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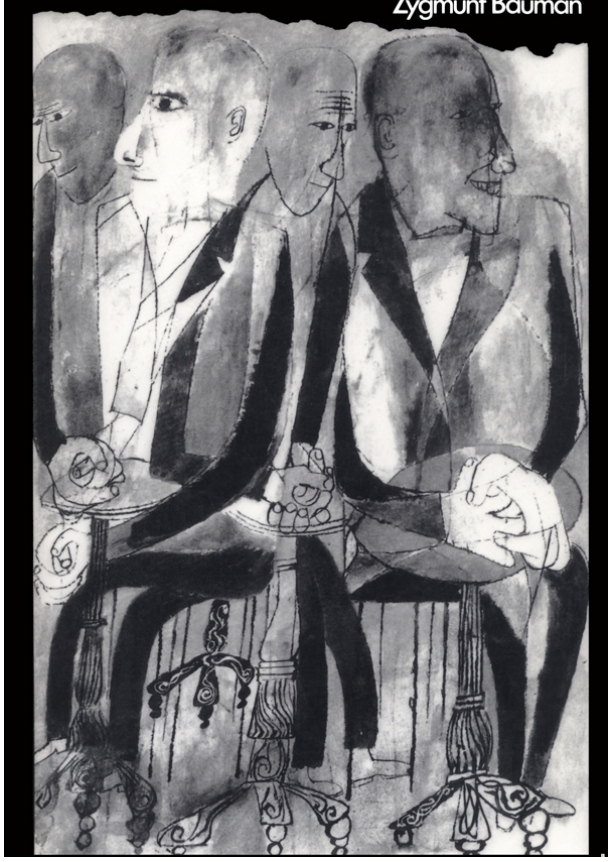

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On modernity, post-modernity and intellectuals

ZYGMUNT BAUMAN

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Introduction

INTELLECTUALS: FROM MODERN LEGISLATORS TO POST-MODERN INTERPRETERS

When it was coined in the early years of the present century, the word 'intellectuals' was an attempt to recapture and reassert that societal centrality and those global concerns which had been associated with the production and dissemination of knowledge during the age of Enlightenment. The word was addressed to a motley collection of novelists, poets, artists, journalists, scientists and other public figures who felt it their moral responsibility, and their collective right, to interfere directly with the political process through influencing the minds of the nation and moulding the actions of its political leaders. By the time the word was coined, the descendants of *les philosophes* or *la république des lettres* had already been divided into specialized enclaves with their partial interests and localized concerns. The word was hence a rallying call, sounded over the closely guarded frontiers of professions and artistic *genres;* a call to resuscitate the tradition (or materialize the collective memory) of 'men of knowledge' embodying and practising the unity of truth, moral values and aesthetic judgement.

Like *la république des lettres,* integrated by the shared activity of discussion and commonality of its topics, the collectivity of the intellectuals was to be united by the response to the call, by the acceptance of the rights and responsibilities the call implied. Only ostensibly, if at all, was the category of 'intellectuals' intended as a descriptive category. It did not draw an objective boundary of the area it denoted, neither did it assume the pre-existence of such a

boundary (though it did indicate the pool from which the volunteers might be sought and recruited). The category was rather expected to create its own referent through arousing concerns, mobilizing loyalties and prompting self-definitions, and thus deploying partial authorities of experts and artists in a collective political, moral and aesthetic authority of men of knowledge. The category was, so to speak, a widely opened invitation to join in a certain kind of practice of a global-societal import. And so it remained to this day. It makes little sense therefore to ask the question 'who are the intellectuals?' and expect in reply a set of objective measurements or even a finger-pointing exercise. It makes no sense to compose a list of professions whose members are intellectuals, or draw a line inside professional hierarchy above which the intellectuals are located. In any place and at any time 'the intellectuals' are constituted as a combined effect of mobilization and self-recruitment. The intentional meaning of 'being an intellectual' is to rise above the partial preoccupation of one's own profession or artistic *genre* and engage with the global issues of truth, judgement and taste of the time. The line dividing 'intellectuals' and 'non-intellectuals' is drawn and redrawn by decisions to join in a particular mode of activity.

At the time it entered the west European vocabulary, the concept of 'the intellectuals' drew its meaning from the collective memory of the Enlightenment era. It was in that era that the power/knowledge syndrome, a most conspicuous attribute of modernity, had been set. The syndrome was a joint product of two novel developments which took place at the beginning of the modern times: the emergence of a new type of state power with resources and will necessary to shape and administer the social system according to a preconceived model of order; and the establishment of a relatively autonomous, self-managing discourse able to generate such a model complete with the practices its implementation required. This book explores

the hypothesis that the combination of those two developments created the kind of experience which was articulated in the particular world-view and associated intellectual strategies to be given the name of ‘modernity’. This book also explores the hypothesis that the subsequent divorce between the state and intellectual discourse, together with the inner transformations of both spheres, has led to an experience articulated today in a world-view and associated strategies often referred to under the name of ‘post-modernity’.

It ought to be clear from what has been said so far that the concepts of modernity and post-modernity are not used in this book as equivalents of the apparently similar oppositions with which they are frequently confused – like ‘industrial’ and ‘post-industrial’ society, or ‘capitalist’ and ‘post-capitalist’ society. Neither are they employed as synonyms for ‘modernism’ and ‘post-modernism’, the terms used to describe self-constituted, in large measure self-conscious, cultural and artistic styles. In the sense they are used in this book, the concepts of modernity and post-modernity stand for two sharply different contexts in which the ‘intellectual role’ is performed; and two distinct strategies which develop in response to them. The opposition between modernity and post-modernity has been employed here in the service of theorizing the last three centuries of West European history (or West European dominated history) from the perspective of intellectual praxis. It is this practice that can be modern or post-modern; the dominance of one or other of the two modes (not necessarily without exceptions) distinguishes modernity and post-modernity as periods in intellectual history. Even if the idea of modernity and post-modernity as *successive* historical periods is viewed as contentious (when it is justly pointed out that modern and post-modern practices coexist, though in varying proportion, within each of the two eras, and that one can speak of the domination of one or the

other pattern only relatively, as of tendencies), the distinction between the two practices remains useful, if only as ‘ideal types’; it does go some way towards revealing the essence of the current intellectual controversies and the range of the intellectual strategies available.

In referring to intellectual practices, the opposition between the terms modern and post-modern stands for differences in understanding the nature of the world, and the social world in particular, and in understanding the related nature, and purpose, of intellectual work.

The typically modern view of the world is one of an essentially orderly totality; the presence of a pattern of uneven distribution of probabilities allows a sort of explanation of the events which – if correct – is simultaneously a tool of prediction and (if required resources are available) of control. Control (‘mastery over nature’, ‘planning’ or ‘designing’ of society) is well nigh synonymously associated with ordering action, understood as the manipulation of probabilities (rendering some events more likely, others less likely). Effectivity of control depends on the adequacy of knowledge of the ‘natural’ order. Such adequate knowledge is, in principle, attainable. Effectivity of control and correctness of knowledge are tightly related (the second explains the first, the first corroborates the second), whether in laboratory experiment or societal practice. Between themselves, they supply criteria to classify existing practices as superior or inferior. Such classification is – again in principle – objective, that is, publicly testable and demonstrable each time the above-mentioned criteria are applied. Practices which cannot be objectively justified (for example, practices which legitimize themselves by reference to habits or opinions binding in a particular locality or particular time) are inferior as they distort knowledge and limit effectivity of control. Moving up the hierarchy of practices measured by the control/knowledge

syndrome, means also moving toward universality and away from ‘parochial’, ‘particularistic’, ‘localized’ practices.

The typically post-modern view of the world is, in principle, one of an unlimited number of models of order, each one generated by a relatively autonomous set of practices. Order does not precede practices and hence cannot serve as an outside measure of their validity. Each of the many models of order makes sense solely in terms of the practices which validate it. In each case, validation brings in criteria which are developed within a particular tradition; they are upheld by the habits and beliefs of a ‘community of meanings’ and admit of no other tests of legitimacy. Criteria described above as ‘typically modern’ are no exception to this general rule; they are ultimately validated by one of the many possible ‘local traditions’, and their historical fate depends on the fortunes of the tradition in which they reside. There are no criteria for evaluating local practices which are situated outside traditions, outside ‘localities’. Systems of knowledge may only be evaluated from ‘inside’ their respective traditions. If, from the modern point of view, relativism of knowledge was a problem to be struggled against and eventually overcome in theory and in practice, from the post-modern point of view relativity of knowledge (that is, its ‘embeddedness’ in its own communally supported tradition) is a lasting feature of the world.

The typically modern strategy of intellectual work is one best characterized by the metaphor of the ‘legislator’ role. It consists of making authoritative statements which arbitrate in controversies of opinions and which select those opinions which, having been selected, become correct and binding. The authority to arbitrate is in this case legitimized by superior (objective) knowledge to which intellectuals have a better access than the non-intellectual part of society. Access to such knowledge is better thanks to procedural rules which assure the attainment of truth, the arrival at

valid moral judgement, and the selection of proper artistic taste. Such procedural rules have a universal validity, as do the products of their application. The employment of such procedural rules makes the intellectual professions (scientists, moral philosphers, aesthetes) collective owners of knowledge of direct and crucial relevance to the maintenance and perfection of the social order. The condition of this being so is the work of the 'intellectuals proper' – meta-professionals, so to speak – to be responsible for the formulation of procedural rules and to control their correct application. Like the knowledge they produce, intellectuals are not bound by localized, communal traditions. They are, together with their knowledge, extraterritorial. This gives them the right and the duty to validate (or invalidate) beliefs which may be held in various sections of society. Indeed, as Popper observed, falsifying poorly founded, or unfounded views is what the procedural rules are best at.

The typically post-modern strategy of intellectual work is one best characterized by the metaphor of the 'interpreter' role. It consists of translating statements, made within one communally based tradition, so that they can be understood within the system of knowledge based on another tradition. Instead of being orientated towards selecting the best social order, this strategy is aimed at facilitating communication between autonomous (sovereign) participants. It is concerned with preventing the distortion of meaning in the process of communication. For this purpose, it promotes the need to penetrate deeply the alien system of knowledge from which the translation is to be made (for example, Geertz's 'thick description'), and the need to maintain the delicate balance between the two conversing traditions necessary for the message to be both undistorted (regarding the meaning invested by the sender) and understood (by the recipient). It is vitally important to note that the post-modern strategy does not imply the

elimination of the modern one; on the contrary, it cannot be conceived without the continuation of the latter. While the post-modern strategy entails the abandonment of the universalistic ambitions of the intellectuals' own tradition, it does not abandon the universalistic ambitions of the intellectuals towards their own tradition; here, they retain their meta-professional authority, legislating about the procedural rules which allow them to arbitrate controversies of opinion and make statements intended as binding. The novel difficulty, however, is how to draw the boundaries of such community as may serve as the territory for legislative practices. This is a minor irritant for the numerous specialized offshoots of intellectual practices served by 'partial' intellectuals. The contemporary 'general' intellectuals find, however, their territorial claims contested. And with the post-modern strategy around, such territorial claims become inherently problematic and difficult to legitimize.

It is the purpose of this book to explore the historical conditions under which the modern world-view and intellectual strategy were formed; and the conditions under which they were challenged and partly supplanted, or at least complemented, by an alternative, post-modern world-view and strategy. It is the assumption of this book that the emergence and the influence of the two distinct varieties of intellectual practice can be best understood when considered against the changes in the relations between the industrialized West and the rest of the world, in the internal organization of Western societies, in the location of knowledge and knowledge-producers within that organization, and in the mode of life of the intellectuals themselves. The book is, in other words, an attempt to apply sociological hermeneutics to understand the successive tendencies in the meta-narrative of Western intellectuals. In this meta-narrative its producers, the intellectuals, remain invisible – 'transparent'. The ambition

of this exercise in sociological hermeneutics is to make this transparency opaque and hence visible and open to scrutiny.

One last remark is in order. In no way am I implying that the post-modern mode constitutes an advance over the modern one, that the two may be arranged in a progressive sequence in any of the possible meanings of the notoriously confusing idea of ‘progress’. Moreover, I do not believe that modernity, as a type of intellectual mode, has been conclusively superseded by the advent of post-modernity, or that the latter has refuted the validity of the first (if one can refute anything taking a consistently post-modern stance). I am merely interested in understanding the social conditions under which the appearance of the two modes has been possible; and the factors responsible for their changing fortunes.

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Z.B.
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Paul Radin, or an aetiology of the intellectuals

Definitions of the intellectual are many and diverse. They have, however, one trait in common, which makes them also different from all other definitions: they are all self-definitions. Indeed, their authors are the members of the same rare species they attempt to define. Hence every definition they propose is an attempt to draw a boundary of their own identity. Each boundary splits the territory into two sides: here and there, in and out, us and them. Each self-definition is in the end a pronouncement of an opposition marked by the presence of a distinction on one side of the boundary and its absence on the other.

Most definitions, however, refrain from admitting the true nature of their accomplishment: by defining two social spaces they assume they have the right to draw the boundary. Instead, they focus ostensibly on only one side of the boundary; they pretend to confine themselves to the articulation of the attributes uniquely present on one side; and they are silent about the necessarily divisive effects of the operation. What most definitions refuse to admit is that the separation of the two spaces (and the legislating of a specific relationship between them) is the purpose and the *raison d'être* of the definitional exercise, not its side-effect.

Thus the authors of most known definitions attempt to list the properties of the intellectuals before any reference is made to the extant or postulated social relationship which sets off the defined group from the rest of society. What is overlooked in the process is that this relationship itself, rather than any special qualities and possessions of the

intellectuals as a group, constitutes them as a separate entity. Being intellectuals, they subsequently seek to reforge their separatedness into a self-identity. The specifically intellectual form of the operation – self-definition – masks its universal content, which is the reproduction and reinforcement of a given social configuration, and – within it – a given (or claimed) status for the group.

The relatively rare exceptions to this rule come from those cases where the intellectuals focus their attention on another society, starkly different from their own; the more different, as it were, the better. Configurations salient in their own practice, but seldom brought to the surface when dealing with their own society, provide a frame of reference in which knowledge of the other society is ordered and interpreted. Self-delusion, indispensable for pragmatic reasons whenever the defence or enhancement of the group's own status is involved, becomes superfluous (indeed, counter-productive) when it is necessary to come to grips with alien experience. As both Levi-Strauss and Gadamer would say, only when confronting another culture, or another text (confronting them, let us clarify, in a purely cognitive, theoretical mode), can the intellectual 'understand oneself. Indeed, the confrontation with the other is first and foremost the recognition of oneself; an objectification, in terms of a theory, of what would otherwise remain pre-theoretical, subconscious, inarticulate.

Nowhere perhaps has this self-revelatory character of cross-cultural hermeneutic exercise found a better illustration than in the work of the eminent American anthropologist Paul Radin. This comes as no surprise, as Radin's life-long preoccupation was the 'primitive world-view', the ideas held by primitive societies; their religious views, moral systems, philosophy. One can legitimately expect such a topic to set in operations precisely those constituents of the researcher's perspective which bear direct relation to understanding his own role within the

world of ideas. He can hardly come to grips with ‘primitive religion’ without scanning the field in search of ‘primitive theologians’; his effort to understand primitive philosophy would require him to locate (or at least construe) primitive philosophers. The way he goes about this task will be found illuminating by anyone wishing to comprehend the processes by which intellectuals are self-constituted in the society of the researcher.

What Radin first found in primitive societies was ‘the existence of two general types of temperament among primitive peoples, that of the priest-thinker and that of the layman; the one only secondarily identified with action, the other primarily so; the one interested in the analysis of the religious phenomena, the other in their effect’.[1] In the beginning, there is an opposition between the great majority of ordinary people, preoccupied with their daily business of survival, ‘action’ in the sense of the routine reproduction of their conditions of existence, and a small group of those who could not but reflect upon ‘action’: ‘truly religious people … have always been few in number’. The opposition is at the same time a relation: the smaller group comes into existence only for some features (or, rather, the absence of some features) in the ‘unmarked’ majority; it has been, so to speak, ‘called into existence’ by a certain insufficiency or incompleteness in the larger group’s equipment; thus the smaller group is in one sense a necessary complement of the ‘unmarked’ majority; in another sense, however, it exists in a derivative, perhaps even parasitic, mode in relation to the larger group.

This interplay between the two aspects of this complex relationship comes out clearly in Radin’s description. ‘Primitive man is afraid of one thing, of the uncertainties of the struggle of life. ’[2]Uncertainty has always been the paramount source of fear. The random behaviour of factors crucial for the success or failure of one’s life struggle, the stubborn unpredictability of outcome, lack of control over so

many unknowns within the life equation, these have always generated acute spiritual discomfort and made the sufferers crave for the security which only the practical control, or intellectual awareness, of probabilities may bring. This urge has been the prime yarn of which the roles of magicians, priests, scientific experts, political prophets or professionals are spun.

> The religious formulator, at first unconsciously if you will, capitalised on the sense of insecurity of the ordinary man … The religious formulator developed the theory that everything of value, even everything unchangeable and predictable about man and the world around him, was surrounded and immersed in danger, that these dangers could be overcome only in a specific fashion and according to a prescription devised and perfected by him.[3]

Capitalising ‘on the sense of insecurity’ expressed itself in the postulation of a special vantage point, accessible only to special people and on special condition, from which a logic could be discerned beneath superficial randomness, so that the random could be made predictable. The control over fate proposed by the religious formulators was thus mediated by knowledge from the very start; a crucial element of the operation, as Radin insists, was ‘the transference of the coercive power from the subject to the object’. (As Francis Bacon would say in a society separated from that described by Radin by millenia of *Naturgeschichte* time, ‘one can master Nature by surrendering to its laws’.) Once the determinants of fate have been objectified, once the subject’s will has been denied the power of forcing, coaxing or enticing the external objects into submission, the only power of relevance to the primeval urge for certainty is knowledge. By proxy, it is the power of the knowledge-holders. The specific way in which the sense of insecurity was capitalized upon by religious formulators and their later equivalents elevated the attribute of ‘being in the know’ as, simultaneously, its premise and inevitable effect.

But there is still more light in Radin's analysis. The kind of knowledge the religious formulators claimed was in no way predetermined by, or confined to, the concrete fears which had always haunted 'ordinary people'. The remarkable feature of the knowledge-attaining process was that it spawned as many new mysteries as it solved among the old ones; and generated as many new fears as it assuaged among the old. The way in which the uncertainty was originally capitalized upon triggered off an unending, self-propelled and self-reinforcing process, in which the very possibility of ever bringing the effort to an end and replacing the situation of uncertainty (within given parameters of the life-process) with one of spiritual balance and practical control was excluded. Once this process had been set in motion, it became apparent that even things seemingly 'unchangeable and predictable' were in fact 'surrounded and immersed in danger'. Power/knowledge denotes a self-perpetuating mechanism, which at a relatively early stage stops being dependent on the original impetus, as it creates conditions for its own continuous and ever more vigorous operation. More fear-generating uncertainties are introduced into the life-world of the 'laymen'. Many of them are so remote from the daily practice of the latter, that neither their gravity nor their declared cure may be checked against subjectively evident effects. This circumstance, of course, further enhances the power of knowledge and of the knowledge-guardians. Moreover, it renders this power virtually invulnerable to contest.

The relatively innocuous distinction drawn between 'religious formulators' and 'ordinary people', between 'being interested in the ideas' and 'being interested in their effects', leads to altogether formidable consequences. It engenders an acute asymmetry in the deployment of social power. Not only does it promote sharp polarization of status, influence, and access to the socially produced surplus, but it also (and perhaps most importantly) builds upon the

opposition of temperaments a relationship of dependency. The doers now become dependent upon the thinkers; the ordinary people cannot conduct their life business without asking for, and receiving, the religious formulators' assistance. As members of society, the ordinary people are now incomplete, imperfect, wanting. There is no clear way in which their morbid flaws can be permanently repaired. Burdened with their flaws forever, they need the constant presence and ongoing intervention of the shamans, magicians, priests, theologians.

The intensity of this need (and hence the strength of dependence) grows with the number of uncertainties built into the existence of ordinary people, and the degree to which the shamans, magicians, etc., enjoy a monopoly in handling them. If, therefore, as Radin suggests, the religious formulators are motivated by the intention to 'strengthen their authority', or even, more cynically, by the wish to 'attain and enhance' their 'economic security',[4] the most rational strategy open to them will be to manipulate the beliefs of the ordinary people in such a way as to increase their experience of uncertainty, and of their personal inability to ward off its potentially deleterious effects. (This strategy would be a case application of the general cybernetic rule, according to which in every complex system the subsystem 'nearest to instability rules'.)[5] The latter condition can be best achieved if the knowledge indispensable for handling the uncertainty is esoteric (or better still, held secret), if handling the uncertainty demands implements the ordinary people do not possess, or if the participation of the shaman, priest, etc., is recognized as an irreplaceable ingredient of the procedure. One can easily observe the application of all these tactical principles in the history of expert-layman relations.

One of the most intriguing of Radin's insights into the pragmatics of the intellectual role can be found in his

attempt to trace back the model of the primitive philosopher to a pattern first introduced by shamans.

> The basic qualification for the shaman and medicine-man in the more simply organised groups like the Eskimo and the Arunta is that he belong to the neurotic-epileptoid type. It is likewise clear that, as we approach tribes with a more complex form of economic organisation, these qualifications, while still present, become secondary to new ones. For this we have already given explanation, namely, that, as the emoluments of office increased, many people who were quite normal were attracted to the priesthood. The pattern of behaviour, however, had by that time become fixed and the non-neurotic shaman had to accept the formulation which owed its origin and its initial development to his neurotic predecessors and colleagues. This formulation … consisted of three parts: first, the description of his neurotic temperament and of his actual suffering and trance; second, the description of his enforced isolation, physical and spiritual, from the rest of the group; and, third, the detailed description of what might best be called an obsessive identification with his goal. From the first arose the theory of the nature of the ordeal through which he must pass; from the second the insistence upon taboos and purifications; and from the third the theory either that he was possessed of the goal or that he was possessed by the goal, in other words, all that is connected by the concept of spirit-possession.[6]

The accuracy of the reconstructed history of succession does not interest us here; it may merely be observed as an essentially untestable ‘myth of origin’. What is of more direct relevance to our topic is the striking parallelity revealed by Radin between some all-too-contemporary elements of the legitimation of the intellectual role and those qualities of the shamans widely described in ethnological literature. If seen against the latter, the most vital characteristics of the first come fully into view; normally hidden beneath the diverse wrappings of many colours and designs in which they are presented at different times by different varieties of intellectuals, they may now be examined in their essential shape.

Ordeal, purification and possession; these three seminal and, arguably, permanent constituents of the legitimation of priestly authority have one feature in common. They all proclaim, and explain, the separation of the priesthood from the laity. They put whatever wisdom or skill the priests may

own beyond the reach of all those who are not priests. They elevate the priestly ways, by the same token downgrading the paths of the laity. And they present the resultant relationship of domination as one of service and self-sacrifice.

All three have been met throughout history (and are still being met) in many guises. We can recognize the ‘theory of the ordeal’, depending on the leading fashion of the era, in references to physical asceticism and self-immolation, monastic humility, the protracted miseries of student life, an existence devoid of leisure and short on the joys the consumer society may offer. The ‘taboo and purification’ aspect has been elaborated upon with particular zeal: its endless inventory extends from the sexual abstinence of the ancient authors, through the bohemianism of romantic artists to the ‘value-neutrality’ and non-commitment of modern scientists or the auto-violence of ‘transcendental reduction’ of the Husserlian seekers of certainty. In all epochs (though in none as much as in the modern world) this aspect spawned some degree of institutionalized isolation for men of knowledge, in which outside instrusions were seen as impure and potentially contaminating, and elaborate practical measures were taken to keep intruders away. The aspect of ‘possession’ was perhaps that most resistant to institutionalization. It was, however, never abandoned as a professional myth. At the start of their professional careers men of knowledge, sacred or secular, take an oath of utter and sole dedication to the pursuit of wisdom and the disposition of their resulting skills; while professions defend their standing by insisting that this is exactly where they stand and that they cannot but stand there.

The glory and nobility of sacrifice rub off on the knowledge to which it leads. Tools and products ennoble each other, and, once started, reinforce each other’s authority and supply reciprocal justification. The result is

that both acquire a degree of independence from the social demand which they invoke as their validity test. ‘Formulations’ enjoy an untarnished reputation because they have been authored by the ‘formulators’ who followed a life which, from their lack of ability and will, ordinary people would not follow. The formulators, on the other hand, retain the esteem they once acquired through putting out a regular supply of highly reputable formulations. The formulators and the formulations now need only each other to substantiate their claim to high status.

We have drawn so far (in a somewhat free fashion, to be fair) on Paul Radin’s *Primitive Religion* – a study published in 1937. Even allowing for the fact that some of the more radical interpretations in the above analysis go beyond the letter (if not the spirit) of that study, there is little doubt that *Primitive Religion* was a product of Radin’s intense effort to break through the self-spun, but firmly institutionalized mythology of ‘thinkers’, sacred or secular, ‘primitive’ or modern (the first confronted by him as the object, the second as the subject of his study). He wished to disclose the social relationship which alone underwrites the rationality of the thinkers’ action but which is all but decreed out of existence by the literal message of the myth. How great the effort must have been becomes apparent once *Primitive Religion* is compared with *Primitive Man as Philosopher,* a study published by Radin ten years earlier. Radin was already in possession of most of the material used for his later book when the first was published; and yet the conclusions drawn in the two books bear virtually no resemblance to each other.

The following extended quotation conveys the interpretative tenor of *Primitive Man:*

> The man of action, broadly characterised, is oriented toward the object, interested primarily in practical results, and indifferent to the claims and stirrings of his inner self. He recognises them but he dismisses them shortly, granting them no validity either in influencing his actions or in explaining

them. The Thinker, on the other hand, although he, too, is definitely desirous of practical results … is nevertheless impelled by his whole nature to spend a considerable time in analysing his subjective states and attaches great importance both to their influence upon his actions and to the explanations he has developed.

> The first is satisfied that the world exists and that things happen. Explanations are of secondary consequence. He is ready to accept the first one that comes to hand. At bottom it is a matter of utter indifference. He does, however, show a predilection for one type of explanation as opposed to another. He prefers an explanation in which the purely mechanical relation between a series of events is specifically stressed. His mental rhythm … is characterised by a demand for endless repetition of the same event … Monotony holds no terror for him…
>
> Now the rhythm of the thinker is quite different.[7]

In this interpretation, thinkers and non-thinkers ('men of action') are set apart by a difference in their mental proclivities and aptitudes. This difference neither generates, nor stands, for a relationship between the two groups. If a relationship may be deduced from a difference so described, it may be only one postulated in the commentary of the distinguished American psychiatrist Kurt Goldstein:

> One can only distinguish in all primitive societies two types of people, those who live strictly in accord with the rules of the society, whom [Radin] calls the 'nonthinkers', and those who think, the 'thinkers'. The number of thinkers may be small but they play a great role in the tribe; they are the people who formulate the concepts and organise them in systems, which are then taken over – generally without criticism – by the nonthinkers.[8]

The distinction which ten years later Radin was to conceive of as a product and a factor of the historical process, of social struggle and the complex relation of dependence, here nests still in its mythological, 'naturalized' shell. People cannot help being what they are. Some are born to think, others – to labour. The latter are well satisfied with their lot; indeed, the very repetitiveness of their daily chores suits them well and provides for a life free of anxiety. The thinkers, however, cannot help but ponder, doubt, invent. Theirs is, by necessity, a very different life – one which non-thinkers would rather not

emulate. The thinkers are cultural heroes to be admired and respected, but not imitated. One would assume that the same Nature which had made people so sharply different linked the special qualities of the thinkers to their special position among the others.

Radin suggests that what anthropologists consider the primitive culture is in fact the expression of the ‘mental rhythm’ of the non-thinkers. He implies that primitivity is self-defining and hermeneutically self-contained and self-sufficient: that the concept is fully explicable only in reference to the attributes of the entities it denotes. We confront here another mystification causally related to the ‘mythological’ definition of the intellectual. Not only does this latter occlude the historical character and the conflicts inherent in the separation and the salience of the intellectuals as indicated above, but it reverses the direction in which the resulting opposition operates. It presents the primitivity as the unmarked side of the opposition, and hence the other side (allegedly coined as a negation of some features of the first, that is, non-primitive) as the marked one. This is a reversal, both sociologically (it is the non-primitives, to wit the intellectuals, who define their opposite as their negation not vice versa) and semantically (the meaning of primitivity is the absence of some attributes which characterize the other side; the meaning of whatever stands against the primitive is positive – construed of traits later to be declared lacking on the other side). It is the constitution of the intellectuals as a distinct social formation with at least a degree of self-consciousness and some joint strategy designed for the status-game, that casts the rest of the society, kept outside the closing ranks, as an entity in its own right, possessed of its own characteristics (even if such characteristics are entirely composed of ‘absences’). It is the primitivity that is the marked side of the opposition; and the primitive is constituted as a by-product of the self-constitution of the intellectuals.

The primitive is therefore a relative (or, rather, relational) notion coined by those who are, and see themselves as being, outside the space it denotes. The baseline against which the concept is construed is the self-image of those outside; it is constructed to denote 'the rest of the world'.

Let us note that what has been said above about the derivative and relational character of the concept of the primitive applies to a whole family of notions born within the context of asymmetry of power, as factors in the reproduction of a structure of domination. Different concepts are employed depending on what particular domination, or dimension in the distribution of social power, is at stake. The primitive as used by Radin betrays the kinship ties within the family: a concept usually only employed in terms of the division between the Western (developed, advanced, complex, civilized, etc.) society and the rest of the world, as scanned from the Western vantage point, here collapsed into the 'non-intellectual' part of the world, and is thus used in the context of another structure of domination. It is because of their shared features that the concepts belonging to the family under discussion are, at least to some extent, mutually exchangeable. What makes the exchange possible without defying the sense of semantic clarity is, of course, the essential isomorphism of all asymmetrical distributions of power. More interestingly, however, at least a part of the explanation may be found in the fact that whatever structure of domination is reflected in, and served by, a given concept, all such concepts are coined, or refined, or logically polished, not by the dominating side of the structure as a whole, but by the intellectual part of it. No wonder the intellectual self-image (or, more fundamentally, the cognitive predisposition shaped up by the specifically intellectual mode of praxis) colours the articulation of all aspects of power asymmetry.

Such a colouring is particularly recognizable in almost ubiquitous references to certain mental deficiencies in the

definitions of otherwise quite different dominated groups and categories. Whether the dominated are construed as primitive, traditional, or uncivilized; whether the category construed is that of non-European cultures, non-white races, the lower classes, women, the insane, the sick, or the criminal – inferiority of mental capability in general, and inferior grasp of moral principles or the absence of self-reflection and rational self-analysis in particular, are almost invariably salient in the definition. The overall effect of such a universality is the enthronement of knowledge, the feature pertaining particularly strongly to the intellectual mode of praxis, in the very heart of the legitimation of any form of social superiority. By the same token, any claim for domination and superiority must, if only obliquely, pay tribute to the very factors on which the intellectuals ground their power claims.

We have now collected all the elements necessary to construct the meaning in which the concept of the intellectual will be employed in the present study; and to describe the strategy which will be applied to the analysis of the past and present of the social category of the intellectuals.

First of all, the concept of the intellectual does not refer in this study to any real or postulated characteristics which can be ascribed or imputed to a specific category of people within society – such as its native qualities, attained attributes or acquired possessions. It is assumed that the category of the intellectuals never has been and never can be ‘definitionally self-sufficient’; and that no current definition which proposes to focus on the features of the category itself in order to explain its position and role within a larger society, can break through the level of legitimations to the social configuration they legitimize. As they draw heavily on the power rhetoric the category itself develops; such current definitions, so to speak, ‘take the topic for the resource’.

Secondly, we refrain here from any attempt to build up a collective definition of the intellectual by a ‘finger pointing’ method – by enumerating skills, occupations, attitudes, biographical types, etc., which at a given time or in a given society may claim to belong, or are thought of as belonging, to the category. Even more radically, we refrain from participating in the (politically crucial, but sociologically secondary) debate aimed at deciding which individuals or groups ‘still are’, and which ‘just miss’ parts of the intellectual category. In our view, this debate is either an element of power rhetoric developed by some sectors of the category to serve the ‘closure’ struggles, or the result of the outsiders confusing power rhetoric with sociological analysis. Again in this case, the topic is mistaken for a resource. What lies behind the debate in which we refuse to participate is a hope to prefigure theoretically what can only be a shifting manifestation of the ongoing political struggles, if not an attempt to interfere with the outcome of such a struggle while accepting the weapon its participants tend to use – that of representing political solutions as decisions about the truth of the matter. Instead, we will confine our search to the task of locating the category of the intellectual within the structure of the larger society as a ‘spot’, a ‘territory’ within such a structure; a territory inhabited by a shifting population, and open to invasions, conquests and legal claims as all ordinary territories are.

We will treat the category of the intellectual as a structural element within the societal figuration, an element defined not by its intrinsic qualities, but by the place it occupies within the system of dependencies which such a figuration represents, and by the role it performs in the reproduction and development of the figuration. We assume that the sociological meaning of the category can be obtained only through the study of the figuration as a totality. But we assume as well that the fact that the category of the intellectuals does appear as a structural