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Introduction

This book gathers together writings on the transformation of the intellectual and the challenges posed by citizenship against the backdrop of dismantling the Modernity project, the decline of Marxist ideology and the contradictory and competing value-systems of our times; it also includes several studies regarding the Portuguese and Spanish intelligentsia, particularly in the context of dictatorial regimes and as an inherited framework for more recent intellectual topographies. The analysis they provide draws relevant implications for our understanding of the changes in the conditionings, nature and meaning of the intellectual’s function.

The 20th century, characterized by omnipresent change and serious conflict, ended with the disintegration of one of the most powerful universal utopias. The new millennium began with the violence of September 11 and all its subsequent political and social implications amidst financial deregulation and economic turmoil. Meanwhile, growing globalizing pressures, the vertiginous transformation of the worldwide cultural situation, and the reliance of modern structures on science and technology governing the entire knowledge industry and informational system suggest that the technocratic or professionalized intellectual will increasingly occupy a dominant position not only in the production apparatus but in most areas of public life.

We may refuse to endorse Adorno and Horkheimer’s views about the neutralization of critical thinking by a system of total domination, Virilio’s detection of lethal risks in technological development and Baudrillard’s remarks on the implosion of meaning. Nevertheless, we cannot fail to note the many restraints on intellectual autonomy in the form of technology, the commodification of social life and bureaucracy. Nor can we escape the impression that it is inevitable for today’s intellectuals to be progressively and organically integrated in institutionalized power relations where they are entrusted with providing expertise and decisions; mobilizing public opinion; or becoming just another voice in the global Babel of noises that definitely discards any possibility for promoting the sort of ideal speech envisaged by Jürgen Habermas.
In his article *A Plea for Intellectuals* (1966), Sartre, for whom the intellectual should be “someone who meddles in what is not his business”, points out a basic contradiction in the intellectual’s situation, caught between a call for questioning and inquiry along the lines of the classic intellectual, and the particularistic requirements of employability. This contradiction between the universal and the particular is also pointed out by others such as Alain Touraine, for whom, in an advanced industrial society, there is a perpetual conflict between the imperatives of organizational control and the struggle for personal autonomy. Alternatively, Edward Saïd and Noam Chomsky have no doubts about their obligations as public intellectuals. Although lamenting the decline of the public intellectual, they make a clear distinction between the critical intellectual, who emerged during the Dreyfus Affair, and the technocratic intelligentsia, heir to the rationalizing intellectuals espousing Enlightenment values which, according to Max Weber, gave rise to the paradigm of technological rationality that would redefine education, culture, social life and politics, while also forming the basis of Antonio Gramsci’s “organic intellectual”. In *The Representations of the Intellectual: the 1993 Reith Lectures*, Saïd conveys an image of today’s critical intellectual as an outsider and a nonconformist, in line with Chomsky, for whom the values of truth and objectivity remain a priority. Among other things, the intellectual’s role is, in Saïd’s words, “to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than produce them)”, acting “on the basis of universal values”. They are good examples of the direct connection between the intellectual as someone who systematically attempts to make a serious contribution to improve social life and the issue of citizenship. It is stimulating to see that, in Saïd and Chomsky’s public commitment, they are not discouraged by difficulties. Quite the opposite: they both consider themselves as belonging to a privileged minority that enjoys favourable conditions for carrying out their activities, such as training, access to qualified information, relative freedom of speech and publics for their views. We could say that, together with Sartre and Marcuse among others, they fall into the categories of nonconformists and iconoclasts that, as such and in certain circumstances, are very often marginalized.

Meanwhile, Bloom’s ideal of a recoiled community of scholars, as presented in his *Closing of the American Mind* (1987), nowadays seems to be a relic from the past, though we cannot help admiring many of those elitist intellectuals, apologists of ‘high culture’, for their vigour, autonomy of mind
and faith in the redeeming power of a legacy of humanistic values and ideals that philosophically addressed the meaning of life and explored the questions of history, politics, religion and aesthetics, so perfectly expressed in George Steiner’s *Errata: An examined life* (1997). Some of these older scholars are still very much active, reminding us of the imperative to expand the intellectual dialogue across generations in search of continuities and connections that may provide answers for today’s epistemological and historical deadlocks.

The last few decades have seen the rise of an intelligentsia that is flourishing in the form of influential figures, mostly associated with academic projects, institutes and foundations, with newspapers, TV, and in cyberspace, as well as with party politics, social movements and grassroots campaigns. Their practices are conditioned or bound by pressures produced by multiple interdependences and polarizations coming out of diversity, various positioning, and fractured identities (in the domains of class, gender, ethnicity, age, religion, sexuality, and so on).

Their predicament also reflects the endorsement by post-modern theory involving social complexity and radical pluralism that has been deconstructing binary oppositions and other notions such as origins, causes, structure, and sovereignty. The axiological shift from Modernity enables value reassessment, options and discourses which are more independent of *doxa* and normativity as an open-ended process of intellectual engagement – a process that builds up new ways of understanding social interaction, disembedding phenomena and more subtle dislocations. The impossibility of contriving any single or unified vision has stimulated more localized and fragmented discourses, the increase of critical sub-cultures and a technocratic or professionalized intelligentsia; in addition, it has brought forward the figure of the more localized specific intellectual, as well as competing or hostile public spheres and subaltern counter publics.

Moreover, if the immense broadening of the public sphere by the Web’s trans-local and transnational networks has brought compensations, conferring more visibility and choice on the intellectuals, it has also meant a higher degree of dispersal, volatility and disarray. This fact, combined with the rapid deterioration ever since the 1960s of the historic linkage between universal belief-systems and political action, seems to have thwarted the formation of any sustainable intellectual front or concurrence that might have led to major cultural change. Even the traditional Left, according to Terry Eagleton, has lost its initially radical impulse as the purpose of transforming has given way to a
desire to subvert mainstream society. In challenging the process of Modernity, with its facile equation of power, knowledge and universal social progress, environmentalists seemed to have gathered strength over the years to promise enough cohesion to configure an intellectual movement, but with time they too came to display signs of having been caught up in the vortex of conflicting pressures and interests.

Does this mean that we are confronted with a culture that has failed to establish an effective connection between intellectual work and the politics of local and transnational citizenship? Will abstract thinking, the discursive and ‘high culture’ give way to the tabloidization of culture and “the civilization of spectacle” as prophesized by Mario Vargas Llosa in 2008? Are today’s intellectuals simply a repository of technocratic ideology? Does this all mean that their problematic and debilitated situation makes them less needed or even irrelevant?

If they are no longer capable of being legislators or ideologists, and if most of them do not fit into the radical category defended by Saïd and Chomsky, the majority, whatever their relative or deadlocked positions amidst the disruptive factors and conflicting rationalities of our societies, will, however, continue to have a genuine interest in critical dialogue, human rights and democracy as Sartre had already observed. Such interest derives fundamentally from the basic recurrent historical demonstration that mankind’s salvation lies precisely in the possibility to amend error and evil and make things better. Hence, it is reasonable to expect that as regards the crisis of and the implementation of an ethics of global governance, at a time when the utopia of the ends (“Real Socialism”) and the utopia of the means (Capitalism) reached their limits, the answer must be cultural and this requires permanent responsible commitment – a commitment that goes beyond the refusal of official optimism, which in wolf lepenies view characterized the “active melancholic” or the european intellectual of the socialist regimes. Against the more pessimistic out looks, it is sensible to expect that today’s and future intellectuals will continue to act as a transforming force within the mounting interplay of local and larger social forces and the relativism that distinguish our post-industrial, informational societies. As Zygmunt Bauman explains in his theory of post-modernity, because relativism has become a common feature in the world, intellectual work should be understood in metaphorical terms, as interpretation, i.e. as cultural translation, a strategy devised for greater hermeneutic transparency and better communication.
Therefore, regardless of the conflicting intellectual topographies, the quandaries and uncertainties that erode the social impact of the intellectuals’ output and public messages, the need for their function is probably greater than ever before, whether as scholars, activists and creative writers, as guiding figures at particular moments, as interpreters or mediators, as creators of consensus or as innovators. Indeed, they are being called upon to deconstruct harmful stereotypes and “discursive formations” that, in Foucault’s view, structure society and often shape their own intellectual practices; to think, verbalize and show the world from the multidimensional perspective of its diversity and ever more boundlessness; to critically access the new forms of citizenship and intervene in the budding multi-level public space shaped through digital engagements – the space of interpersonal and intercultural communication which we create and discover everyday in our ordinary adventures with each other; to read our multiple cultural heritages adequately; help in healing old and more recent wounds; denounce policies and practices that violate human that violate human rights and condemn abusive and spurious conflicts. In other words, they are being summoned to force ethics into politics, be of assistance in averting the ever-increasing systemic risks the world is progressively more exposed to, probe and question practices, conceive alternatives and negotiate values and choices in defence of a more sustainable and democratic global order.

These are some of the issues that this book addresses in its three parts: 1. The Intellectual and the Postmodern World; 2. Intellectual Commitment, Identity and Citizenship; 3. Intellectual Topographies in the Iberian Context.

All the sections offer theoretical and pedagogical approaches, capturing and expanding on some of the trends that the History of Intellectuals, the History of Ideas, Political History, Sociology, Anthropology, African-American Studies and Native-American Studies have been exploring. Seen from this angle, the book also vivifies a debate that has an established tradition, thereby adding to the intellectual narrative itself. The first and second parts display different levels of analyses, involving philosophical, scientific, aesthetic, media and culture studies. The third part stands out for the specificity of the cultural and political contexts in which the topic is inscribed. It focuses on the intellectual circumstances in Portugal and Spain, from the beginning of the 20th century through the dictatorial contexts in which both countries were immersed for decades, and up to the present, debating continuities between past and current forms of intelligentsia and the
re-drawing of traditional intellectual topographies. The issues raised in the three sections are relevant to today’s pressing problems and to numerique ongoing public controversies, even when some of the intellectual figures pertain to previous ages, since by deepening our understanding of the possibilities of intellectual response in different historical circumstances, we can envisage today’s situation in a wider perspective.

*Intellectual Topographies and the Making of Citizenship* is neither a comprehensive nor a representative sample of work on the topic. Rather, it is a selection of writings by academics, some of whom are also prestigious public intellectuals who are in the privileged situation of speaking from the double perspective of theory and praxis; a couple of contributions are by students working for their Master’s and Ph.D degrees. On the whole, the assortment included in the three sections is the product of seminars and of an international conference held in November 2011, at the Universidade Católica Portuguesa, on the intellectual functions, on citizenship and on how intellectuals and post-modern culture interrelate in a broad sense.

Finally, the idea of this book is also routed in the apprehension about the ongoing course of our contemporary world and the nature of the modern university, namely the specialization and professionalization of academic life, its tendency to become a market and its growing incapacity to safeguard the necessary autonomy to create knowledge, respond with strong ideas to the present civilizational crisis and recreate the ideal of a universal humanism based on solidarity and intercultural values. No wonder, the university as one of the key factors accountable for the deterioration of the independent public intellectual has been tackled, among others, by Bauman, Bourdieu, Smith and Weber, Posner, Sousa Santos and Freudi. Questioning and reevaluating the issue of the intellectual from within academia is also a positive way of reacting to such apprehension. More so because, being mostly a multi-perspective inquiry into the intellectual’s situation, the book avoids establishing overgeneralizations, sustaining gloomy prophecies or a simplistic celebration. Let us hope these writings capture the current state of debate and prompt further productive work on the topic.

Finally, a note on our editing policy: we have kept to both British and American English out of respect for the authors’ individual choices.

Helena Gonçalves da Silva