ourselves when we take ourselves as object of thought. This is why, before stating these directions and in order to be able to do so, we must try to make as explicit as possible the unconscious deposited in each intellectual by the very history of which intellectuals are the products. Against the genesis amnesia,

which is the basis of all forms of the transcendental illusion, there is no more effective antidote than the reconstruction of the forgotten or repressed history perpetuated in these apparently ahistorical forms of thought structuring our perception of the world and of ourselves.

This is an extraordinarily repetitive history, since its constant change disguises a pendulum swing between two possible attitudes towards politics, either commitment or retreat (at least this was so until this opposition was overcome with Zola and the Dreyfusards). The 'engagement' of '*philosophes*' which Voltaire in 1765, in the article in the *Philosophical Dictionary* called 'The man of letters', contrasts with the scholastic obscurantism of decadent universities and academies, 'where things are only half said', has a successor in the participation by 'men of letters' in the French Revolution – even though, as Robert Darnton has shown, 'literary bohemia' seized the opportunity of the revolutionary 'disorders' to take revenge on the most consecrated of the followers of the *philosophes*.

In the post-revolutionary period of restoration, 'men of letters', being held responsible not only for the current of revolutionary ideas – through the role of *opinion makers* conferred on them by the proliferation of newspapers in the first phase of the revolution – but also for the excesses of the Terror, are regarded with mistrust and even contempt by the young generation of the 1820s; they are mistrusted most especially by the Romantics who, in the first phase of the movement, challenge and reject the pretension of the '*philosophe*' to intervene in political life and to propose a rational vision of historical evolution. But, once the autonomy of the intellectual field finds itself threatened by the reactionary politics of the Restoration, the romantic poets, led to assert their desire for autonomy in a rehabilitation of feeling and religious sensibility against Reason and the criticism of dogma, hasten to claim, as do Michelet and Saint-Simon, freedom for the writer and the scholar, and to assume in fact the prophetic function which was that of the eighteenth-century philosopher.

But in a new swing of the pendulum, the populist Romanticism which seems to have carried away virtually all the writers in the period before the 1848 revolution does not survive the failure of the movement and the installation of the Second Empire: the collapse of illusions which I will expressly call 'forty-eighter' (to evoke the analogy with the illusions of 1968 whose collapse still haunts our present day) leads to that extraordinary disenchantment, so vigorously evoked by Flaubert in *Sentimental Education*, which provides a favourable terrain for a new assertion of intellectuals' autonomy, this time radically elitist. The defenders of art for art's sake, like

Flaubert and Théophile Gautier, assert the autonomy of the artist by opposing 'social art' and the 'literary bohemia' just as much as they oppose a bourgeois art which is subordinated in matters of art (and also the art of living) to the norms of the bourgeois clientele. They oppose this new-born power which is the cultural industry by refusing the servitude of 'industrial literature' (except as an alimentary substitute for a private income, as with Gautier and Nerval). Not admitting any other judgement than that of their peers, they assert the closing in on itself of the literary field, but also the writer's renunciation of leaving his ivory tower to exercise any form of power whatsoever (thereby making a break with the poet as visionary [*vates*] like Hugo or the prophet-scholar like Michelet).

By an apparent paradox, it is only at the end of the century, at a time when the literary field, the artistic field and the scientific field arrive at autonomy, that the most autonomous agents of these autonomous fields intervene in the political field as intellectuals – and not as cultural producers converted into politicians, like Guizot or Lamartine – that is, with an authority founded on the autonomy of the field and all the values associated with it: ethical purity, specific expertise, etc. In a concrete fashion, intrinsically artistic or scientific autonomy is asserted in political acts like Zola's 'J'accuse' and the petitions designed to support it. These interventions of a new kind tend to maximize the two dimensions constitutive of the identity of the intellectual who is invented through them – 'purity' and 'engagement' – giving birth to a *politics of purity* which is the perfect antithesis of the reason of state. They imply in effect the assertion of the right to transgress the most sacred values of the collectivity – patriotic values, for example, with the support given to Zola's defamatory article against the army, or much later, during the Algerian war, the call for support for the enemy – in the name of values transcending those of citizenship or, if you will, in the name of a particular form of ethical and scientific universalism which can serve as foundation not only for a sort of moral magisterium but also for a collective mobilization to fight to promote these values.

It would suffice to add to this overview of the major stages in the genesis of the figure of the intellectual some indications of the cultural policy of the 1848 Republic or that of the Commune, in order to have an almost complete picture of the possible relations between cultural producers and power such as they might be observed either in the history of a single country, or in the political space of European states today. History carries an important lesson: we are in a game in which all the moves made today, wherever, have already been made – from the rejection of politics and the return to the religious, to the

resistance to actions by a political power hostile to intellectual things, via the revolt against the grip of the media, or the disabused abandonment of revolutionary utopias.

But the fact of finding oneself thus at 'end game' does not necessarily lead to disenchantment. It is clear in effect that the intellectual (or, better, the autonomous fields which make the intellectual possible) is not instituted once and for all with Zola, and that the holders of cultural capital may always 'regress', as a result of a disintegration of that unstable combination which defines the intellectual, towards one or another of apparently exclusive positions, either towards the role of 'pure' writer, artist or scholar, or towards the role of political actor, journalist, politician, expert. Moreover, contrary to what the naively Hegelian vision of intellectual history might have us believe, the claim of autonomy which is inscribed in the very existence of the field of cultural production must reckon with obstacles and powers which are ceaselessly renewed, whether we are dealing with external powers such as those of the Church, the state and great economic enterprises, or internal powers, and in particular those which accompany control of the specific instruments of production and distribution (press, publishing, radio, television).

This is one of the reasons – along with the differences in national histories – why the *variations* among countries in the state of relations now and in the past between the intellectual field and political power mask the *constants*, which are nevertheless more substantial and which are the real foundation of the possible unity of intellectuals of all countries. The same *intention of autonomy* can in effect be expressed in opposite position-takings (secular in one case, religious in another) according to the structure and the history of the powers against which it must assert itself. Intellectuals of different countries must be fully conscious of this mechanism if they want to avoid letting themselves be divided by conjunctural and epiphenomenal oppositions which stem from the fact that the same will to emancipation runs up against different obstacles. Here I could take the example of the most visible French philosophers and German philosophers (including Foucault and Habermas) who, since they pit the same concern for autonomy against contrasting historical traditions, seem to oppose each other with apparently inverse relations with truth and with reason. But I could equally well take the example of an issue like public opinion polls, which some in the West take as particularly subtle instruments of domination, whereas to others, in the countries of Eastern Europe, they appear as the conquest of liberty.

In order to understand and master the oppositions which are in

danger of dividing them, intellectuals of different European countries can only overcome the oppositions which threaten to divide them if they have a vivid awareness of the structures and the national histories of the powers they must stand up to in order to exist as intellectuals. They must, for example, know how to recognize in the statements of any one of their foreign colleagues (in particular when these statements seem disconcerting or shocking) the effects of historical and geographical distance from the experience of political despotism such as Nazism or Stalinism, or from ambiguous political movements like the student revolts of 1968, or, where internal powers are concerned, the effects of the present and past experience of intellectual worlds which are very unequally subject to open or latent censorship by politics or economics, the university or the academy, and so on.

When we speak as intellectuals, that is, with the ambition to be universal, it is always, at any moment, the historical unconscious inscribed in the experience of a singular intellectual field which speaks through our mouths. I think that we only have a chance of achieving real communication when we objectify and master the various kinds of historical unconscious separating us, meaning the specific histories of intellectual universes which have produced our categories of perception and thought.

I want to come now to an exposition of the particular reasons why it is especially urgent today that intellectuals mobilize and create a veritable *Internationale of intellectuals* committed to defending the autonomy of the universes of cultural production or, to parody a language now out of fashion, *the ownership by cultural producers of their instruments of production and circulation* (and hence of evaluation and consecration). I do not think I am succumbing to an apocalyptic vision of the state of the field of cultural production by saying that this autonomy is very severely threatened or, more precisely, that a threat of a totally new sort today hangs over its functioning; and that artists, writers and scholars are more and more completely excluded from public debate, both because they are less inclined to intervene in it and because the possibility of an effective intervention is less and less frequently offered to them.

The threats to autonomy result from the increasingly greater interpenetration between the world of art and the world of money. I am thinking of new forms of sponsorship, of new alliances being established between certain economic enterprises (often the most modernizing, as in Germany, with Daimler-Benz and the banks) and cultural producers; I am thinking, too, of the more and more frequent recourse of university research to sponsorship, and of the creation of

educational institutions directly subordinated to business (as with the Technologiezentren in Germany or the business schools in France). But the grip or empire of the economy over artistic or scientific research is also exercised inside the field itself, through the control of the means of cultural production and distribution, and even of the instances of consecration. Producers attached to the major cultural bureaucracies (newspapers, radio, television) are increasingly forced to accept and adopt norms and constraints linked to the requirements of the market and, especially, to pressure exerted more or less strongly and directly by advertisers; and they tend more or less unconsciously to constitute as a universal measure of intellectual accomplishment those forms of intellectual activity to which they are condemned by their conditions of work (I am thinking, for example, of *fast writing* and *fast reading*, which are often the rule in journalistic production and criticism). One could ask whether the division into two markets characteristic of the fields of cultural production since the middle of the nineteenth century, with on one side the narrow field of producers for producers, and on the other side the field of mass production and 'industrial literature', is not now threatening to disappear, since the logic of commercial production tends more and more to assert itself over avant-garde production (notably, in the case of literature, through the constraints of the book market).

It would be necessary to analyse the new forms of stranglehold and dependence, like the ones introduced by sponsorship, and against which the 'beneficiaries' have not yet developed appropriate systems of defence since they are not fully aware of all their effects; it would also be necessary to analyse the constraints imposed by state sponsorship – even though it seems to escape the direct pressures of the market – whether through the recognition it grants spontaneously to those who recognize it because they need it in order to obtain a form of recognition which they cannot get by their work alone, or whether, more subtly, through the mechanism of commissions and committees – places of negative co-optation which often result in a thorough standardization of the avant-garde, either scientific or artistic.

The exclusion from public debate of artists, writers and scholars is the result of the conjoined impact of several factors: some grow out of the internal evolution of cultural production – like the increasingly narrow specialization which leads researchers to give up the wider ambitions of the intellectual in earlier days – whereas others are the result of the increasingly strong grip of a technocracy which, with the often unconscious complicity of journalists (themselves caught in the game of competition), puts citizens on extended intellectual vacation by favouring 'organized irresponsibility', in the words of Ulrich Beck,

and which finds an immediate ally in a technocracy of communication – more and more present, via the media, in the universe of cultural production. One would have to develop, for example, the analysis of the production and reproduction of technocratic power or, better, *epistemocratic* power, in order to understand the almost unconditional delegation, founded on the social authority of educational institutions, which the great majority of citizens grant, on the most vital issues, to the ‘state nobility’ (the best example being the almost unlimited confidence which those who have been called ‘nucleocrats’ enjoy, notably in France).

With less and less to communicate (in fact and by right) the greater their success, measured by the size of the audience they address, those who control access to the instruments of communication tend to spread the emptiness of media droning inside the apparatuses of communication, and tend increasingly to impose superficial and artificial problems born of simple competition for the biggest audience on to the political field as well as the fields of cultural production. The deepest forces of inertia of the social world – not to mention economic powers which, especially through advertising, exercise a direct hold on the written and spoken press – can thus impose a domination all the more invisible in that it is accomplished only via complex networks of reciprocal dependence, like the *censorship* exercised through the intersection between mutual controls of competition on the one hand, and the interiorized controls of self-censorship on the other.

These new masters of thoughtless thought monopolize public debate to the detriment of professionals of politics (parliamentary legislators, trade union leaders, etc.); and also to the detriment of intellectuals, who are subject, even within their own universe, to sorts of *specific powerplays* such as surveys aiming to produce manipulated classifications, or the ‘top ten’ lists which newspapers publish on anniversary occasions, and so forth, or even publicity campaigns aiming to discredit productions destined for the narrow (and long-term) market at the expense of the products of wide circulation and short cycle which new producers launch on to the market.

It has been shown that the successful political demonstration is the one which manages to make itself visible in the papers and especially on television, and hence to impress upon journalists (who may contribute to its success) the idea that it is successful – with the most sophisticated forms of demonstration being conceived and produced, sometimes with the help of communications advisers, with an eye on the journalists who must take notice of them.¹ In the same way, an ever larger part of cultural production – when it is not coming from

people who, since they work in the media, are guaranteed the support of the media – is predefined, down to date of appearance, title, format and size, content and style – to catch the attention of journalists who will make it exist by speaking about it.

Commercial literature has not just come into existence recently; nor is it new that the necessities of commerce make themselves felt at the heart of the cultural field. But the grip of the holders of power over the instruments of circulation – and of consecration – has undoubtedly never been as wide and as deep as it is today – and the boundary has never been as blurred between the experimental work and the *bestseller*. This blurring of boundaries to which so-called ‘media-oriented’ producers are spontaneously inclined (as shown by the fact that the journalistic lists of hits always juxtapose the most autonomous and the most heteronomous producers) constitutes the worst threat to the autonomy of cultural production. The heteronomous producer, whom the Italians magnificently call *tuttologo*, is the Trojan horse by means of which all forms of social stranglehold – that of the market, of fashion, of the state, of politics, of journalism – are imported into the field of cultural production. The basis on which one can condemn these *doxosophes*, as Plato called them, is implicit in the idea that the specific force of the intellectual, even in politics, can rely only on the autonomy conferred by the capacity to respond to the internal requirements of the field. Zhdanovism, which flourishes among mediocre or failed writers and artists, is only one piece of evidence among others that heteronomy arrives in a field through the producers who are the least capable of succeeding according to the norms it imposes.

The anarchic order reigning in an intellectual field which has achieved a high degree of autonomy is always fragile and threatened, to the extent that it constitutes a challenge to the laws of the ordinary economic world, and to the rules of common sense. It is dangerous for it to depend on just the heroism of a few. It is not virtue which can found a free intellectual order; it is a free intellectual order which can found intellectual virtue.

The paradoxical and apparently contradictory nature of the intellectual means that any political action aiming to reinforce the political efficacy of intellectuals’ enterprises is fated to give itself an apparently contradictory slogan. On the one hand, the aim is to reinforce autonomy, notably by reinforcing the separation from heteronomous producers and by fighting to guarantee cultural producers the economic and social conditions of autonomy in relation to all forms of power, not excluding those of state bureaucracies (and first of all, in respect to the publication and evaluation of the products of

intellectual activity). On the other hand, it must tear cultural producers away from the temptation to remain in their ivory tower, and encourage them to fight, if only to guarantee themselves the power over the instruments of production and consecration and, by involving themselves in their own times, to assert the values associated with their autonomy.

This fight must be *collective* because the effectiveness of the powers which are exercised over them results in large part from the fact that those intellectuals who confront them are dispersed and in competition with each other – and also because efforts at mobilization will always be suspect, and doomed to failure, so long as they can be suspected of being used as part of struggles for leadership by an intellectual or a group of intellectuals. Cultural producers will not find again a place of their own in the social world unless, sacrificing once and for all the myth of the ‘organic intellectual’ (without falling into the complementary mythology of the mandarin withdrawn from everything), they agree to work collectively for the defence of their own interests. This should lead them to assert themselves as an international power of criticism and watchfulness, or even of proposals, in the face of the technocrats, or – with an ambition both more lofty and more realistic, and hence limited to their own sphere – to get involved in rational action to defend the economic and social conditions of the autonomy of these socially privileged universes in which the material and intellectual instruments of what we call Reason are produced and reproduced. This *Realpolitik of reason* will undoubtedly be suspected of corporatism. But it will be part of its task to prove, by the ends to which it puts the sorely won means of its autonomy, that it is a corporatism of the universal.

Notes

Note on the epigraph to the book, ‘It is by reading that one becomes readerly’: Queneau’s play on the proverb includes a pun on the verb *lire*, since *liseron* means ‘bindweed’. *Trans.*

Preface

- 1 D. Sallenave, *Le Don des morts* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), *passim*.
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 H.-G. Gadamer, *L’Art de comprendre, Écrits, II, Herméneutique et Champ de l’expérience humaine* (Paris: Aubier, 1991), p. 17; and also on the irreducibility of historical experience as ‘the immersion in a “becoming” excluding knowledge of “what happens”’, p. 197.
- 7 J. W. Goethe, ‘Karl Wilhelm Nose’, *Naturwiss. Sch.*, IX, p. 195, quoted in E. Cassirer, *Rousseau, Kant, Goethe*, trans. James Guttman, Paul O. Kristeller and John H. Randall (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1947), p. 80.
- 8 M. Chaillou, *Petit Guide pédestre de la littérature française du XVII^e siècle* (Paris: Hatier, 1990), esp. pp. 9–13.
- 9 L. Wittgenstein, ‘Lecture on ethics’, *Philosophical Review* (1965): 3–26. *Trans.*

Prologue *Flaubert, Analyst of Flaubert*

- 1 To allow the reader to follow the analysis more easily and to check its