INTRODUCTION

Fundamental Confusion

Forget populism

Perhaps the most surprising thesis this book advances is the one fundamental to its project: the thesis that we need another book on intellectuals. Sociologists, literary critics, philosophers, and pundits have been generating a nearly overwhelming series of critiques and celebrations of intellectuals for many years. We have had postmodernist announcements of the intellectual's death, popular elegies of the last intellectuals, conservative and progressive attacks on intellectual apostasy from Western traditions, populist critiques of new class impositions, and even neo-Fabian celebrations of professionals as the one progressive class. After all of these books and arguments, what remains to be said on the topic? [1]

All of these dithyrambs and diatribes share a fundamental confusion about the character and role of intellectuals in contemporary society. Are intellectuals an empowered elite, or are they a vestigial organ of modernity with no function in a commodity-driven social order that no longer requires the regulative work of representation and legitimation that intellectuals once performed? Can progressive intellectuals speak for the oppressed, or does their intervention inevitably reproduce the silencing and marginalization of the oppressed for whom they purport to act? Can conservative intellectuals preserve the common grounds of a democratic social order, or can they only reproduce structures of privilege and exclusion? That these questions come so readily to hand indicates that the status of intellectuals, an issue fundamental to our work as intellectuals, remains confused.

The second, perhaps less surprising thesis of this book is that these questions cannot be resolved in any simple way. Rather, the fact that intellectuals today must write and act, take positions and make polemics, in the absence of clear answers to basic questions about their own positioning,

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authority, and prerogatives, is the very condition of intellectual work in the realm of popular politics today. It is this condition—which is not precisely the condition of postmodernity—and its fundamentally conflicted situations that I describe in this book. The aim is not (and cannot be) to resolve either the confusion or the conflicts I explore here but to clarify their terms. The confusions remain fundamental. They are the embattled grounds and the shifting foundations that contemporary intellectuals, especially critical intellectuals interested in popular politics, must come to understand. By assessing some of the specific battles involving publicity, pedagogy, and scholarship in which critical intellectuals of various sorts are engaged, I hope to make a contribution to that understanding.

The phrases "popular politics" and "critical intellectuals" require some explanation, and a distinction usefully formulated by Carl Boggs will help to clarify these terms. The confusions I am primarily interested in attend the work of critical intellectuals who are generally also academics, though I also want to emphasize that what it means to be a critical intellectual is not at all clear. Maintaining a distinction between critical intellectuals and the type of intellectual worker Boggs has called "the technological variant" proves difficult. Nonetheless, there does seem to be general agreement that the authority and influence of critical intellectuals is in decline and that technologists have become "the predominant intellectual type in the modern period."

As Boggs explains, the ascendancy of the technocratic intellectual "comes with advanced levels of industrial development and the rationalization of social life that accompanies it."[2] These technocrats—an elite of specialists and bureaucrats—fulfill some of the modernized functions of the traditional intellectuals Gramsci described as "the industrial technician, the political economist, the organizer of a new culture, of a new law, etc." Clerics of the information age, today's technicians furnish what Gramsci called "homogeneity and consciousness" for the dominant order.[3] As Boggs puts it, technological intellectuals are a "new class" of experts serving "to legitimate, in various ways, the smooth functioning of bureaucratic state capitalism and other forms of industrial society" and "are located primarily in the state bureaucracy, universities, corporations, the military, the media, and the culture industry" (3).

Here the confusion begins to emerge. Universities, the media, and the culture industry also provide the locations for most of the academic professionals whose work as critical intellectuals I will consider. One problem is that in a given institutional context, the critical intellectual is frequently also an accredited technician in the social sciences or the humanities. One confusion we may hope to clarify, one that Boggs himself perpetuates, is

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the belief that the two varieties of intellectuals he names—varieties that my reference to Gramsci should make clear have a long genealogy in leftist thought—not only represent stable and easily identified groups but also have generally clear and easily specified political tendencies.

The politics intellectuals as technicians practice is not essentially popular. As experts, their authority depends on institutionalized power or professional credentials rather than public opinion. Popular politics, the politics of opinion, is the province of another type of intellectual (or of another mode of intellectual work) that Boggs identifies as "evolving out of and against this stratum [of technicians,] . . . a critical intelligentsia situated in higher education, the media, and the arts but typically confined to local spheres of influence and therefore lacking the cohesion of the technocrats" (3). These "critical intellectuals" frequently function in sectors of the public sphere where professional credentials and institutionalized power cannot completely protect them. They often address a wider audience and claim to speak for or to represent excluded, silenced, or oppressed groups, criticizing the dominant order in the interests of a more egalitarian, just, or democratic society.

It is this critical orientation toward a more general audience on more general topics that I call popular politics. This is the politics of critical intellectuals or of intellectuals when they function critically. It is the politics toward which many academic professionals in cultural studies specifically, and in the humanities and social sciences more generally, aspire.

Yet there is widespread confusion today about the relationship between intellectuals both critical and technical and the communities they purport to represent and address. This confusion has been especially debilitating on the Left, where democratic principles and the inherent elitism of intellectuals often conflict. This conflict has caused some to advocate limiting the intellectual's role to championing the popular or playing the ventriloquist for the authentic voice of various identity groups. I will argue that attempting to impose such limits is a mistake. I also think that the appeals academics sometimes make to other academics to become "public" intellectuals are also mistaken. Such calls are, it seems to me, largely irrelevant. At the very least, as teachers and scholars, cultural intellectuals already function as public intellectuals in an important segment of the public sphere. The negative and sensationalized attention that cultural intellectuals in the university have recently received—distorted as it may be—indicates that the critical work we do still maintains a degree of ideological potency. Moreover, disentangling our roles as critical intellectuals and as academic specialists—masters of our specific disciplinary technologies—is not always easy and is sometimes quite impossible. Success within the

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professional parameters of literature departments or the equally professional interdisciplinary constructs of cultural studies is not without political point, as Bruce Robbins has effectively argued.[4] It is far from clear, however, what the nature, grounding, and authority of the political points we would make are. However large or small our audiences may be—and it is not clear to me that publication in the *Village Voice* or the *New Yorker* is, in itself, a token of political achievement—intellectuals generally (and Left intellectuals particularly) seem confused and at odds about what it is they are supposed, as intellectuals, to profess and why, after all, anyone should want to listen. This fundamental uncertainty about the importance of what intellectuals do is one vexed condition of their indispensable work that I want to explore.

A suggestive outline of these problems may be found in the work of George Konrad and Ivan Szelenyi, whose *Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*, a samizdat manuscript smuggled out of Hungary, became a tremendously influential text in the West after its publication in 1979.[5] Reacting to the example of empowered intellectuals as official planners and bureaucratic functionaries in East European Leninist party states, Konrad and Szelenyi argued that intellectuals are not disembodied, "free-floating" representatives of universal values, transcendent reason, and progressive ideals. In their view, which has clearly influenced thinkers such as Boggs, intellectuals are shaped and deformed by their class positions in ways that Gramsci had already begun to explore in "The Formation of Intellectuals." Moreover, having become in their own right a "new class" of experts, planners, and cultural workers, intellectuals tend to hide their self-promoting agendas and aggrandizing self-interests behind claims to serve universalized truth, justice, or emancipation. "The intellectuals of every age have described themselves ideologically, in accordance with their particular interests, and if those interests have differed from age to age it has still been the common aspiration of the intellectuals of every age to represent their particular interests in each context as the general interests of mankind."[6] What defines modernity and distinguishes it from all the ages that preceded it is its unique empowerment of intellectuals in the social order. Thus, in modern and modernizing societies, intellectuals as the New Class—new as well in its unprecedented powers, with all the arrogance and presumption that accompanies those powers—have become the enemies of the oppressed and the foes of emancipation even and especially when they claim to serve both.

This analysis, the terms of which are by now very familiar to critics on the Left and on the Right, has been widely influential. If one were to construct a genealogy of critiques of intellectuals and power in recent decades, Konrad and Szelenyi precede and influence Foucault, Gouldner,

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Ross, and Boggs (to choose only a few familiar names). The influence of their work may also be traced in the works of Zygmunt Bauman, Edward Said, and Gayatri Spivak. Bauman, for example, offers an elegant rephrasing of Konrad and Szelenyi's crucial criticism as the point of departure in an important essay on postmodernity: "As 'organic,' intellectuals remained invisible as the authors of ideological narratives. The pictures of society or history they painted seldom contained their own representation. . . . A closer scrutiny, however, would pierce the camouflage. It would reveal the uncanny resemblance the stage actors of ideological scenarios bore to the intellectual scriptwriters. Whoever happened to be named as the sitter in a given portrait-painting session, the product was invariably a thinly disguised likeness of the painter."[7] Alvin Gouldner, on the other hand, and unlike these other writers, sees the new class of empowered intellectuals as "the most progressive force in modern society and . . . a center of whatever human emancipation is possible in the foreseeable future."[8] While this assertion seems impossibly elitist and, especially in the light of Leninism's failure in the Eastern Bloc, historically doubtful, it is also not altogether without merit, as we shall see. In fact, I will hold that both Bauman and Gouldner, holding what appear to be mutually exclusive positions, are right. Which is to say that having identified the problem of intellectuals as a New Class does not point us reliably toward a solution, especially if that solution involves rehabilitating populism in the name of democratic values.[9]

One important source of confusion has been the ideal or idea (actually a metaphor) of organic relationship that has frequently expressed the desire of progressive intellectuals. Boggs's work is a case in point. His distinction between technocratic and critical intellectuals is related to (but not completely identical with) Gramsci's well-known distinction between traditional and organic intellectuals. Since I will frequently use and criticize the idea of organic intellectuals as it circulates today, and since a genealogical descent of the populist strain in cultural studies must confront Gramsci's concept of the organic intellectual, a brief consideration of Gramsci's use of these terms and their relationship to my argument will help clarify my own position.[10] Given the special authority usually accorded to Gramsci among cultural critics who have populist propensities (and that includes most critics in cultural studies), it is worth remembering that Gramsci's organic intellectual was no populist. In fact, if we on the Left are looking for practical grounds for progressive politics, then we must forget populism and the peculiar ideal of the organic intellectual with which it is often associated. This does not mean that we can or should embrace an antidemocratic vanguardism or a retrograde elitism.

One point to which I will frequently return in the following pages is that

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nothing in the idea of the organic intellectual or even in the ideal of the counterhegemonic serves in itself as a grounds for politics. The political orientation of intellectuals must originate and always does originate elsewhere than in a relation to any particular social group (though no political orientation can be realized without attempting to analyze, critique, and above all forge such relations). Rather, the fundamental grounding of any intellectual's politics, and the grounds of the acts of criticism and judgment that are unavoidably part of any intellectual's task, must and always do come from certain strains within the varied and vexed traditions of the Enlightenment. This is especially the case for those of us who still consider ourselves leftists. Moreover, I will suggest that intellectuals today, especially intellectuals who have "progressive" programs, may as well admit that there is little reason to assume that the progressive ideals of the Enlightenment (ideals of social and economic justice as civic responsibilities, for example) have any preexisting organic grounding (preexisting the work of intellectuals to create them, that is) in any particular group. This is true even though enlightened or progressive politics must remain democratic in principle even though they cannot in practice be grounded in the popular.

My use of the term "enlightened" is polemical. I mean to draw attention to another common, fundamental confusion related to the confusion that surrounds the term "organic." Although the influence of Adorno and Horkheimer may still be felt in a widespread tendency among intellectuals to distrust the Enlightenment and its values, it is worth remembering that this is more specifically a distrust of intellectual work after the institutional and ideological transformations that occurred at the end of the nineteenth century, coinciding with, and finding expression in, the reorganization of American universities as professional research and credentialing organizations. Thus the current suspicion of the Enlightenment is frequently a suspicion of the institutional empowerment of academic intellectuals who have claimed to speak for it.

W. E. B. DuBois may be the quintessential intellectual embodiment of these developments, as Adolph Reed, in his study of the sociologist's and reformer's work, makes clear. Reed offers the following concise formulation: "The changing shape and thrust of the university was in fact an element of a more profound sociological phenomenon involving redefinition of the roles and self-perceptions of intellectuals in response to the industrial reorganization of American society. . . . Indeed, the fundamental views of the proper organization of human society around which intellectuals tend to converge emphasize the importance of precisely those activities that are characteristic to intellectuals."[11] Reed goes on to emphasize a point made by James Gilbert that the belief that society should be a consciously organized entity and therefore the basis of modern radical and

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reform movements is rooted in the "collectivism" of corporate-era intellectuals. "The collectivist outlook," Reed summarizes, "entails typically an emphasis on expertise as a legitimate, decisive social force, notions of the impartiality and neutrality of the state and resonant assumptions of the neutral, guiding role of technology. In the collectivist outlook realization of social justice depends on neutrality and scientific impersonality as major weapons" (18–19).[12] Much of our suspicion these days is correctly directed against the overweening and antidemocratic tendencies of the self-serving elitism implicit in this ideology of intellectuals. Too often, however, these suspicions of intellectuals as a "new class" have come to include doubts about the nature of social justice or the value of truth or the reality of expertise. This antimodernist or neopopulist mood (which also has antecedents in the last century's end) tends, especially on the "Left," to debilitate the intellectual's ability to engage productively in public or democratic debate at all.

I am interested in what the term "organic" has come to imply and how, in critiques of New Class administrators, "organic" has come to signify the desire for an alternative to the troublesome articulations of knowledge and power that are part of the traditional intellectual's social function. For the moment, to stay with Gramsci, I agree that "all men are intellectuals. . . . but all men do not have the function of intellectuals in society" ("Formation of Intellectuals," 121). Thus, though "*homo faber* cannot be separated from *homo sapiens*," there is a specific intellectual function in society that certain groups are specifically enabled to play. For Gramsci, the "traditional type of intellectual" is represented not only by the churchman but by "the literary man, the philosopher, the artist." Over and against these clerics, Gramsci imagines a "new class of intellectuals," different from the new class of managers and specialists, a group of intellectuals intimately associated with the life world of industrial workers: "In the modern world technical education, strictly tied to even the most primitive and unqualified industrial work, must form the basis for the new type of intellectual" (122). Here is the seed of what Stuart Hall has described as the project of the Birmingham Centre, the project from which so much in contemporary cultural studies still grows. That project, Hall says, involved the production of organic intellectuals whose education and expertise were based on an authentic experience of the conditions of the class for which they spoke.

This project, already complicated for Gramsci, has become radically more so today. Gramsci found the roots of his organic intellectual in the Factory Councils and their political project of self-representation. As Hall admits, intellectuals today have found no equivalent: "The problem about the concept of an organic intellectual is that it appears to align intellectuals with an emerging historical movement and we couldn't tell then and we

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can hardly tell now, where that emerging historical movement was to be found" (281). Despite all the fascinating work on subcultures and fandom, intellectuals today lack an easily identifiable emergent class, a hero of historical agency—Marx's proletariat, Mao's Third World peasantry, or even Gouldner's new class planners—with which to forge an organic relationship.[13] In cultural studies, this is the gap that contemporary identity-based politics in the United States and the populist class-based politics of Britain attempt to fill. But as we shall see in the following pages, considering any of these as preconstituted groups in which a politics might be grounded poses embarrassing problems for aspiring organic intellectuals.

Like Stuart Hall and so many others, I evoke Gramsci as my authority. Like Boggs's distinction between technocratic and critical intellectuals, Gramsci's frequently cited distinction between traditional and organic intellectuals is complexly fissured and the flawed foundation of much confusion. For example, Gramsci's preferred case of traditional intellectuals, the ecclesiastics, can historically also be considered organic intellectuals in their relation to the dominant feudal class. Thus, Gramsci writes, "the category of the ecclesiastics can be considered as the intellectual category organically tied to the landed aristocracy" ("Formation of Intellectuals," 119). For Gramsci, the identity of intellectuals is always relational and dynamic. Moreover, the political valence of these categories and of the opposition they may represent cannot be decided in advance. To take a more contemporary example, Pat Robertson, minister of the 700 Club, may well be understood as an intellectual organically related to conservative Christians whose desire to saturate public institutions with Christian prayer and to abrogate the reproductive rights of women and the civil rights of gay men and lesbians does oppose what may be understood (and what *is* understood by the Christian Right) as a hegemonic, "humanistic," liberal and secular dominant order. That does not mean, however, that Robertson represents a viable "counterhegemonic" order that progressive intellectuals should support. As Stuart Hall remarks, Margaret Thatcher may be the most successful example of an organic intellectual anyone has seen in recent years. But where does that leave us?

Before the pathos of epochal consciousness carries us away (as it too often does in reflections on intellectuals), I would add that this was already a problem for Gramsci himself, whose links to the Factory Councils were not as simply organic, not as free of the politics of class, knowledge, and imposition, as populists today might wish. In an editorial in *Ordine Nuovo*, Gramsci wrote:

> It is essential to convince the workers and peasants that it is above all in their own interest to submit to the permanent discipline of educa-

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tion and to create a conception of their own world and the complex and intricate system of human relations, both economic and spiritual, which shapes social life on the globe.[14]

Here Gramsci avows that intellectuals, not workers and peasants, sometimes know what is best for workers and peasants, and that what is best for workers and peasants is sometimes that they become more like intellectuals, those whose task it is to create socially active conceptions and politically useful representations of the world. Moreover, I do not offer this as a critique of Gramsci. In fact, I think Gramsci is right.[15] If intellectuals sometimes project their guild values—respect for accuracy and fairness in argument and an adherence to ideals of social and economic justice as civic virtues, for example—onto those they purport to represent, then this may be not only unavoidable but necessary for the work of recruitment and persuasion that remains the intellectual's critical task. To perform that task, we may have to forget populism.

Local transcendentals and specific universals

Today many intellectuals, and frequently those writers who are the most interesting, seem at a loss to characterize themselves as intellectuals or seem to want altogether to dispense with the burden of such an embarrassingly laden term, one freighted with the discredited hopes of the Enlightenment and the disreputable claims of Jacobin vanguards.[16] This confusion on the part of intellectuals has sometimes been called postmodernity. I think it is time we stopped our dithering. Following Benda, Edward Said has attempted to reclaim for the intellectual the task of "speaking truth to power" and has also argued that "in the outpouring of studies about intellectuals there has been far too much defining of the intellectual, and not enough stock taken of the image, the signature, the actual intervention and performance, all of which taken together constitute the very lifeblood of every real intellectual." [17] I want to take some of that stock in this book, and I begin by noting that—as Said points out—certain universalizing absolutes (if not Benda's Platonic transcendentalism) are a crucial part of any intellectual's tool kit and burden:

> The central fact for me is, I think, that the intellectual is an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public. . . . The intellectual does so on the basis of universal principles: that all human beings are entitled to expect decent standards of behavior concerning freedom and justice from worldly powers or

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nations, and that deliberate or inadvertent violations of these standards need to be testified and fought against courageously. (Said, 11–12)

I like Said's frank and forthright definition, but I am also aware (as he is too) that this definition is the beginning rather than the end of the intellectual's problem.

In accruing to oneself the claim to speak truth, to represent truth, one also represents oneself as one entitled or empowered by talent, or training, or institutional position to do so. Said's self-avowed romance with the intellectual as a figure of distance, exile, and opposition somewhat blunts his own appreciation of the fact that these days intellectuals tend to be academic experts—though they are not always credentialed experts in the fields they purport to criticize. I think Said rests too much on his identification of the intellectual as an amateur, since few intellectuals in a society ruled by an ethos of professionalism could achieve any hearing or legitimacy except as credentialed experts in some field. Said's own effectiveness as an intellectual to some measure grows from his position as University Professor at Columbia University, even though his work on Palestinian rights and the history of Orientalism is not obviously connected to his more professionally delimited books on literary theory or the Victorian novel.

Intellectuals need to wrestle with such "facts" of their situation. The intellectual is neither dead nor absent. The Enlightenment, with all its problematic pretensions to universality, continues to ground any progressive politics that intellectuals can imagine. The bid for power and the inherently unpopular tendencies of the intellectual's critical task cannot be negotiated away or hidden behind general appeals to subversion or exile, the organic or democracy. And finally, these "facts" are the beginning of the intellectual's problems, not the solution to them.

Critics of intellectuals usually distrust the transcendent in exactly the same measure in which they distrust its associated term, the universal. Critics of these critics, both those self-identified as on the "Right" and those self-identified as on the "Left," unite in bemoaning this distrust of transcendent values and universal principles, which they agree is the root of all contemporary evils. Thus conservatives such as Allan Bloom, Dinesh D'Souza, and Lynne Cheney and progressives such as Terry Eagleton, Christopher Norris, and Todd Gitlin speak in one voice when they speak of relativism, perspectivism, and skepticism.[18] But this unity does not, in my view, mean that either side is right. Reinvigorating intellectual self-confidence by a virile renunciation of relativism and uncertainty is, at the present moment, neither possible nor desirable.

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Here, once again, Konrad and Szelenyi seem positively apt. They argue that the tradition of transcendence is not itself eternal; it has a complex narrative history in the West since the Enlightenment:

> What is to be viewed as transcendent in the knowledge of various ages depends on who is doing the viewing, and from what vantage point. Similarly, knowledge may have a different significance in different eras; at one time it may qualify as transcendent, at another as historically determined, and indeed with the passage of time it may lose its value altogether. (21)

However vexed the history of transcendence is, the appeal to transcendent values remains indispensable to the work critical intellectuals do.[19] One implication of this unimpeachable bit of common sense is that transcendence, historically determined and constantly shifting, is always with us. Without it we would be incapable not only of projecting alternatives to the world as it presses on us but even of imagining the necessity of doing so. As Bruce Robbins puts it, on the issue of transcendence, it may be less important to take sides on "philosophical absolutes" than to understand "a set of ongoing social practices."[20]

Thus, when critics like Bloom and Gitlin criticize professional academic humanists for abandoning the transcendent in favor of the political, they are, symptomatically, both right and wrong. They are right to identify widespread suspicion concerning the value and nature of universals; they are wrong to claim that universals have been abolished. They are right that abandoning the transcendent would be catastrophic for intellectuals; they are wrong to suggest that this is what intellectuals have done. Even those who claim to have done so in the name of critical relativism or enthusiastic populism have not been able to accomplish this abandonment. In fact, I doubt that it can be done without compromising the possibility of critical thought altogether.

Nonetheless, critics of an illusory relativism have real reason to be worried. We all do. For appeals to the transcendent cannot remove us from the realm of politics or the vagaries of history in which contending claims for truth and transcendence urged from antagonistic positions and points of view require adjudication. The transcendent, however contingent and conflicted it may be, remains a necessary part of, and grounding for, any politics and any political position at all. Universality and transcendence are not philosophical absolutes; they are contested terms in political disputes.[21] Moreover, in some situations, the special interests and particular values of intellectuals—respect for reasoned argument, respect for facts, respect for the objects of study or criticism—do offer useful forms of transcendence and of opposition. Konrad and Szelenyi call this local, specific, his-

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torically determined and context-dependent form of transcendence "cross-cultural significance," a reservoir of values and commitments beyond a given immediacy or popular practice that offer critical leverage or grounds. I would call them local transcendentals or specific universals. The leverage or grounds they provide are not only valuable; they are politically and intellectually indispensable.

Can one acknowledge an aspiration toward the transcendent as the basis for intellectual work in the realm of popular politics at the same time one attempts to specify the ways in which transcendence is historically determined? Can one say, with Konrad and Szelenyi, "we do not wish to deny the existence of transcendent elements in the activity of intellectuals, only to make them relative" (22), and continue to do the intellectual's work of recruitment and persuasion? If their statement paradoxically divides against itself—between relativism and the universal—that too is symptomatic of the intellectual's position, of what Konrad and Szelenyi; call a certain "schizophrenia inherent in the intellectual's role" (22). Schizophrenia is symptomatic of the intellectual's situation as a cross-cultural alien in most of the public contexts where critical intellectuals today work. Schizophrenia may indeed be the symptom that, to borrow a phrase from Žižek, we must learn to enjoy.

The intellectual's schizophrenia results from a double bind that cannot be resolved. On the one hand, history teaches again and again that appeals to universals and to transcendence—appearing in the twentieth century in the guise of world-historical classes, movements, or geists—tend to mask the impositions of self-interested elites and the victimization and silencing of troublesome or dissonant differences. Even without recourse to Adorno and Horkheimer's problematic critique of enlightened violence and the administered society, it is apparent that in social groupings whose members have become increasingly aware of their own heterogeneity, uncritical attempts to impose normative understandings as transcendent values or specific constructions of universal reason easily legitimate policies of oppression and exclusion that exacerbate rather than ameliorate the splits and conflicts within communities and the injustices that attend them.[22] On the other hand, without an appeal to the transcendent—to that which does not manifest itself clearly in a given situation and which projects an improvement in or advances a solution for a pressing problem, to that which articulates in practice principles of justice or standards of truth on which in theory at least all might imagine themselves to agree—there can be no intellectuals, no politics, and no community at all. Neither populism nor postmodernism offers an escape from this double bind.

Carl Boggs makes a persuasive case for considering the history of critical intellectuals as an ongoing conflict between Jacobin and anti-Jacobin ten-

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dencies. In particular, his readings of Marx and Gramsci document a long anti-Jacobin tradition on the Left. Yet as Boggs also shows, even the most determinedly anti-Jacobin strain in the Marxist tradition has always been marked by conceptual ambiguities and historical ambivalences (see Boggs, 37–62). The explicit or implicit populism of much contemporary work by cultural studies intellectuals continues this anti-Jacobin tradition.

In criticizing that populist strain, I intend not to take the side of Jacobin over organic intellectuals but to shift the terms of the dispute. No one at this moment is about to grant a determining role to a revolutionary vanguard of intellectuals.[23] And yet, though many have tried, no one can really imagine a politics in which critical intellectuals blend harmoniously into the communities they seek to serve and to represent. Despite the almost ubiquitous currency of the term "community" these days—especially among the anti-Jacobin Left—neither community nor democracy can ground the intellectual's work. They are instead the horizon of the intellectual's problem. Politics for intellectuals—and there can be no politics and no community without the representative and representational work of intellectuals—must always be a negotiation between or among conflicted positions. As I have already argued, this negotiation can occur—criticism itself can occur—only in the light of certain values whose transcendence is assumed and whose presence depends on the intellectuals' willingness to assume the Jacobin project as Boggs describes it and to "appear as theoretical architects who can overcome the limits of effective social reality" by appeal to a certain "universality of goals—for example, nationalism, democracy, the general will, revolution" (16). Although Boggs enumerates these elements as constitutive of "Jacobinism as an historical phenomena" (16), I offer them here more as a description of the necessary conditions of the intellectual's work. My only prescription is that intellectuals stop deluding themselves into believing that the values they seek to advance necessarily originate in the communities they address.

Unlike Alvin Gouldner, I do not look to the New Class (if it be one) as in itself a repository of progressive values. I do not believe that the New Class of intellectuals is "the most progressive force in modern society and is a center of whatever human emancipation is possible in the foreseeable future" (Gouldner, 83). Nor do I believe that the New Class, in itself, is the source of all our woes. For one thing there are too many diverse traditions of intellectuals and intellectual work with equally diverse political valences. In our society, the empowered intellectuals tend to be not cultural intellectuals but their colleagues among scientists and engineers.[24] The sort of contested and contesting universalism that I posit here does not bespeak any hope I cherish for a reconstitution of transcendence as a universal ground; rather, it represents my sense of the terms in which our

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struggles must be engaged, the terms in which they are engaged even when we are reluctant to acknowledge that fact.

Grand narratives and identity politics

On another level of abstraction, consider the oft repeated announcement that postmodernity means the end of the grand narratives, many of which, especially the political and secular ones, originate in the Enlightenment. The production and legitimation of these grand narratives, the grounding myths of progress and salvation, were the intellectual's most important contribution to society. Their end, we are told, means the end of intellectuals as well.[25] This account of postmodernity has become a grand narrative in itself, though what it actually tells us about our contemporary condition is not always clear.

Bernard Yack is one intellectual who finds this postmodern narrative unpersuasive. He sees postmodernity as one "fetish of modernity" rather than modernity's end.[26] In more concrete terms, Yack, like Richard Rorty, seems to think that postmodernists have misunderstood both history and the Enlightenment. I agree with much of what Yack says about the complexity of the Enlightenment. I agree with much of his critique about the oversimplified unidimensionality of contemporary attempts to describe a shift in epochal consciousness marking modernity's end. Yet there does seem to have been a shift in consciousness nonetheless, though it may be less epochal than many have claimed.

For example, Yack concludes the chapter in which he most directly addresses postmodernity (characterizing it as a "figment of a fetish") with the following remarks:

> The spectacular potency of distinctly modern ideas and practices has given rise to the illusion that new ideas necessarily lead to new epochs. . . . The worldly impact of distinctly modern forms of knowledge is completely unprecedented. To expect post-modern forms of knowledge to have a similar impact on the human condition is to lose sight of one of the most important and unique features of the modern age. (87)

Yack claims that, postmodern denials to the contrary notwithstanding, modernity continues substantially unchanged.[27] Yet his narrative reveals that from the intellectuals' point of view, something has indeed changed. For if intellectuals, attaching their hopes to the utopian aspirations of certain modern ideas of rationality and justice, might once have hoped to change the world by changing the world's mind, they can now neither cherish hopes for such an epochal change nor believe in such power lodged

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within ideas. This may be a shift within an epoch (which was always one available reading of Lyotard's version of the postmodern), but as a shift, it is significant. However nuanced this shift may be, few contemporary intellectuals enjoy immunity from its effects, not even those like Yack and Rorty who insist that nothing much has changed.

Here again is the intellectual's double bind. Grand narratives continue to emplot the intellectual's relation to the world while intellectuals have come to doubt the validity of such constructions. Antagonistic positions require being thought together even at the risk of a certain schizophrenia.

This schizophrenia manifests itself frequently in cultural studies and its relationship to identity politics. Here a struggle against cultural exclusion and against universalized norms of taste or judgment and a championing of identity based and communal particularities have seemed to furnish a sort of political grounding. It may be true on one level of analysis that, as Andrew Ross puts it in an influential essay, intellectual work "now draws upon many different schools of ethical action, informed not by 'universal' (i.e., Western) humanist values, but by the specific agendas of the new social movements against racism, sexism, homophobia, pollution, and militarism."[28] It is also certainly true that so-called Western humanist values are products of a particularly vexed and unsavory historical process implicated in the exploitation, expropriation, and oppression of the rest of the world. Nonetheless, the fact remains that the specific agendas of the popular movements against racism, sexism, homophobia, pollution, and militarism to which Ross refers (and we can easily add colonialism to the list) depend inevitably for their moral focus and rhetorical leverage on commitments to the very "universal," even humanistic, and traditionally intellectual values to which Ross attempts to oppose them: justice, equality, respect for facts, and freedom from domination. Moreover, the relationship between a decentered identity politics and a reliable progressive orientation seems more and more vexed. As Bill Readings suggests, a certain "pietistic leftism" structuring much work in cultural studies actually bespeaks a widespread anxiety "that there is no longer an automatic leftist orientation to the struggle against cultural exclusion."[29] Identity politics can be invoked to justify racism as well as to attack it. This is regularly done by those who want to restrict immigration or persecute Jews and African Americans in order to defend the particularity of a white Christian identity defining an organic, racist community. Readings has a point. Critics working in cultural studies have difficulty specifying what they mean by politics beyond a by now familiar and inadequate critique of exclusionary practices.

Cary Nelson's *Manifesto of a Tenured Radical* exemplifies this problem. Nelson's marching orders for cultural studies seek to mobilize its radical

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potential in a concerted attack on the abusive treatment of graduate students and adjunct faculty. About cultural studies, Nelson asserts that it "is the social and textual history of varying efforts to take up the problematic of the politics and meaning of culture," and that it "is concerned with the social and political meanings and effects of its own analyses." He thunders in conclusion that "to avoid facing this challenge and retreat into academic modesty . . . or claims of disinterested scholarship . . . is to hide from cultural studies' historical mission." Yet despite the Jacobin energy of his reference to a historical mission for cultural studies, he offers little direction about the actual character of its mission or the specific contents of its politics beyond the assertion that cultural studies works to discredit invidious distinctions between elite and popular cultures as well as all other forms of hierarchical exclusion.[30]

These are laudable aims, and I have no trouble endorsing them. But given the confusions and incoherences of identity positions and identity politics, it is difficult to make such tepid pluralism seem like a world-historical mission. In fairness to Nelson, he struggles hard with this problem. He says, for example, that cultural studies "needs now to critique its investment in what has been called the Left's 'mantra of race, class and gender,' categories that are properly considered both in relation to one another and to the culture as a whole" (66–67), but he doesn't allow himself to say much about what would ground such a critique. This is a problem if the identity categories that have grounded work in the field now become its object.

Nelson, I think, shies away from the answer not because he does not know it but because the answer is in itself embarrassingly simple. Interesting to note, when he turns to the substantial political analyses and concrete recommendations that provide the most bracingly radical and practically challenging sections of his book, he relies on recognizably orthodox Marxist narrativizations of labor, value, and exploitation rather than criticism of identity-based exclusionary practices. Not a postmodernist politics of identity and culture but a grand narrative, dependent not only on Marx but on the Enlightenment traditions of political economy and moral philosophy that shaped Marx's (and our) view of the world, enables Nelson's most effective polemics.

My point is not to offer class analysis as the only grounds for politics, nor to offer a Marxist critique of cultural studies. My point is that whenever we assert specific political positions, we rely on grand narratives to orient our polemics and to provide them with persuasive force. If I were to issue marching orders of my own, I would say that we must stop pretending that we have gotten beyond the vexed and conflicted Enlightenment traditions, the duplicitous and embattled grand narratives, that none of us on the Left has ever really been able to do without. We must stop distrusting the big

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words that make us so unhappy: justice, equality, solidarity, compassion, rationality, and the rest. But we must also remember that these large abstractions will never resolve the arguments in which we engage. They are the terms in which those arguments must be conducted, the terms that those arguments themselves must specify. The simplicity of this answer in principle (I almost wrote "in theory") does nothing to reduce the complexity of the problems that demand our attention. Without this answer, however, I do not see how we can make progress. We need to know not how to agree on these things (agreement not always being possible) but how to quarrel over them.

In this light, Readings's observations appear only partially correct. It is true that cultural inclusiveness has no particular political orientation in itself, but it is also true that prejudicial practices of exclusion take place within a cultural environment and a tradition of intellectual work where Enlightenment values like justice, equality, and self-determination still possess a great deal of force. Therefore, those who argue for or practice prejudicial exclusion in the interests, let's say, of preserving Western or European civilization betray the best traditions of the culture they purport to defend. I use the word "best" self-consciously and without apology. The ideals of the Enlightenment, the ideals of progressive politics—of a politics that seeks to make the world more just and to reduce the quantity of human suffering—are the best of the West, though they are not exclusively Western. My point is simply that we are never and cannot be freed from the grand narratives that continue to structure our understanding of the world and to furnish the grounds on which intellectuals and the communities they try to represent contest political issues. That these "universals" are the problematic grounds for local conflicts rather than the transcendental categories of common sense only means that intellectuals who seek to speak out of and for the best traditions of Western progressiveness must hold to and champion them all the more energetically.

The university and the public sphere, the two realms in which intellectuals work and are worked on by others, should function today as dissensual communities, to borrow a phrase from Bill Readings. The Enlightenment tradition to which I am referring does not provide a common identity on which communal harmony might be established, as Habermas imagines. Rather, it offers a panoply of competing perspectives in what Readings has called—following Jean-Luc Nancy and Maurice Blanchot—a "community without identity," a "community of dissensus that presupposes nothing in common" (Readings, 189–90). But the end of such a community, in the university or in our civil society, cannot simply be—as Readings puts it—"to make its heteronomy, its differences more complex" (190). Such a project sounds a lot like the tepid pluralism that Readings began by criti-

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cizing. Rather, if we critical and technical intellectuals are going to talk politics, then our project can only be to strive to make justice, truth, and goodness prevail. If we are to do that, we must first win an audience over to recognize their understanding of these terms as our own. This may be an impossible project to theorize, but in the chapters of this book, I hope to show that it is an impossible project to avoid. It is also, I believe, one clearly worth pursuing.

The work at hand

In part 1, I concentrate on some current polemics among intellectuals regarding the nature of the intellectual's task. I consider controversies surrounding the public sphere and publicity, pedagogy and emancipation, community and judgment, culture and politics, as they emerge in specific, particularly revealing contexts. These include the media celebration of "black intellectuals" (chapter 1), the assumptions of progressive education (chapter 2), the problem of community as it appears in the work of neopragmatists (chapter 3), and the relation of relativism to global politics in the new world order (chapter 4). Thus the first four chapters form a group in which I consider some fundamental confusions in contemporary debates about academic intellectuals. In general, I argue that none of the currently attractive intellectual positions—neither traditional models of intellectual influence and authority, nor populist appeals to participant democracy, nor evocations of community, nor theories of cultural relativism or social constructionism—can ground or orient an intellectual's fundamental and fundamentally political commitments. Each of these positions does, however, symptomatically represent a problem in the way intellectuals today must do their work.

In part 2, I consider three important figures for the intellectual in contemporary society, both within the university and in society at large: the intellectual as critic, as scientist, and as professional. In each case, as in part 1, I have focused on a specific instance of a practice or controversy that I have found especially revealing: critical studies of fandom (chapter 5), popularizations of physicist Stephen Hawking as a universal intellectual (chapter 6), and the "science wars" as a model of interdisciplinarity in democratic societies (chapter 7). In each of these chapters, and especially in the last, the figure of the organic intellectual, the ego-ideal for many Left-oriented workers in cultural studies today, wrestles perpetually with a demon double in the figure of a traditional counterpart. Science, or the figure of the scientist, figures prominently here because the scientist as expert may be the most powerful image of the intellectual today. In pop culture, the scientist appears either as the last, forlorn hope that some-

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thing like a universal intellectual or a philosopher king might be found to save us from our political disputes and practical confusions, or as the evil of the New Class personified and empowered. None of these representations is simply accurate or true, but if we take them together, we can trace an ongoing, crucial negotiation between expert imposition and popular resistance.

These struggles, the necessary political conflicts of a heterogeneous democratic culture, are one sign that intellectuals are on the job and doing the vexed and conflicted interdisciplinary work that it is their special task to do. I am not suggesting interdisciplinarity—as figured in science studies, for example—as an alternative to the professionalized multiversity that Clark Kerr first named in 1963 and that, as Boggs remarks, remains "the hegemonic form of academic life in the 1990s" (111); but I am trying to describe what interdisciplinarity, professionalism, science, culture, and democracy have to do with one another in a conflicted realm where multiplicity rather than universality rules the field. In this field, the critical intellectual finds a crucial contemporary task to play in the realm of popular politics.

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