

PREFACE

and isolated thoughts or circulate in fringe publications, confidential reports, or esoteric journals. It is clear indeed that no compilation made by an archivist, no matter how detailed and exhaustive; no discussion within parties, associations, or trade unions; no synthesis by a theorist can substitute for the product of a confrontation between all those researchers oriented toward action and all the thoughtful and experienced activists of all the European countries. Only the ideal assembly of all those who, be they researchers or activists, have something to contribute to the joint enterprise will be able to build the formidable collective edifice worthy, for once, of the overworked concept of *societal project*.

*Paris, November 2000*

*For a Scholarship with Commitment\**

I would like, first, to thank Edward Said for his invitation to participate in this debate and for his kind words of introduction. I regret that I could not be with you in Chicago on this day due to ill health. Nonetheless, I hope that, thanks to techniques of remote communication, I can be among you in voice and spirit and that we will be able to open a dialogue.

Given that I do not have much time and that I would like my speech to be as effective as possible, I will come directly to the question that I wish to raise before you: Must intellectuals—more precisely, research scholars, or to be more accurate still, social scientists—intervene in the political world, and if so, under what conditions can they interject themselves efficiently? What role can they play in the various social movements active today, at the national level and especially at the international level—that is, at the level where the fate of individuals and societies is increasingly being decided? Can they contribute to inventing a new manner of doing politics fit for the novel dilemmas and threats of our age?

\* Keynote address delivered by videoconference to the Modern Language Association Meetings, Chicago, December 1999, and introduced by MLA President Edward Said.

First of all, to avoid misunderstandings, one must posit clearly that a researcher, artist, or writer who intervenes in the political world does not become a politician because of that. According to a model created by Emile Zola on the occasion of the Dreyfus affair, he becomes an intellectual or, as you say in America, a "public intellectual," that is, someone who engages his specific authority and the values associated with the exercise of his or her craft, such as the values of disinterestedness and truth, in a political struggle—in other words, someone who enters the terrain of politics but without forsaking her exigencies and competencies as a researcher.\* (This is to say, in passing, that the canonical opposition that is made, especially in the Anglo-American tradition, between "scholarship" and "commitment" is devoid of foundation. The intrusions of artists, writers, and scientists—Einstein, Russell, or Sakharov—in the public sphere find their principle and basis in a scientific "community" defined by its commitment to objectivity, probity, and a presumed independence from worldly interests.)

By investing her artistic or scientific competency in civic debates, the scholar risks disappointing (the term is too weak) or, better yet, shocking others. On the one side, she will shock those in her own universe, the academy, who choose the virtuous "way out" by remaining enclosed in their ivory tower and who see in commitment a violation of the famous "axiological neutrality" that is wrongly identified with scientific objectivity when it is in fact a scientifically unimpeachable form of *escapism*. On the other side, she will shock those in the political and journalistic fields who see her as a threat to their mo-

\* [Translator's note] See Pierre Bourdieu, "The Corporatism of the Universal: The Role of Intellectuals in the Modern World," *Telos* 81 (Fall 1989): 99-110.

nopoly over public speech and, more generally, all those who are disturbed by her intervention in political life. She will risk, in a word, awakening all the forms of anti-intellectualism that were hitherto dormant here and there, among the masters of today's world, bankers, businessmen, and state managers, among journalists and politicians (including those of the "left"), nearly all of whom are now holders of cultural capital, and of course among intellectuals themselves.

But to indict anti-intellectualism, which is almost always based on *ressentiment*, does not exempt the intellectual from this critique to which every intellectual can and must submit himself or herself or, in another language, from *reflexivity*, which is the absolute prerequisite to any political action by intellectuals. The intellectual world must engage in a permanent critique of all the abuses of power or authority committed in the name of intellectual authority or, if you prefer, in a relentless critique of the use of intellectual authority as a political weapon within the intellectual field. Every scholar must also submit himself or herself to the critique of the *scholastic bias*,\* whose most perverse form is the propensity to a kind of "paper revolutionism" devoid of genuine target or effect. I believe indeed that the generous but unrealistic impulse that led many European intellectuals of my generation to submit to the dictates of the Communist Party still inspires too often today what I call "campus radicalism," this typically academic propensity to "confuse the things of logic for the logic of things," according to the pitiless formula of Marx, or, closer to our current predicament, to mistake revolutions in the order of words or texts for revolutions

\* [Translator's note] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Scholastic Point of View," *Cultural Anthropology* 5, 4 (November 1990): 380-391, and *Pascalian Meditations* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000 [1997]), chapters 1 and 2.

in the order of things, verbal sparring at conferences for “interventions” in the affairs of the *polis*.

Having posed these preliminary and apparently negative notions, I can assert that intellectuals (by which I mean artists, writers, and scientists who engage in political action) are indispensable to social struggles, especially nowadays given the quite novel forms that domination assumes. A number of recent historical works have revealed the pivotal role played by “think tanks” in the production and imposition of the neoliberal ideology that rules the world today. To the productions of these reactionary think tanks, which support and broadcast the views of experts appointed by the powerful, we must oppose the productions of critical networks that bring together “specific intellectuals” (in Foucault’s sense of the term) into a veritable *collective intellectual* capable of defining by itself the topics and ends of its reflection and action—in short, an autonomous collective intellectual.

This collective intellectual can and must, in the first place, *fulfill negative functions*: it must work to produce and disseminate instruments of defense against symbolic domination that relies increasingly on the authority of science (real or faked). Buttressed by the specific competency and authority of the collective thus formed, it can submit dominant discourse to a merciless logical critique aimed not only at its lexicon (“globalization,” “flexibility,” “employability,” etc.) but also at its mode of reasoning and in particular at the use of metaphors (e.g., the anthropomorphization of the market). It can furthermore subject this discourse to a sociological critique aimed at uncovering the social determinants that bear on the producers of dominant discourse (starting with journalists, especially economic journalists) and on their products. Lastly, it

can counter the pseudoscientific authority of authorized experts (chief among them economic experts and advisors) with a genuinely scientific critique of the hidden assumptions and often faulty reasoning that underpin their pronouncements.

But the collective intellectual can also fulfill a *positive function* by contributing to the collective work of political invention. The collapse of Soviet-type regimes and the weakening of communist parties in most European and Latin American countries has freed critical thought. But neoliberal doxa has filled the vacuum thus created and critique has retreated into the “small world” of academe, where it enchants itself with itself without ever being in a position to really threaten anyone about anything. The whole edifice of critical thought is in need of reconstruction. And this work of reconstruction cannot be effected, as some have 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.

This is where the collective intellectual can play its unique role, by helping to create the social conditions for the collective production of *realistic utopias*. It can organize or orchestrate joint research on novel forms of political action, on new manners of mobilizing and of making mobilized people work together, on new ways of elaborating projects and bringing them to fruition together. It can play the role of midwife by assisting the dynamics of working groups in their effort to express, and thereby discover, what they are and what they could or should be, and by helping with the reappropriation and accumulation of the immense social stock of knowledge on the social world with which the social world is pregnant. It could

thus help the victims of neoliberal policies to discover the differential effects of one and the same cause in apparently radically diverse events and experiences, especially for those who undergo them, associated with the different social universes, that is, in education, medicine, social welfare, criminal justice, etc., within one country or across countries. (This is what we tried to do in the book *The Weight of the World*, which brought to light new forms of social suffering caused by state retrenchment, with the purpose of compelling politicians to address them.) \*

This task is at once extremely urgent and extremely difficult. For the representations of the social world that must be resisted and countered are issued out of a *conservative revolution*—as was said of the pre-Nazi movements in Weimar Germany. In order to break with the tradition of the welfare state, the “think tanks” from which have emerged the political programs of Reagan and Thatcher and, after them, of Clinton, Blair, Schröder, and Jospin, have had to effect a veritable symbolic counterrevolution and to produce a *paradoxical doxa*. This doxa is conservative but presents itself as progressive; it seeks the restoration of the past order in some of its most archaic aspects (especially as regards economic relations), yet it passes regressions, reversals, and surrenders off as forward-looking reforms or revolutions leading to a whole new age of abundance and liberty (as with the language of the so-called new economy and the celebratory discourse around “network firms” and the Internet). All of this can be clearly seen in the efforts to dismantle the welfare state, that is, to destroy the

\* [Translator's note] Pierre Bourdieu et al., *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997 [1993]).

most precious democratic conquests in the areas of labor legislation, health, social protection, and education. To fight such a progressive-retrogressive policy is to risk appearing conservative even as one defends the most progressive achievements of the past. This situation is all the more paradoxical in that one is led to defend programs or institutions that one wishes in any case to change, such as public services and the national state, which no one could rightly want to preserve as is, or unions or even public schooling, which must be continually subjected to the most merciless critique. Thus I am sometimes suspected of conversion or accused of contradiction when I defend a public school system of which I have shown time and again that it fulfills a function of social conservation.

It seems to me that scholars have a decisive role to play in the struggle against the new neoliberal doxa and the purely formal cosmopolitanism of those obsessed with words such as “globalization” or “global competitiveness.” This fake universalism serves in reality the interests of the dominant: in the absence of a world state and a world bank financed by taxation of the international circulation of speculative capital, it serves to condemn as a “politically incorrect” regression toward nationalism the recourse to the only force, the national state, presently capable of protecting emergent countries such as South Korea or Malaysia from the stranglehold of multinational corporations. This fake universalism allows one to stigmatize, under demonizing labels such as “Islamism,” the efforts of such a Third World country to assert or restore its political autonomy, based on state power. To this verbal universalism, which also plagues relations between the sexes and which leaves citizens isolated and disarmed in the face of the overwhelming power of transnational corporations, committed

scholars can oppose a *new internationalism*, capable of tackling with truly international force not only issues such as environmental problems (air pollution, the ozone layer, nonrenewable fuels, or atomic fallout) that are truly "global" because they know no boundaries between nations or between social classes, but also more strictly economic issues such as the foreign debt of emergent countries, or cultural issues such as the question of the hegemony of financial capital in the field of cultural production and diffusion (attested to by the growing concentration of publishing or movie production and distribution). All these can unite intellectuals who are resolutely universal, that is, intent upon universalizing the conditions of access to the universal, beyond the boundaries that separate nations, especially those of the North and South.

To do so, writers, artists, and especially researchers (who, by trade, are already more inclined and more able than any other occupation to overcome national borders) must breach the *sacred boundary* inscribed in their minds—more or less deeply depending on their national tradition—between *scholarship* and *commitment* in order to break out of the academic microcosm and to enter resolutely into sustained exchange with the outside world (that is, especially with unions, grassroots organizations, and issue-oriented activist groups) instead of being content with waging the "political" battles, at once intimate and ultimate, and always a bit unreal, of the scholastic universe. Today's researchers must innovate an improbable but indispensable combination: *scholarship with commitment*, that is, a collective politics of intervention in the political field that follows, as much as possible, the rules that govern the scientific field.

Given the mix of urgency and confusion that usually char-

acterizes the world of political action, this is truly and fully possible only by and for an organization capable of coordinating the collective work of an international network of researchers and artists. In this joint enterprise, scientists are no doubt the ones who have to shoulder the primary role at a time when the powers that be ceaselessly invoke the authority of science—and the science of economics in particular. But writers and above all artists also have their contribution to make (among them, I think in particular of Hans Haacke, who has already invested his talents in critical battles). "True ideas bear no intrinsic force," said Spinoza, and the sociologist is not one to dispute him on this. But she can suggest the unique and irreplaceable role that writers and artists can play in the new division of political labor or, to be more precise, the new manner of doing politics that needs to be invented: to give *symbolic force*, by way of artistic form, to critical ideas and analyses. They can, for instance, give a *visible and sensible* form to the *invisible but scientifically predictable* consequences of political measures inspired by neoliberal ideology.

I would like, by way of conclusion, to recall what happened last month in Seattle. I believe that, without overestimating its importance, we can see in this event a first and exemplary experiment that needs to be analyzed up close in order to uncover the principles of what could be the means and ends of a new form of international political action able to transform the achievements of research into successful political demonstrations; what could be, more generally, the strategies of political struggle of a new nongovernmental organization defined by total commitment to internationalism and full adherence to scholarship.