

A Plea for Intellectuals

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I. WHAT IS AN INTELLECTUAL?

A. *The situation of the intellectual*

Were we to consider only the attacks made on intellectuals, we would have to conclude that they are guilty of many crimes. It is striking, too, that these attacks are everywhere more or less the same. In Japan, for example, reading several newspaper and magazine articles, translated into English for the Western world, I gained the impression that after the Meiji era, the intellectuals were divorced from political power; after the Second World War however, and especially in the years from 1945 to 1950, one would have thought that intellectuals had seized political power and proceeded to do much damage. Over the same period, if you read the French press, it might have looked as if intellectuals had reigned supreme in France too and been responsible for various disasters. In your country as in ours, a military collapse (we called ours a victory, while you called yours a defeat) was followed by a period of remilitarization of society in the service of the Cold War. Intellectuals are commonly believed to have understood nothing of this process. Here in Japan, as in France, they were condemned for the same violent and contradictory reasons. In Japan, their proper function is held to be that of preserving and transmitting culture, and thus by definition to be *conservative*; accordingly they are attacked for having mistaken their office and their role by becoming critical and negative, so that in the end, in their ceaseless sniping at authority, they saw only the evil in their country's history. The result was that they went wrong in *everything*, which would not have been so serious had they not misled the people at every important conjuncture.

Mislead the people! This presumably means: inducing them to turn their backs on their own interests. Do intellectuals then exercise a certain amount of power in the same sense as the government? No – once they depart from the cultural conservatism that defines their activity and vocation, they are attacked, accurately enough, for their impotence. Who listens to them? In any case, they are intrinsically weak – they *produce* nothing and possess nothing but their salary to live on, which prevents them from standing up for themselves in civil society, let alone political society. Intellectuals are thus ineffective and unstable; they compensate for their lack of political or social power by taking themselves for an elite qualified to deliver judgement on everything – which they are not. Hence, their moralism and idealism (they think as if they were already living in the distant future and pass judgement on our times from the abstract point of view of posterity).

Let us add one more characteristic: their *dogmatism*. Intellectuals invoke certain intangible but abstract principles as arbitrary criteria of action. Here the allusion is usually, of course, to Marxism. As such, it is a further contradiction since Marxism is opposed in principle to moralism. The contradiction is solved by projecting it onto intellectuals themselves. In any case, their attitudes are invariably compared unfavourably with the realism of politicians: whereas intellectuals betrayed their function, their *raison d'être*, and identified themselves with 'the spirit that always denies', politicians both in Japan and France modestly set about reconstructing their war-torn country, displaying a wise empiricism imbued with the traditions and, in certain cases, the new techniques (and theories) of the Western world. Europe has gone farther in this direction than Japan. You consider intellectuals to be a *necessary* evil: they are needed to preserve, transmit and enrich culture; some will always be black sheep, but their influence can be neutralized. In Europe, intellectuals have already been pronounced dead: under the influence of American ideas, the imminent disappearance of men who claimed to know everything is widely predicted. The progress of science will replace such universalists with rigorously specialized teams of researchers.

Is it possible, despite their mutual contradictions, to find a common element in all these criticisms? Yes, it is. We may say they are all inspired

by one fundamental reproach: *the intellectual is someone who meddles in what is not his business* and claims to question both received truths and the accepted behaviour inspired by them, in the name of a global conception of man and of society – a conception that is today untenable and hence abstract and false, because the industrialized countries can be defined by the extreme diversity of their life styles, social functions, and concrete problems.

Now, *it is true* that the intellectual is someone who intervenes in problems that do not concern him. So much so that in France the word 'intellectual', as a pejorative term, dates from the Dreyfus affair. In the opinion of the *anti-dreyfusards*, the acquittal or condemnation of Captain Dreyfus was a matter for the military tribunals and, in the final analysis, for the General Staff: the *dreyfusards*, by insisting on the innocence of the accused, were interfering in a domain *that was outside their competence*. Originally, then, the category of intellectuals was seen as a heterogeneous collection of individuals who had acquired a certain fame by exercising their intelligence (in the exact sciences, the applied sciences, medicine, literature, etc.) and who subsequently *abused* this fame by straying outside their proper province and criticizing society and established authority in the name of a global and dogmatic conception (vague or precise: moralist or marxist) of man.

If we want an example of this common conception of the intellectual, I would suggest that the scientists working on atomic fission in order to perfect the techniques of atomic warfare should not be called 'intellectuals': they are scientists, and nothing more. But if these same scientists, terrified by the destructive power of the devices they have helped to create, join forces and sign a manifesto alerting public opinion to the dangers of the atomic bomb, they become intellectuals. This is the sequence of events: (1) they stray outside their field of competence – constructing bombs is one thing, but evaluating their use is another; (2) they abuse their celebrity or their authority to do violence to public opinion, by concealing the unbridgeable gulf that separates their scientific knowledge from their *political* appreciation – deriving from *very different principles* – of the devices on which they are working; (3) they do not protest against the use of the bomb on the grounds of any technical

defects it may have, but in the name of a highly controversial system of values that sees human life as its supreme standard.

How important are these basic complaints? Do they correspond to anything in the real world? We cannot answer this before we know *what an intellectual is*.

B. *What is an intellectual?*

Since the intellectual is criticized for straying outside the field of *his own* competence, he is seen as a particular case of a wider set of persons who are defined by various socially *recognized* functions. Let us see what this means.

All praxis has several moments to it. Action partially negates that which *is* (the practical field represents a situation *to be changed*) to the profit of that which *is not* (the end in view, a redistribution of the initial elements of the situation in order, ultimately, to reproduce life). But this negation is a disclosure and is accompanied by an affirmation, since *that which is not* is realized by *that which is*; the act of disclosure of that which *is*, on the basis of that which *is not*, should be as exact as possible since this act has to find in what is given the means of achieving that which does not yet exist (the resistance to be expected from a material is revealed as a function of the pressure that must be applied to it).

Thus all praxis contains a moment of practical knowledge that reveals, surpasses, preserves and already modifies reality. This is the level of research and practical truth, defined as a grasp of being in as much as it encloses the possibility of its own directed change. Truth comes into being out of non-being, into the present out of the practical future. From this point of view, an enterprise that has successfully been *accomplished* is a *verification* of possibilities discovered in the course of it. (If I manage to cross a river with a make-shift bridge, the material selected and assembled for the purpose will have demonstrated the solidity expected of it.) From this we may conclude that practical knowledge is, in the first instance, *invention*. If various possibilities are to be discovered, utilized and verified, they must first be *invented*. In this sense, every man is a *project*: he is a *creator*, because he invents what

already exists, starting with what does *not yet exist*; he is a *scientist*, because he will never succeed in anything without first assessing *exactly* all the possibilities that will help him to realize his project; he is a *researcher* and a *challenger*, for since the end in view will indicate only schematically the means needed to attain it, in so far as it is itself abstract, he must seek concrete means which will in their turn delimit the end and sometimes enrich it by deflecting it. The result is that he puts the end in question by the means, and vice versa, until the point is reached where the end becomes the integral unity of the means used to achieve it. It is at this point that he has to decide whether 'it is all worth it' – in other words, whether this aggregate end, envisaged from the global point of view of *life*, is worth the extent of the *transformations of energy* needed to realize it; or, if you like, whether the gain is worth the expense of energy. For we live in a world of scarcity in which every expenditure shows up somewhere else as a waste.

Within modern societies, the division of labour ensures that different groups are allocated different tasks which, taken together, constitute praxis. For our purposes, this division of labour engenders specialists of practical knowledge. In other words, in and through this particular group, *disclosure* is isolated as a moment of action and posed for itself. The ends are defined by the ruling class and are realized by the working classes, but the study of the means to them is reserved to a group of technicians who belong to what Colin Clark calls the tertiary sector, made up of scientists, engineers, doctors, lawyers, jurists, academics and so on. These men as individuals do not differ from other men, since each of them, whatever he does, discloses and preserves the being that he surpasses by his project of organizing it. On the other hand, the social function which is assigned to them consists of the critical examination of the field of the possibles; neither the evaluation of ends, nor in most cases (there are exceptions: surgeons for example) their realization, falls within the province of these specialists. Such technicians of practical knowledge do not yet, as a group, qualify as intellectuals, but it will be from their midst – and nowhere else – that intellectuals will be recruited.

To understand better what intellectuals are, let us see how, in France, they came into being. Up to about the 14th century, the cleric, a servant of the Church, was in his own way the holder of a body of knowledge.

Typically, neither the barons nor the peasants knew how to read. Reading was the *province of the cleric*. But the Church wielded economic power (it possessed immense wealth) and political power (as evidenced by the truce of God* which it imposed on the nobility and was generally able to enforce). It was, as such, the guardian of an *ideology* – Christianity – which expressed it and which it inculcated in other classes. The cleric was the mediator between lord and peasant; he enabled them to recognize each other in so far as they possessed (or believed they possessed) a common ideology. He preserved dogmas, and transmitted and adapted traditions. In his capacity as a servant of the Church he was not a specialist in any one branch of knowledge. He offered a mythical image of the world, a totalitarian myth which, while expressive of the class consciousness of the Church, defined the place and destiny of man in a wholly sacred universe; it reinforced, of course, the existing social hierarchy.

The specialist in the field of practical knowledge appeared with the development of the bourgeoisie. The merchant class, as it crystallized, entered into conflict with the Church, whose principles (the just price, condemnation of usury) fettered the development of commercial capitalism. However, it adopted and preserved the ideology of the clerics without troubling unduly to define its own ideology. But from amongst its own sons it chose its technical auxiliaries and advocates. Merchant navies presupposed the existence of scientists and engineers; double-entry book-keeping needed calculators who would develop into mathematicians; unconditional property and contracts multiplied the demand for lawyers; medicine evolved and anatomy provided an inspiration for bourgeois realism in the arts. A new stratum of 'experts in means' thus arose from within the ranks of the bourgeoisie: they constituted neither a class nor an elite, but were wholly integrated in the vast enterprise that was mercantile capitalism, and provided it with the means to self-reproduction and expansion. These scientists and experts were not the guardians of any *ideology*, and their function was certainly not to provide the bourgeoisie with one. They were to take little part in the

*Translator's note: A ruling by the Church dating from the 11th century forbidding any act of violence or hostilities between armies from Friday evening to Monday morning.

conflict that ranged the bourgeoisie against the ideology of the Church. The formulation of ideological problems was left to the clerics, who split into opposing camps in the name of synthetic universality, at the time when the development of commerce had turned the bourgeoisie into a force to be reckoned with. There sprang from their efforts to adapt a sacred ideology to the demands of a rising class, simultaneously, the Reformation (Protestantism was the ideology of mercantile capitalism) and the Counter-Reformation (the Jesuits contended with the reformed Church for the bourgeoisie: thanks to them, the notion of usury gave way to that of credit). The men of knowledge lived through these conflicts, interiorized them, were deeply affected by the contradictions of the epoch, but were not their principal agents.

As it happened, no adaptation of sacred ideology could ultimately satisfy the bourgeoisie, whose interests now demanded a *desacralization of every sphere of practical activity*. It was this secularization – beyond all inter-clerical conflicts – that the technicians of practical knowledge had unwittingly prepared by rendering bourgeois praxis aware of its own nature, and defining the time and space of the circulation of commodities. As one sacred field after another was laicized, God was obliged to retire back to Heaven: from the end of the 17th century, he became a *Hidden God*. At this time, the bourgeoisie felt a compelling need to affirm itself as a class with a global conception of the world, that is to say an ideology: such was the content of what has been called ‘the intellectual crisis of Western Europe’. This ideology was not created by clerics but by specialists of practical knowledge: men of the law (Montesquieu), men of letters (Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau), mathematicians (d’Alembert), a tax-farmer (Helvetius), doctors, etc. They took the place of clerics and called themselves *philosophers*, that is to say ‘the lovers of Wisdom’. Wisdom was equated with Reason. Over and above their specialist labours, they were called upon to create a rational conception of the Universe which would embrace and justify the *actions* and *demands* of the bourgeoisie.

They were to use the analytic method of reasoning which was the method of research that had proved its efficacy in the sciences and technologies of the time. They were now to apply it to the problems of history and society: it was their best weapon against the traditions,

privileges and myths of the aristocracy, long founded on an irrational syncretism. Prudence, however, led them in turn to give a syncretic guise to the vitriols they prepared for the corrosion of aristocratic and theocratic myths. As a single example, I will cite the idea of *Nature*, a compromise between the rigorous object of the exact sciences and the Christian world created by God. *Nature* was the one and the other at the same time. It was in the first instance the idea of a totalizing and syncretic unity of everything that exists – and thus referred back to a divine Reason; but at the same time it was the idea that everything is subject to laws and that the world consists of an infinite number of causal series, in which each object of knowledge is the fortuitous effect of the juncture of several of these series, which eliminate any need for a Demiurge. The ample shelter of this well-chosen concept allowed thinkers to be Christians, deists, pantheists, atheists or materialists; the men of the time either dissimulated their deepest convictions behind this façade without ever believing in it, or they deceived themselves and became believers and non-believers *at the same time*. Most of the *philosophes* fell into the second category – for although they had developed specialist skills of practical knowledge, they were still influenced by the beliefs inculcated into them in their earliest childhood.

Henceforward, their task was to forge weapons for the bourgeoisie in its struggle against feudalism and to bolster its proud consciousness of itself. By extending the idea of *natural law* to the economic sphere – an inevitable but fundamental error – they both secularized the economy and converted it into a domain external to man: a system of inflexible laws whose constraints permitted no modification. The economy was part of *Nature* – here too one could only command *Nature* by obeying it. When the *philosophes* demanded liberty, the right of free inquiry, all they were doing was demanding an independence for thought that was necessary to conduct practical research (which they were performing at the same time). But for the bourgeois class, the target of this demand was above all the abolition of feudal shackles on commerce, and the victory of liberalism or free economic competition. In the same way, *individualism* appeared to bourgeois proprietors as the validation of *real* property – a relationship without intermediaries between the possessor and the goods possessed – as against feudal property, which expressed above all a

relationship between men themselves. The notion of *social atomism* was the outcome of the application of the scientific thought of the period to society: the bourgeois made use of it in order to reject social 'organisms'. Equality between all social atoms was a necessary consequence of the scientific ideology which derived from analytical Reason: the bourgeoisie made use of it to discredit the nobility by pitting the *rest* of society against it. In fact at the time, as Marx said, the bourgeoisie saw itself as the universal class.

In short, the *philosophes* did what intellectuals are criticized for doing today – they used their skills for another end than that towards which they were supposed to be working; they developed a bourgeois ideology based on a mechanistic and analytical scientism. Should we view them as the first intellectuals? Yes and no. It is true that aristocrats attacked them, at the time, for meddling in affairs that had nothing to do with them. The nobles and the prelates reproached them for doing this: but *not* the bourgeoisie. For the fact was that their ideology did not arise out of thin air: the bourgeois class produced it in a raw and diffuse state in and through *its* commercial practice. This class was becoming aware that it needed such an ideology to achieve full consciousness of itself through a system of signs and symbols – and to dissolve and destroy the ideologies of the other classes in society. The *philosophes* can thus be seen as *organic* intellectuals, in the sense that Gramsci gave to the word. They were born into the bourgeois class, and they took upon themselves the task of expressing the *objective spirit* of this class. Where did this organic accord come from? Firstly, from the fact that they were engendered by this class, borne along by its successes and saturated by its customs and attitudes. Secondly and above all, from the fact that the advance of scientific and practical research, and the progression of the rising class, moved forward together. The ensemble of ideas and values composed of a spirit of contestation, a rejection of the principles of authority and the fetters on free commerce, a conviction of the universality of scientific laws and a belief in the universality of man by contrast with feudal particularism, culminated in the twin formulas: every man is a bourgeois; every bourgeois is a man. This ideological complex has a name: bourgeois *humanism*.

This was its golden age. The *philosophes*, born, educated and moulded

within the bourgeoisie, fought in consonance with it to bring its ideology to light. That age is now distant. Today the bourgeois class is in power, but no one any longer believes it to be a universal class. This alone would suffice to make its 'humanism' obsolete; all the more so since this ideology was adapted to a capitalism of family enterprises, and bears no relation to the era of monopolies. Yet it lingers on; the bourgeoisie persists in calling itself humanist, the West has baptized itself the Free World, and so on. However, in the last third of the 19th century and, particularly from the Dreyfus affair onwards, the grandsons of the *philosophes* became *intellectuals*. What does this mean?

Intellectuals are still recruited from the ranks of the technicians of practical knowledge. But in order to define them we must enumerate the *modern* characteristics of this social category.

(1) The technician of practical knowledge is recruited *from above*. In general he is no longer a member of the ruling class, but it is this class that defines his *being* by its allocation of *jobs*: an allocation that is a function of the exact nature of *its* priorities (for example, according to the level of industrialization), and of the social needs determined by *its* particular options and interests (a society in part *chooses* the number of its deaths according to the fraction of surplus-value it assigns to medical research). The job, as a position to be filled and a role to be played, defines *a priori* the future of an abstract but *awaited* man. Such and such a number of places for doctors, teachers, etc., in 1975 means for a whole category of adolescents at once a specific structuration of the field of their possibilities, of studies to be undertaken, and at the same time a *destiny*. In fact, it sometimes happens that the job awaits them even *before* their birth, as their *social being*. This being is nothing other, in effect, than the unity of the functions they will have to fulfil day in, day out. In this way the ruling class determines the number of technicians of practical knowledge in accordance with the dictates of *profit*, which is its supreme end. It decides at the same time what fraction of surplus-value it will devote to their salaries, in keeping with the level of industrial development, the state of the business cycle, and the appearance of new needs. (Mass production, for example, involves a considerable expansion of the advertising industry, and thus calls into being a growing army of applied psychologists, statisticians, copy-writers and designers; while

the adoption of 'human engineering' involves the direct participation of applied psychologists and of sociologists.) Today the situation is clear enough: industry is trying to extend its control over the university to force it to abandon the old obsolete humanism and replace it with specialized disciplines, destined to supply firms with testers, supervisors, public relations officers, and so forth.

(2) The ideological and technical formation of the specialist in practical knowledge is also defined by a system that is instituted from above (primary, secondary and higher education) and hence is necessarily *selective*. The ruling class regulates education in such a way as to give its technicians (a) the ideology it judges suitable for them (primary and secondary education) and (b) the knowledge and skills to enable them to perform their functions (higher education).

It thus educates them *a priori* to fulfil two roles: it turns them simultaneously into specialists in research and servitors of hegemony, that is to say custodians of tradition. In their second role they become 'functionaries of the superstructures', to use another of Gramsci's expressions. As such, they are granted a certain degree of power – that of 'exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government' (testers perform policing functions, teachers implement the selection procedures, etc.). They are implicitly entrusted with the task of transmitting received values (adapting them as the need arises, to changing circumstances) and if necessary combating the ideas and values of all other classes, by deploying their specialized knowledge. At this level they are the agents of an ideological *particularism*, which is sometimes openly admitted (the aggressive nationalism of the Nazi theoreticians) and sometimes concealed (liberal humanism, with its false universality). It is worth noting in passing that they are in this respect expected to concern themselves with things that have nothing to do with them. Yet no one would dream of calling them *intellectuals*, since they merely camouflage the dominant ideology as scientific laws. In the colonial epoch, psychiatrists conducted so-called rigorous studies to establish the inferiority of Africans, for example, on the basis of the anatomy and physiology of their brains. In this way, they contributed to the maintenance of bourgeois humanism – all men are equal *except* colonials who are merely shadows of men. Other studies established in the same way

the inferiority of women: humanity was bourgeois, white and masculine.

(3) Class relations automatically regulate the selection of the technicians of practical knowledge: in France there are hardly any workers in this social category, because of the enormous difficulty for a working-class child to *acquire* higher education; a somewhat greater number of peasants can be found in this category, because the most recent waves of rural emigration have been to some extent absorbed in civil administration in the towns. But above all this category consists of sons of the petty bourgeoisie. A system of scholarships (education is free, but one needs money to live) allows the state to adopt this or that recruitment policy according to the circumstances. We should add that even for middle-class children, the field of possibilities open to them is rigorously limited by family resources: six years of medical training puts too much of a strain on the budget of a lower-middle class family. Thus his whole situation is rigorously defined for the technician of practical knowledge. He is born, in general, into the middle ranks of the middle classes, where from earliest childhood a particularist ideology of the ruling class is inculcated in him, while his work invariably ranges him in any case with the middle classes. This means that in general he has no contact whatever with workers: in fact he is an accomplice to their exploitation since, after all, he lives off surplus value. In this sense his social being and his destiny come to him from without: he is a middle man, a middling man, a middle-class man. The general ends towards which his activities lead are not *his* ends.

It is at this point that the intellectual makes his entrance. His emergence is rooted in the fact that the socialized worker whom the ruling class has made a technician of practical knowledge suffers at various levels from a fundamental contradiction.

(1) He has been a 'humanist' from his earliest childhood – which means that he was taught to believe that all men are equal. Yet, if he considers himself, he becomes aware that he is living proof that all men are *not* equal. He possesses a measure of social *power* by virtue of his knowledge become skill. This knowledge came to him, the son of a civil servant or manager or member of the liberal professions, as a *heritage*: culture resided in his family even before he was born into it. Thus to be born into his family and to be born into culture were one and the same thing

for him. And if he happens to be one of the few who have risen from the ranks of the working class, he will have succeeded only by traversing a complex and *invariably unjust* system of selection which has eliminated most of his comrades. He is thus always the possessor of an unjustified privilege even, and in a certain sense above all, if he has brilliantly passed all the tests. This privilege, or monopoly of knowledge, is in radical contradiction with the tenets of humanist egalitarianism. In other words, he ought to renounce it. But since he *is* this privilege, he can only renounce it by abolishing himself, a course which would contradict the instinct for life that is so deeply rooted in most men.

(2) The *philosophe* of the 18th century had, as we have seen, the luck to be born as an organic intellectual of *his own* class. This meant that the ideology of the bourgeoisie – which contested the obsolete forms of feudal power – seemed to arise spontaneously out of the general principles of scientific research, an illusion which derived from the universalism of the bourgeoisie: in opposition to the aristocracy, which deemed itself particularized by virtue of descent and race, the bourgeoisie took itself to be the universal class.

Today, the bourgeois ideology with which the technicians of practical knowledge are initially impregnated by their education in the ‘humanities’, contradicts the other component part of themselves, their function as researchers, equipped with specific knowledges and methods. They are universalist because they seek universal forms of knowledge and practice. But if they apply their methods to an examination of the ruling class and its ideology – which is also *their own* – they cannot hide from themselves the fact that both are surreptitiously particularist. At that moment, in their very research, they discover alienation: they become aware that they are the instruments of ends which remain foreign to them and which they are forbidden to question. This contradiction stems not from themselves but from the ruling class itself. We can see this clearly in an example taken from Japanese history.

In 1886 Arinari Mori reformed the Japanese educational system: primary education was to be based on the ideology of militarism and nationalism, it was to nourish in the child loyalty to the State and submission to traditional values. But at the same time Mori was convinced (we are talking about the Meiji era) that if education were to be limited

to these basic conceptions, Japan would be unable to produce the scientists and technicians necessary for its industrialization. Thus, for the same reason, 'higher' education had to be given a certain amount of freedom in order to stimulate research.

Since then the Japanese educational system has been drastically changed, but I have cited this example in order to show that the contradiction experienced by the technicians of practical knowledge is created by the contradictory needs of the ruling class. In effect, it is the dominant class which fashions the contradictory mould which awaits the technicians from their earliest childhood, and which turns them into men-in-contradiction, since the particularist ideology of obedience to a state, to a political policy, to a ruling class, must enter into conflict in their case, with the free and universalist spirit of research which is also conferred on them from without, but *at a later date*, when they are already submissive. In France, this contradiction is the same: from childhood they are screened from social reality – the exploitation of the majority by a minority – by a false universality. Under the name of humanism the true condition of the workers and peasants and the class struggle is concealed from them. A lying egalitarianism masks the imperialism, colonialism and racism which are the ideology of these practices. When they start their higher education, most of them have already been imbued since infancy with a belief in the inferiority of women. Liberty, exercised by the bourgeoisie alone, is presented to them as a formal universality – everyone has the right to vote. Peace, progress and fraternity ill conceal the mechanisms of selection which make each of them a 'competitor' against each other, or the wars of imperialism such as the US aggression in Vietnam. Recently, they have been made to learn or recite pretentious prattle about 'affluence', whose only function is to dissimulate the fact that two-thirds of humanity live in a state of chronic under-nourishment. To give any appearance of unity to all these contradictory thoughts, to check the freedom of research in the name of ideas which are manifestly false, it is consequently necessary to fetter free scientific and technical thought with norms which do not belong to science, and to erect external barriers to the spirit of inquiry, while trying to believe and make others believe that they are inherent to any inquiry. In short, scientific and technical thought can develop its universality only *under control*. Thus in

spite of its kernel of freedom, universality and rigour, science – subordinated to particularism – becomes ideology.

(3) Whatever may be the goals of the ruling class, the technician's activity is first and foremost *practical*: in other words, his goal is what is useful. Not what is useful to this or that social group, but what is useful without specification or limits. When a doctor is engaged in research to find a cure for cancer, his quest does not specify, for example, that only the *rich* are to be cured, for the simple reason that degrees of wealth have nothing to do with cells of cancer. The indetermination of the patient to be cured is necessarily conceived as a universalization: if it is known how to cure one man (obviously characterized by socio-professional traits which fall outside the scope of research) then *all* men may be cured. But in reality the doctor finds that he is caught within a system of relations defined by the ruling class in terms of *scarcity* and *profit* (the supreme end of the industrial bourgeoisie). The result will be that his research, limited by the funds made available for it and – if he finds a cure – by the high price of initial treatments, will only benefit a minority. (We should add that his discoveries can be shelved for commercial reasons by this or that organization: a first-class remedy devised in Rumania for maladies of old age can be secured in certain countries but not in France, because of the resistance of the local pharmaceutical companies; other medicaments may exist in laboratories for several years but cannot be bought anywhere, while the public is kept ignorant of them, etc.). In many cases, with the complicity of the technicians of practical knowledge in question, privileged social groups rob discoveries of their *social utility*, and transform it into a utility for the minority at the expense of the majority. For this reason new inventions frequently remain for a long time instruments of frustration for the majority: such is one of the meanings of *relative impoverishment*. Thus the technician who creates inventions for *all* men may become – at least for a time whose length can rarely be predicted – simply an agent of the pauperization of the working class. This process is particularly obvious in the case of major improvements in industrial products, which are promptly utilized by the bourgeoisie to increase its profits.

Thus the technicians of knowledge engendered by the ruling class are always torn by an inner contradiction. On the one hand, in their

capacity as salaried employees and minor functionaries of the superstructure, they are directly dependent on the managers of private or state enterprises and are defined in this particularity as a specific stratum within the tertiary sector. On the other hand, in as much as their speciality is always the universal, these specialists embody a contestation of the very particularisms with which they have been injected and which they cannot contest without contesting themselves. They insist there is no such thing as 'bourgeois science' and yet their science is bourgeois by virtue of the *limits* imposed on it, and they know it. All the same, it is true that in the phase of research proper they work in an atmosphere of freedom, which makes the return to their real condition all the more bitter.

The powers that be are not unaware of the fact that the reality of the technician's activity is a ceaseless reciprocal contestation between the universal and the particular, and that the technician therefore represents, at least potentially, what Hegel called an 'unhappy consciousness'. For this reason authorities regard him as extremely *suspect*. They accuse him of being someone 'who is forever saying no'; although they know perfectly well that contestation is not a mere character trait but a necessary procedure of scientific thought. For scientific thought, while it is traditionalist to the extent that it accepts a corpus of accumulated knowledge, is negative to the extent that the object of study *contests itself* within it and thereby renders possible further scientific advance. The upshot of the Michelson-Morley experiment* was to put in question the whole of Newtonian physics. But this contestation was in no way sought as such. Progress in the measurement of speed (*technical progress in instrumentation*, linked to industrial development) led Michelson and Morley to attempt to measure the velocity of the earth. Their measurement revealed a wholly unexpected contradiction; they took cognizance of it only in order the better to overcome it with a new contestation – which was in effect forced on them by the object. Fitzgerald and Einstein may thus be seen not so much as scientists contesting a previous system, but

*Translator's note: the Michelson-Morley experiment of 1887 was set up to attempt to measure the velocity of the earth through a 'fixed' frame of reference (the aether) by the effect which it was anticipated this velocity would have on the velocity of light. The failure of the experimenters to detect any such effect was the starting point of Einstein's theory of relativity in 1905.

rather as exploring what had to be abandoned in the system in order to integrate into it the results of experience at least cost. No matter: in the eyes of authority, if technicians of knowledge are such that current means are disputed in their work, they will eventually start to dispute current ends – the abstract postulates of the ruling class and the aggregate unity of current means. Thus the researcher is simultaneously indispensable and yet suspect in the eyes of the dominant class. He cannot fail to experience and interiorize this suspicion, and to become suspect *from the outset* in his own eyes.

Thereafter there are two possible lines of development:

(i) The technician of knowledge accepts the dominant ideology or adapts himself to it: in the end, in a state of wholly bad faith, he puts the universal to the service of the particular; he practices self-censorship and becomes *apolitical, agnostic*, etc. It can also happen that he is politically coerced into abandoning a valid dissent and renounces his ability to question the world, at the price of considerable damage to his skills. In this case, his rulers typically say with satisfaction of a man, 'he is no intellectual'.

(ii) If the technician of practical knowledge becomes aware of the particularism of his ideology and cannot reconcile himself to it: if he sees that he has interiorized authoritarian principles in the form of self-censorship; if he has to call in question the ideology that formed him to escape malaise and mutilation; if he refuses to be a subaltern agent of bourgeois hegemony and to act as the means towards ends which he is forbidden to know or to dispute – then the agent of practical knowledge becomes a monster, that is to say an intellectual; *someone who attends to what concerns him* (in exteriority – the principles which guide the conduct of his life; and in interiority – his lived experience in society) and whom others refer to a man *who interferes in what does not concern him*.

In a word, every technician of knowledge is a *potential intellectual* since he is defined by a contradiction which is none other than the permanent tension within him between his universalist technique and the dominant ideology. But in reality a technician cannot simply decide to become an intellectual. Such a conversion will depend in part on his personal history, which may determine whether the tension which

characterizes him is released; while in the last analysis only social factors can complete the transformation.

Among the latter figure first and foremost the policy adopted by the ruling classes and the living standard they promise their intellectuals – in particular their students. Low salaries are certainly a way of intensifying their dependence. But they may also incite technicians of knowledge to revolt by revealing the real position reserved for them in society. Then again the ruling class may be unable to provide all its students with the jobs which have been promised them: those who fail to find employment will fall below the standard of living – no matter how low – typical of technicians, and will tend to develop solidarity with the less favoured social classes. Unemployment of this kind, or demotion to less well-paid and less honorific employment, is often the outcome of a process of selection within the educational system; but the negative product of such selection (the eliminated student) cannot contest the filtering mechanisms of which he is a victim without contesting the whole of society. There are also certain historical conjunctures in which the traditional values and dominant ideology of a society are violently opposed by the working class, inducing profound transformations within the ruling class itself.

At such times, numerous specialists in knowledge are transformed into intellectuals because the contradictions which have erupted in society bring home to them their own contradiction. If, on the other hand, the dominant classes seek to augment the impact of ideology at the expense of that of science, it is they who intensify the inner tension within technicians and are responsible for their transformation into intellectuals – by reducing the quota of technique, science and free research to a level below what such technicians can accept. In Japan, in recent years, the capitalist State has forced teachers of history to deform historical truth; even where the latter had till then been solely concerned with teaching or establishing facts, they were thereby impelled to oppose, in the name of their own professional conscience and scientific standards, a ruling ideology which they had otherwise hitherto passively accepted. Usually all these diverse determinants operate *at the same time*: for their totality, however contradictory it may be, reflects the general attitude of a society towards its specialists. But these pressures can ultimately do no more than bring the specialist to consciousness of

his own *constitutional contradiction*. The intellectual is thus someone who becomes aware of the opposition, both within himself and within society, between a search for practical truth (with all the norms it implies) and a ruling ideology (with its system of traditional values). Although this new awareness must, *in order to be real*, operate in the case of the intellectual *first and foremost* at the level of his professional activities and functions, it is nothing other than an unmasking of the fundamental contradictions of the society: that is to say, the struggle between classes and within the dominant class itself, the organic conflict between the truth the latter needs for its own purposes and the myths, values and traditions with which it seeks to infect other classes in order to ensure its hegemony.

The intellectual, the product of a class-divided society, testifies to these conflicts because he has interiorized them. He is thus a product of history. In this sense no society can complain of its intellectuals without accusing itself, for it has the intellectuals it makes.

2. THE FUNCTION OF THE INTELLECTUAL

A. *Contradictions*

We have defined the intellectual in his *existence*. We must now discuss his *function*. But does he have one? It is clear, in effect, that no one has given him a mandate to exercise a function. The dominant class attaches no importance to him: all it is willing to acknowledge is the technician of knowledge and the minor functionary of the superstructure. The underprivileged classes cannot engender him since he derives from the specialist in practical truth who in turn is created by the options of the dominant class, which allocates a fraction of surplus value to produce him. As for the middle classes - to whom he belongs - although they originally suffer from the same inner divisions, reproducing within themselves the discord between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, their contradictions are not experienced at the level of myth versus scientific knowledge, or particularism versus universalism: thus the intellectual cannot knowingly be mandated to express them.

Let us say that the intellectual is characterized as having a mandate

from no one, and as receiving his statute from no authority. He is, as such, not the product of a particular decision – as are doctors, teachers, etc., in as much as they are agents of authority – but the monstrous product of a monstrous society. He is claimed by no one and recognized by no one (neither the State, nor the power-elite, nor the lobbies, nor the organizations of the exploited classes, nor the masses). We can be sensible of what he *says* but not of his existence. For example, discussing a diet and the reasons for it, we may say more or less inanely: 'It was *my* doctor who told me that', whereas if an intellectual's arguments take effect and are widely accepted, they will be presented in *themselves*, without any reference to he who first developed them. They will become an *anonymous* outlook, the common property of all. The intellectual is suppressed by the very manner in which his products are used.

Thus no one concedes him any rights or status. In fact, his existence cannot be admitted, since it cannot even admit itself. It is simply the lived impossibility of being a pure technician of practical knowledge in our societies. This definition reveals the intellectual as the most disarmed of men: he certainly cannot belong to an elite because, at the outset, he disposes of no *knowledge* and, consequently, no *power*. He cannot hope to teach, even though he is often recruited from amongst the ranks of teachers, because he is initially one who is ignorant. If he is a professor or a scientist, he does *know* certain things even if he cannot derive them from true principles. But as an intellectual, he is *searching* for other things: the restrictions, violent or subtle, of universality by particularism, and the envelopment of truth by myth have made him essentially an *investigator*. He investigates *himself* first of all in order to transform the contradictory being assigned to him into a harmonious totality. But this cannot be his only object, since to find his inner secret and resolve his organic contradiction, he must proceed to apply the rigorous methods he uses as a specialist technician of practical knowledge to the society of which he is a product – to its ideology, its structures, its options and its praxis.

The principles which govern these methods are: freedom of research (and contestation); rigour of inquiry and proof; quest for truth (disclosure of being and its conflicts); universality of results obtained. Nevertheless, these abstract principles do not suffice in themselves to

constitute an adequate method for the intellectual's pursuit of his object, for the specific object of his inquiry is two-fold, in effect, and each aspect is both the complement and converse of the other. The intellectual will both seek to understand *himself* within society, in so far as he is a product of society, and at the same time to study the total society which produces, at a certain point in time, intellectuals like himself. The result is a perpetual reversal of perspectives: the self is referred to the world and the world is referred to the self. The object of the research of an intellectual can thus never be the object studied by anthropology. For the intellectual cannot consider the social whole *objectively*, because he discovers it within himself as his fundamental contradiction. Nor, on the other hand, can he be satisfied with a merely *subjective* questioning of himself, since he is precisely inserted into a determinate society that has fashioned him. From these remarks we may conclude that:

(1) The object of the intellectual's inquiry demands a specialized knowledge of the abstract method of which we have spoken. Within this constant reversal of perspectives that is necessary to overcome his inner contradiction, the two moments – the interiorization of exteriority and re-exteriorization of interiority – must be rigorously linked. Such a linkage of contradictory terms is nothing other than the *dialectic*. The dialectic is a method that the intellectual is not qualified to teach. When he awakens to his new condition and seeks to overcome his 'difficulty in being', he is not familiar with any dialectical procedure. It is his object that will impose it on him little by little, since it is a two-fold object and each of its faces refers to the other. Yet even at the end of his quest the intellectual will not have a rigorous knowledge of the method that has imposed itself on him.

(2) In any case the ambiguity of his object separates the intellectual from the realm of *abstract universality*. The mistake of the *philosophes* was to believe that they could directly apply a universal (and analytic) method to the society in which they existed, when precisely *they lived within it*: for in fact it conditioned them historically in such a way that its ideological presuppositions infiltrated their positive research and even their negative will to combat them. The reason for their error is obvious: they were *organic intellectuals* working for the very class that had produced them, and their universality was simply the false universality of the bourgeoisie,

which took itself to be a universal class. Thus when they sought man, they got no further than the bourgeois. True intellectual investigation, if it is to free truth from the myths which obscure it, implies a traversal of research through the singularity of the researcher. The latter needs to situate *himself* in the social universe in order to be able to grasp and destroy within and without himself the limits that ideology imposes on knowledge. It is at the level of the *situation* that the dialectic of interiorization and exteriorization is operative; the intellectual's thought must ceaselessly turn back on itself in order always to apprehend itself as a *singular universality* – a thought secretly singularized by the class prejudices inculcated in him since childhood, even while it believed itself to be free of them and to have attained the universal. To take just one example, if we wish to combat racism (as an ideology of imperialism) it is not enough simply to oppose it with universal arguments that are drawn from anthropological science. Such arguments may be convincing on the level of universality – but racism is a concrete everyday attitude, and consequently a man can sincerely hold anti-racist opinions of a universal type, while in his deepest recesses, under the influence of his childhood, he remains a racist – so that one day he will involuntarily behave like one in ordinary life. Thus the intellectual's labour will come to nothing, even if he demonstrates the aberrant character of racism, unless he constantly returns to himself to liquidate the traces of racism within him left over by his childhood, by a rigorous investigation of the 'incomparable monster' that is his self.

At this level the intellectual, who by virtue of his work as a technician of knowledge (endowed with a certain salary and standard of living) can be classified as a petty-bourgeois promoted by a selective educational process, must ceaselessly combat his own class – which, itself moulded by the culture of the ruling class, necessarily reproduces within him a petty-bourgeois ideology and petty-bourgeois thoughts and sentiments. The intellectual is thus a technician of the universal who realizes that in his own field, universality does not exist ready-made; but perpetually remains to be achieved. One of the principal traps an intellectual must avoid in this enterprise is to universalize too fast. I have seen some who were in such a hurry to pass over to the universal that during the Algerian war they condemned Algerian terrorism in exactly the same breath as

French repression. Such a judgement was the very pattern of a false bourgeois universality. What these intellectuals failed to understand was that the Algerian rebellion – an insurrection of the poor, disarmed and hunted by a police regime – could not but choose *guerrilla war and the use of bombs*. Thus, the true intellectual, in his struggle against himself, will come to see society as the arena of a struggle between particular groups (particularized by virtue of their structure, their position and their destiny) for the statute of universality. In contradiction to the tenets of bourgeois thought, he will perceive that *man does not exist*. But by the same token, once he knows he is not yet a man, he will grasp – within himself and then outside himself, and vice versa – man as a *task*. As Ponge has said: man is the future of man. In opposition to bourgeois humanism, an intellectual who achieves self-awareness necessarily comes to see both his own singularity and its adumbration of man, as the distant goal of a practical and daily enterprise.

(3) For this reason, a criticism often made of intellectuals is senseless – the general prejudice that an intellectual is an abstract being who lives in a world of pure universality, who is familiar only with ‘intellectual’ and purely negative values, whose ‘cerebral’ reasoning is impervious to the appeals of sensibility. The origin of these criticisms is obvious: the intellectual is an agent of practical knowledge, *first and foremost*, and it is only rarely that he ceases to be so when he becomes an intellectual. It is true that he claims to apply methods of the exact sciences outside their familiar domain, in particular to dissolve the dominant ideology both outside and within himself – an ideology that is presented to him in the form of confused and elusive thoughts and ‘affective’ or ‘vital’ values, so called to magnify their fundamentally irrational character. But his goal is to realize the practical subject and to discover the principles of a society capable of engendering and sustaining such a subject. In the interim he pursues his investigation at all levels and attempts to modify *himself* in his *sensibility* as well as his *thoughts*. This means that as far as possible he seeks to produce, both in himself and in others, a true unity of the personality, a recuperation by each agent of the ends imposed on his activity (which would, by the same stroke, become different ends), a suppression of alienations, a real freedom for thought – by defeating *external* social prohibitions dictated by the class structure, and

internal inhibitions and self-censorship. If there is a sensibility which he rejects, it is a *class* sensibility – for example the ‘rich’ and variegated sensibility of racism; but he rejects it in favour of a richer sensibility, that implies human relations of reciprocity. There is no certainty that he will achieve this completely, but at least he will indicate the path towards it, both to himself and to others. What he contests, by contrast, is simply ideology (and its *practical* consequences) – in so far as ideology, whatever its origin, is a mendacious and imperspicuous substitute for a class consciousness. Thus his contestation is merely a *negative moment* of a praxis which he is incapable of undertaking alone, a praxis which can only be brought to fruition by the totality of oppressed and exploited classes, and whose positive meaning – even if he can only glimpse it – is the advent in a distant future of a society of free men.

(4) This dialectical action of one singular universal on other singular universals should never, therefore, be conducted in the abstract. The ideology to be combated by the intellectual is constantly actualized in *events*. We should be clear on this point: ideology comes to us not so much in the form of a set of clearly defined propositions, but rather as a way of expressing and masking particular events. Racism, for example, is sometimes – but rather rarely – manifested in books (as in the case of Drumont’s *La France Juive*), but it will be found much more frequently as the hidden motor of events, such as the Dreyfus affair; or in the justifications casually and indirectly furnished by the mass media for racist violence – whether as legal persecution (Dreyfus), lynching, or intermediate forms – which themselves constitute one of the principal aspects of racism. To discharge himself of the clinging racism against which he must always struggle, the intellectual can express his ideas in a book. But the most important thing he can do is tirelessly to denounce *in acts* the sophisms which attempt to justify the condemnation of a Jew *on the grounds that he is a Jew*, or to excuse a particular pogrom or some massacre. In short, the intellectual must work *at the level of events* to produce other concrete events that will combat pogroms or racist verdicts in the courts, by revealing the violence of the privileged in all its nakedness. By *event* I mean a fact that is the bearer of an idea, in other words, a singular universal – for the universality of the idea is limited by the singularity of the fact, a *dated* and *localized* event that *takes place* at a

certain point in the history of a nation, and which resumes and totalizes it to the extent that it is a totalized product of it. This means, in effect, that the intellectual is constantly confronted with the concrete, and can only make a concrete response to it.

(5) The intellectual's most immediate enemy is what I will term the *false intellectual* and what Nizan called a watch-dog – a type created by the dominant class to defend its particularist ideology by arguments which claim to be rigorous products of exact reasoning. In actual fact, representatives of this category share the same origins as true intellectuals: they too begin as technicians of practical knowledge. It would be simplistic to imagine that the false intellectual is merely an individual who has 'sold out' – unless we understand the bargain that makes a technician of knowledge into a false intellectual as a little less crude than is normally implied. Let us say that certain subaltern functionaries of the superstructure feel that their interests are tied to those of the dominant class – which is true – and refuse to feel anything else – which is to suppress the opposite sentiment, that is also true. In other words, they ignore their alienation as men (actual or potential men) and think only of their power as functionaries. They wear the appearance of intellectuals and also start by contesting the ideology of the dominant class – but their's is a pseudo-contestation, whose rapid exhaustion merely serves to demonstrate that the dominant ideology is resistant to all contestation. In other words, the false intellectual, unlike the true, does not say *no*, but rather cultivates the 'no, but . . .' or the 'I know, but still . . .' attitude. These arguments are capable of seducing the true intellectual, who typically is only too inclined – in his capacity as a functionary – to entertain such attitudes himself, and to use them to revert again from monster to pure technician. But he is also necessarily impelled to refute such arguments, precisely because he is *already* the monster that they cannot convince. He will thus reject 'reformist' propositions, and in doing so will tend to become more and more *radical*. In actual fact radicalism and intellectual commitment are one and the same; it is the 'moderate' arguments of reformists which logically radicalize the intellectual, by showing him that he must either reject the basic principles of the ruling class or serve it by merely appearing to reject them. For example, many false intellectuals in France declared during the French war in Indo-China

or the Algerian war: 'Our colonial policy is not all it should be: there is too much inequality in our overseas territories. But I am against all violence, whatever its origin: I wish to be neither executioner nor victim, and for this reason I am opposed to the revolt of the natives against the settlers.' To any radicalized thinker, it is clear that such a pseudo-universalist position amounts to the following: 'I am in favour of the chronic violence that the settlers inflict on the colonial peoples (super-exploitation, unemployment, under-nourishment, police terror) – which is in any case a minor evil that will be righted in the long run; but I am against the violence that the colonial peoples seek to exercise in order to liberate themselves from their oppressors.' It is then obvious enough that once the use of counter-violence against the oppressors is vetoed, mild reproaches to them count for very little (such as: 'grant equal pay, or, at least make a gesture towards it'; 'a little more justice, for goodness sake!'). Such reproaches are patently a façade since the false intellectual seeks to prevent the real strength of the oppressed from transforming them into demands backed by arms. If the colonial population does not rise *en masse*, the settlers are well aware that it will find no organized force in the metropolitan country to support it. Colonial authorities thus have no reason to object to the false intellectual, whose discourse helps to divert the colonial population from revolt by luring it towards the mirage of reformism. Intellectual radicalism is thus normally fortified and developed by the arguments and attitudes of the false intellectuals. In the permanent dialogue between true and false intellectuals, reformist arguments and their practical consequences (preservation of the *status quo*) necessarily tend to revolutionize true intellectuals, since they demonstrate that reformism merely performs the double function of serving the dominant class while allowing the technicians of practical knowledge to maintain an illusory distance from their employers, in this dominant class.

All those who adopt a universalist perspective *here and now* are *re-assuring* to the established order: the universal today is made up of false intellectuals. True intellectuals – uneasily aware of their essentially monstrous character – are by contrast *disquieting*: for they suggest that the human universal is *yet to come*. Many false intellectuals enthusiastically joined Gary Davis's movement for 'world government' after the Second World War. They hoped to become citizens of the world *overnight*

and to establish the reign of Peace on Earth. 'Very good', a Vietnamese of the time might say to a false French intellectual of this type: 'Now make a start by demanding peace in Vietnam, since that is where the fighting is.' 'Not on your life,' the intellectual would reply: 'that would only help the Communists.' Such an attitude wants peace in general, but no particular peace, whether to the advantage of imperialism or of its colonial victims. But he who calls for universal peace, but no particular peace, merely confines himself to a *moral* condemnation of war – something everyone repeats, even President Johnson. It is because of the role of false intellectuals that the popular image of an intellectual (as I explained in the first lecture) is of a moralist and idealist, who pronounces *moral* condemnations of war and dreams in this violent world of a day when ideal peace will finally reign – a peace that will not be a new human order founded on the abolition of all wars by the victory of the oppressed, but a spiritual idea of a peace descended from heaven. It is for this reason that the true intellectual, as a *radical* thinker, is neither a moralist nor an idealist: he knows that the only peace worth having in Vietnam will cost blood and tears; he knows that peace will only come after the withdrawal of American troops and the end of American bombing – *therefore* after the defeat of the United States. In other words, the nature of his contradiction obliges him to *commit himself* in every one of the conflicts of our time, because all of them – class, national, and racial conflicts – are particular effects of the oppression of the under-privileged and because, in each of these conflicts, he finds himself, as a man conscious of his own oppression, on the side of the oppressed.

Nonetheless, it must be repeated, his position is not a *scientific* one. He gropingly applies a rigorous method to unknown objects which he demystifies by demystifying himself; he pursues a work of practical exposure by combating ideologies and revealing the violence they mask or justify; he labours in order that a social universality may one day be possible where all men will be *truly* free, equal and fraternal, certain in his knowledge that on that day, and not before, the intellectual as a species will disappear, and men will at last acquire practical knowledge in liberty and harmony. For the moment, all he can do is seek and stumble, with no other guide than his dialectical rigour and radicalism.

B. *The intellectual and the masses*

The intellectual stands alone because no one has mandated him. Now one of his contradictions is that he cannot liberate himself unless others liberate themselves at the same time. For every man possesses personal goals which are perpetually *stolen* from him by the system. Alienation even extends into the ranks of the ruling class itself, whose members work for inhuman ends which do not belong to them, that is to say fundamentally for *profit*. Thus the intellectual, once he grasps his own contradiction as an individual expression of objective contradictions, is in solidarity with every man who struggles for himself and for others against these contradictions.

However it would be wrong to imagine that the intellectual could accomplish this task by simply *studying* the ideology inculcated into him (for example by subjecting it to ordinary critical methods). In actual fact it is his *own* ideology – it manifests itself both in his mode of life (in so far as he is a *real* member of the middle classes) and in his *Weltanschauung*. In other words it is the tinted glasses through which he normally looks at the world. The contradiction from which he suffers is at first experienced only as suffering. In order to examine it, he must *take his distance* from it – and this he cannot do without assistance. In effect, this historical agent is entirely conditioned by his circumstances and his consciousness is precisely the opposite of an *overview*. If he sought to project himself into the future in order to know himself (as we can know past societies), he would miss his goal completely; he has no knowledge of the future, and even if he were to guess an aspect of it, it would be as still imbued with his own current prejudices – and thus would reproduce the very contradictions he sought to look back upon. If he were to try to place himself theoretically outside society in order to judge the ideology of the dominant class, *at best* he would take his contradictions with him; at worst he would identify with the big bourgeoisie which is economically situated *above* the middle classes and overlooks them, and he would then accept its ideology without demur. It follows that if he wishes to understand the society in which he lives, he has only one course open to him and that is to adopt the point of view of its most underprivileged members.

The under-privileged do not represent universality, which is non-existent today, but they do represent the *immense majority*, particularized by the oppression and exploitation which make of them the products of their products, and rob them of their ends (as the technicians of practical knowledge are likewise robbed) by reducing them to particular means of production, defined by the instruments they fashion and the tasks these utensils assign to them. Their struggle against this absurd particularization leads them in their turn to seek universality – not, of course, the universality of the bourgeoisie (when it views itself as a universal class) – but a concrete universality of negative origin, born of the liquidation of particularisms and the advent of a classless society. The only way the intellectual can really distance himself from the official ideology decreed from above is by placing himself alongside those whose very existence contradicts it. The urban and rural proletariat, by nature, prove that our societies are particularist and class-divided. The fact that two billion people out of a world population of three billion are under-nourished today reveals another fundamental truth of our present societies – belying the myth of affluence invented by false intellectuals. The degree of consciousness achieved by the exploited classes is *variable* – they may at times be deeply imbued with bourgeois ideology; but they nevertheless remain characterized by an *objective intelligence*. This intelligence is not a gift, but is a product of their *point of view* of society, the one and only radical perspective on it – whatever their *political attitudes* may be (in some cases resigned dignity or reformism, to the extent that their objective intelligence has been obscured by values inculcated by the dominant class). This objective perspective gives rise to a *popular mode of thought*, which spontaneously views society from its foundations upwards, starting with the lowest level of the social hierarchy that is most susceptible to radicalization. This popular vision captures the dominant classes and their allies as in a *tilt shot* angled from below, in which they appear not as cultural elites but as enormous statues whose pedestals press down with all their weight on the classes which reproduce the life of the society. Here there is no mutual recognition, courtesy or non-violence (as between bourgeois who look into each other's eyes at the same height), but a panorama of violence endured, labour alienated and elementary needs denied. If the intellectual can adopt this simple

and radical perspective, he would see himself *as he really is*, from below – rejecting his class and yet doubly conditioned by it (born into it as a psycho-social ‘background’ and reinserted into it as a technician of knowledge), weighing on the popular classes as a charge on the surplus-value they produce. He would then clearly perceive the ambiguity of his position and, if he applied the rigorous methods of the dialectic to these fundamental truths, he would learn in and through the popular classes the true nature of bourgeois society. He would abandon what few reformist illusions he has left, and would become a revolutionary. He would understand that the masses must imperatively break the idols that crush them. His new task would then be to combat the perpetual re-emergence *within the people* of ideologies which paralyse them. But at this level, new contradictions arise.

(1) In the first place, the under-privileged classes do not as such produce intellectuals, since it is precisely the accumulation of capital which allows the dominant classes to create and to augment *technical capital*. Of course, the ‘system’ recruits a few technicians of practical knowledge from the exploited classes (in France, about 10 per cent); but even if these technicians come from the people, they are immediately integrated into the *middle classes* through their work, their salary and their standard of living. In other words, the under-privileged classes do not produce organic representatives of the objective intelligence which is theirs. Until the day of the revolution, an organic intellectual of the proletariat will remain a contradiction in terms. Besides, since such an intellectual would be born into classes who demand the universal because of their very situation, he would never be the monster we have described as an unhappy consciousness (if he could exist at all).

(2) The second contradiction is a corollary of the first. If the intellectual, who cannot be organically produced as such by the under-privileged classes, nevertheless seeks to rally to them in order to assimilate their objective intelligence and to inform his trained methods with their popular principles, he will promptly and *justifiably* encounter the distrust of those with whom he wishes to ally. In effect workers are bound to see him as a member of the middle classes – in other words, of strata which are by definition accomplices of capital. The intellectual is thus necessarily separated by a gulf from those men whose point of view he wants to

adopt – that of *universalization*. He is, in fact, constantly attacked for this by the false intellectuals who are in the pockets of the established order of the ruling class and its allies: ‘You are a petty-bourgeois who has imbibed bourgeois culture from birth and lived amongst the middle classes; how dare you claim to represent the *objective spirit* of the working classes; you have no contact with them and they want nothing to do with you.’ In point of fact it seems as if there is a vicious circle here: in order to struggle against the particularism of the dominant ideology, it is necessary to adopt the point of view of those whose very existence condemns it. But to adopt this point of view, an intellectual must never have been a petty-bourgeois, since his education has irretrievably infected him from the start. Moreover, since it is the contradiction between particularizing ideology and universalizing knowledge that makes a petty-bourgeois into an intellectual, to adopt this point of view it would be necessary *not to be an intellectual*.

Intellectuals are perfectly well aware of this new contradiction: many of them come to grief over it and go no further. They either assume a position of *too great humility* towards the exploited classes (hence their long-standing temptation *to refer* to themselves as proletarians, or to try to *become* proletarians), or they fall into systematic suspicion of each other (each suspects that the ideas of the other are secretly conditioned by bourgeois ideology, because every intellectual is *tempted* by his petty-bourgeois background and sees in others a reflection of himself); or finally, in desperation at the distrust of which they are the object, they retreat and – unable to revert to simple technicians of knowledge at peace with themselves – they become *false intellectuals*.

Joining a mass party – another temptation – does not resolve the problem. The distrust remains. Discussion of the precise role of intellectuals and theoreticians in the Party recurs again and again. This has happened many times in France. The same pattern occurred in Japan, around 1930, in the time of Fukumoto, when the communist Mizuno left the Japanese CP and accused it of being ‘a theoretical discussion group dominated by the petty-bourgeois ideology of corrupted intellectuals’. Who in that epoch could claim that he represented or theorized the *objective intelligence* of the working class? Those who insisted, for instance, that the Meiji restoration was a bourgeois revolution? Or those

who denied this? If it is the Party leadership which decides the matter on practical political grounds, who can be sure that when these change, its personnel and opinion will not be changed too? If this should happen, it is safe to predict that those who retained the condemned theory a moment too long will be denounced as 'corrupt intellectuals' – in other words as intellectuals *tout court*, since corruption is precisely the fundamental characteristic which every intellectual rebels against once he has discovered it inside himself. Thus if petty-bourgeois intellectuals are led by their own contradictions to align themselves with the working class, they will serve it at their risk and peril; they may act as theorists but never as organic intellectuals of the proletariat, and this contradiction, no matter how well it may be understood, will never be resolved. Thus our axiom is confirmed that intellectuals cannot receive a mandate from *anyone*.

C. *The role of the intellectual*

These two complementary contradictions are awkward but not as serious as they might appear to be at first sight. The exploited classes, in actual fact, do not need an *ideology* so much as the practical truth of society. That is to say, they have no need of a mythical representation of themselves; they need knowledge of the world in order to change it. This means that they demand to be *situated* (since knowledge of one class implies knowledge of all the others and of the balance of forces between them), and that they aspire to discover their *organic goals* and the praxis which will enable them to reach them. In short, they need to possess their own practical truth, which means they seek to grasp themselves both in their *historical particularity* (such as two industrial revolutions have made them, with their class memory, or material residues of past structures; workers in St Nazaire, for example, are contemporary witnesses to an older form of the proletariat) and in their *struggle for universalization* (that is to say, against exploitation, oppression, alienation, inequality, the sacrifice of labour to capital). The dialectical relationship between these two exigencies is what is called *class consciousness*. Now it is at this level that the intellectual can serve the people. Not as a technician of universal knowledge, since he is *situated*, as are the 'under-privileged' classes themselves. But precisely in so far as he is a *singular universal*,

since an intellectual achieves self-consciousness by simultaneously discovering his class particularism and his task of universality – which is to contradict and surpass his particularity towards a universalization of the particular, starting from his original particularism. But since the working class seeks to change the world by taking itself as it is as the point of departure, instead of posing itself at the outset as universal, there is a parallelism between the effort of the intellectual to achieve universalization and the spontaneous movement of the working class. In this sense, although the intellectual can never be originally *situated* within this class, it is a gain that he has become conscious of his *situated condition*, even as a member of the middle class. His task is not to deny his situation, but to use his experience of it to *situate* the working class, and his universalist techniques to illuminate the efforts of this class to achieve universalization. At this level, the contradiction which produces an intellectual offers him the means to grasp the historical singularity of the proletariat with universal methods (historical research, structural analysis, dialectics) and its strivings towards universalization in their particularity (as they issue from a singular history and preserve it to the very extent that they call for the *incarnation* of a revolution). It is by applying the dialectical method, by grasping the particular in the demands of the universal and reducing the universal to the movement of a singularity towards universalization, that the intellectual – defined as a man who has *achieved consciousness of his own constituent contradiction* – can help the proletariat to achieve its own self-consciousness.

However, his class particularity may vitiate over and over again his efforts as a theoretician. Thus the intellectual must forever struggle against the *ideology* which forever rises anew within him, perpetually recreated in novel forms by his original situation and formation. He has two resources he should use simultaneously in this struggle:

(1) *Perpetual self-criticism*: he must not confound the universal – which he practices as a specialist in the field of practical knowledge: $y=f(x)$ – with the singular efforts of a particularized social group to achieve universalization. If he poses as the guardian of the universal, he lapses at once into the particular and again becomes a victim of the old illusion of the bourgeoisie that takes itself for a universal class. He must strive to remain aware of the fact that he is a petty-bourgeois breaking out of his

mould, constantly tempted to renourish the thoughts of his class. He must remind himself that he is never secure from the danger of lapsing into universalism (which thinks of itself as already *completed* and as such, excludes the effort of various particularities towards universalization), into racism, nationalism, or imperialism. (In France the so-called 'respectful left' is one which respects the values of the right even though it believes it does not share them – such was 'our left' during the Algerian war.) At the very moment when the intellectual is denouncing these attitudes, he is always liable to be infected by them: American Blacks have good reason to denounce with horror the paternalism of many intellectual and anti-racist whites. Thus an intellectual cannot join workers by saying: 'I am no longer a petty-bourgeois; I move freely in the universal.' Quite the contrary; he can only do so by thinking 'I am a petty-bourgeois; if, in order to resolve *my own* contradiction, I have placed myself alongside the proletariat and peasantry, I have not thereby ceased *to be* a petty-bourgeois; all I can do, by constantly criticizing and radicalizing myself, is step by step to refuse – though this interests no one but myself – my petty-bourgeois conditioning.'

(2) *A concrete and unconditioned alignment with the actions of the under-privileged classes.* Theory, in effect, is nothing but a moment of praxis: the moment of assessment of the field of possibilities before it. Therefore, if it is true that theory illuminates praxis, it is equally true that it is conditioned and *particularized* by the total enterprise undertaken, since before posing itself for itself, it arises organically within an action which is *always particular*. The role of the intellectual is thus not to judge an action before it has begun, nor to urge that it be undertaken, nor to supervise its development. On the contrary, it is to *join it in mid-course* in its elemental forms (a wild-cat strike, or a stoppage that has already been canalized by a trade union), to integrate himself in it, participate in it physically, allow himself to be captured and borne along by it and only then, to the extent that he judges it necessary, to decipher its nature and illuminate its meaning and possibilities. In so far as a common praxis integrates him into the general movement of the proletariat, he can grasp, within its internal contradictions (the action is particular in its origins, universalizing in its ends) both the particularity and the universalizing ambitions of this movement, as a force at once familiar

(the intellectual shares the same goals and runs the same risks) and foreign, that has borne him a long distance from where he once stood, yet remains *given and out of reach*: excellent conditions for grasping and defining the particularities and universal exigencies of a proletariat. How can a specialist in universality best serve the movement of popular universalization? Both in his capacity as one who can never be assimilated, and remains excluded even during violent action, and as a divided consciousness, that can never be healed. The intellectual will never be either completely inside the movement (thus lost within a too great proximity of class structures) nor completely outside it (since as soon as he begins to act, he is in any case a traitor in the eyes of the ruling class and of his own class, one who uses the technical knowledge they allowed him to acquire against them). Outlawed by the privileged classes, suspect to the under-privileged classes (because of the very culture he puts at their disposal), he can begin his work. And what exactly is his work? One could, I believe, describe it in the following terms:

(1) He must struggle against the perpetual rebirth of ideology amongst the popular classes. In other words, he should attack externally and internally every ideological representation that they entertain of themselves or their power (the 'positive hero' the 'personality cult', the 'glorification of the proletariat', for example, all of which may appear to be products of the working class but are in fact borrowed from bourgeois ideology: as such, they must be destroyed).

(2) He must make use of the capital of knowledge he has acquired from the dominant class in order to help raise popular culture – that is to say, to lay the foundations of a universal culture.

(3) Whenever necessary and particularly *in the present conjuncture*, he should help to form technicians of practical knowledge within the under-privileged classes, since these classes cannot themselves produce them, in the hope that they will become the organic intellectuals of the working class, or at least, technicians who are as near as possible to such intellectuals (who cannot yet in fact be created).

(4) He must recover his own ends (universality of knowledge, freedom of thought, truth) by rediscovering them as the real ends sought by *all those in struggle* – that is, as the future of man.

(5) He should try to radicalize actions under way, by demonstrating

the ultimate objectives beyond immediate aims – in other words, universalization as a historical goal of the working class.

(6) He must act as a guardian of the historical ends pursued by the masses, against *all political power* – including the power of mass parties and apparatuses of the working class itself. Since an end is always, in effect, the unity of its means, he must examine the latter in the light of the principle that all means are good if efficacious, *provided* they do not deform the end pursued.

The last task raises a new difficulty. In as much as an intellectual puts himself at the service of a popular movement, he must observe its discipline, and refrain from weakening the organization of the masses. But in as much as he must clarify the practical relationship between means and ends, he can never renounce his critical faculties if he is to preserve the fundamental meaning of the ends pursued by the movement. But this contradiction need not detain us: *it is the natural element of the combatant intellectual*, which he will live *in tension*, with more or less success. All we can say on this subject is that there should be intellectuals associated with the political leadership of popular parties or organizations – in a situation of maximum discipline and minimum criticism. It is equally necessary that there should be intellectuals outside parties, united with the movement as individuals from the outside, in a situation of minimum discipline and maximum criticism. Between these two extremes (we could say, the opposite poles of opportunism and ultra-leftism) there is a marsh of intellectuals shifting from one position to the other, non-party members who nevertheless respect discipline and critical party members who are always on the brink of leaving; through them a sort of osmosis takes the place of antagonisms – one man enters the party as another man leaves. No matter: antagonisms may diminish, but perpetual contradictions and dissensions are the lot of the social group we call intellectuals – all the more so in that a fair number of *false* intellectuals have normally slipped into their ranks, police agents capable of understanding the problems of the intelligentsia. The swarm of disputes that make discord the normal internal statute of the intelligentsia will astonish only those who believe we live in the era of the universal rather than that of universalizing endeavour. What is certain is that thought progresses by contradictions. It should be stressed that

contemporary divergences can become so accentuated that they divide intellectuals very deeply (after a defeat, or during a decline, after the Twentieth Congress or in consequence of the Sino-Soviet split) and that in such cases they usually threaten to weaken both the movement of thought and the popular movement itself. For this reason intellectuals must try to establish, maintain or re-establish an antagonistic unity amongst themselves – in other words, a dialectical consensus that contradictions are necessary and a unitary supersession of opposites is always possible, and that therefore, rather than trying obstinately to convert others to one's own point of view at all costs, intellectuals should seek to create by mutual understanding of conflicting theses the condition for surpassing them.

At this point, we reach the term of our inquiry. We know that an intellectual is an agent of practical knowledge and that his principal contradiction (professional universalism versus class particularism) impels him to join the movement of the under-privileged classes towards universalization, for fundamentally they are moving towards the same goals as himself, whereas the dominant class reduces him to the rank of a means towards a particular end which is *not his own* and which, consequently, he is powerless to criticize.

It remains true that, even so defined, the intellectual has a mandate from no one; suspect to the working class, a traitor to the dominant class, a fugitive from his own class who can yet never wholly escape it, he rediscovers his own contradiction once again, modified and deepened, even within the ranks of popular parties. If he joins one of these parties, he will still be at once solidary and excluded, since he always remains in latent conflict with political authority. Everywhere the intellectual is *unassimilable*. His own class wants no more of him than he of it, but no other class opens to welcome him. How then can we speak of the *function* of an intellectual? Is he not rather *one man too many*, a *defective* product of the middle classes, compelled by his imperfections to live on the fringe of the under-privileged classes without ever becoming part of them? Today, many people from all classes think that the intellectual arrogates functions to himself that do not exist.

In one sense, this is true. The intellectual, indeed, is well aware of it. He cannot ask anyone to legitimize his 'function'. He is a by-product

of our societies, and the contradiction within him between truth and belief, knowledge and history, free thought and authoritarianism, is not the outcome of an intentional praxis but of an internal reaction - that is to say the system of relations between mutually incompatible structures within the synthetic unity of a person.

But on closer inspection we find that the intellectual's contradictions are the contradictions inherent in *each* one of us and in the whole society. Our ends are robbed from all of us - we are all means towards ends which escape us, ends which are fundamentally inhuman; we are all torn between objective thought and ideology. The only difference is that, in general, these contradictions remain at the level of lived experience and find expression either in a straightforward denial of basic needs or in a diffuse dissatisfaction (among the white collar workers of the middle classes, for instance) whose causes are not perceived. This does not mean that people do not suffer from these contradictions - on the contrary, they can die or go mad from them. But in general they lack, for want of technical knowledge, a reflective consciousness of their situation. Yet each of us, though we may not be aware of it, spontaneously strives to achieve this consciousness, which would permit man to reassert his mastery over this savage society that turns him into a monster and a slave. The intellectual, because of his own contradiction, is driven to make this effort for himself, and consequently *for everyone* - and it is this that becomes his *function*. In one sense he is suspect to all, since he is a disputant *from the outset* and thus a potential traitor, but in another sense, he makes an effort to achieve consciousness *for all*. Of course, everyone can repeat the performance afterwards. However, to the extent that he is a situated and historical being, the disclosure he attempts to accomplish is always liable to be limited by re-emergent prejudices, or by confusion of a completed universality with an ongoing universalization, as well as by simple ignorance of history (inadequacy of instruments of research). But (a) he expresses society, not as it will be for a future historian, but as it is now *for itself* - and his degree of ignorance therefore represents the *minimal ignorance* that structures his society; (b) he is not, consequently, infallible - on the contrary he is often mistaken; but his errors, to the extent that they are inevitable, indicate the *minimum* coefficient of mistakes to which under-privileged classes are liable in any historical situation.

Through the intellectual's struggle against his own contradictions inside him and outside him, a historical society gains a perspective – a hesitant, doubtful perspective, conditioned by external circumstances – *on itself*. It attempts to think itself *practically*, that is to say to determine its structures and its ends; in short, to universalize itself on the basis of methods which the intellectual derives from his techniques of knowledge. In a certain sense the intellectual becomes a *guardian of fundamental ends* (the emancipation, universalization and hence humanization of man). But let us be clear on one point: within society, the technician of practical knowledge possesses in his capacity as a subaltern functionary of the superstructures, a certain amount of power. The intellectual, on the other hand, though he springs from this technician, is *powerless*, even if he is linked to the leadership of a party. For at another level this link returns him to the role of a subaltern functionary of the superstructures and, while accepting this role for reasons of discipline, he must also always contest it, by constantly watching over the relationship between means chosen and organic ends. As such, his function can vary from testimony to martyrdom: established power, whatever its complexion, typically seeks to make use of intellectuals as instruments of its propaganda, but it distrusts them and always makes them the first victims of a purge. No matter: as long as he can write and speak, the intellectual must defend the popular classes against the hegemony of the dominant class and against the opportunism of popular apparatuses.

When a society loses its ideology and its system of values as a result of a great upheaval (such as military defeat, or enemy occupation) it often happens that it will – almost without being aware of it – expect its intellectuals to liquidate the old system and recreate a new one. Yet, of course, its intellectuals will not be content simply to replace an outworn ideology with another, just as particularist, that merely facilitates the reconstruction of the same type of society as before. They will attempt to abolish all ideology and to define the *historical ends* of the exploited classes. Thus it comes about that when the dominant class regains the upper hand, as it did in Japan towards 1950, it attacks intellectuals for having failed in their duty – that is to say, for not having *dressed up* the old ideology in order to *adapt* it to the new circumstances (in other words, for not having behaved in conformity with the general idea of a tech-

nician of practical knowledge). At the same time, it may happen that the exploited classes (either because living standards are rising, or because the dominant ideology remains powerful, or because workers temporarily blame intellectuals for their setbacks, or because they need a *pause* in their struggle) condemn the past actions of the intellectual, and relegate him to solitude. But this solitude is his *lot*, since it arises from his own contradictions: he can no more escape from it when he exists in symbiosis with the exploited classes whose *organic* intellectual he can never be, than he can abandon it at the moment of defeat by making false and futile retractions (unless he is to become a pseudo-intellectual). In actual fact, when he is working with the exploited classes, his *apparent* communion does not mean that he is necessarily right, any more than his near-total solitude in moments of retreat mean that he is necessarily wrong. In other words, numbers have nothing to do with the problem. The intellectuals' duty is to live his contradiction *for all* and to surpass it *for all* by his radicalization (in other words, by the application of techniques of truth to lies and illusions). Precisely because of his contradiction, he tends to become a guardian of democracy: he challenges the abstract character of the rights conferred by bourgeois 'democracy', not because he wishes to suppress them, but because he seeks to complete them with the concrete rights of socialist democracy – while preserving, in either form of democracy, the *functional* truth of freedom.

3. IS THE WRITER AN INTELLECTUAL?

I

We have defined the situation of the intellectual in terms of the contradiction within him between practical knowledge (truth, universality) and ideology (particularism). This definition applies to teachers, scientists, doctors, and others. But by this criterion, is the writer an intellectual? On the one hand, he exhibits most of the fundamental characteristics of intellectuality. On the other hand, his social activity as a 'creator' does not *a priori* appear to have universalization or practical knowledge as its end. If beauty can be seen as a particular mode of unveiling the world, the role of *contestation* in a beautiful work of art would seem to be

minimal – indeed, in a certain sense, inversely proportional to its beauty. Moreover, it would appear that excellent writers (e.g. Mistral) can draw their strength from established traditions and ideological particularism. Writers may also oppose the development of theory (in as much as theory interprets the social world and the place they occupy in it) in the name of lived experience (their particular experiences) or of absolute subjectivity (the cult of the Ego; Barrès and the enemy – the barbarians, the engineers – in the *Jardin de Bérénice*). For that matter, is it correct to describe whatever it is that a reader learns from a writer as *knowledge*? And if so, should we not define the writer in terms of his choice of a particularism? But this would prevent the writer from living within the scope of the contradiction that makes someone an intellectual. For while the intellectual vainly seeks integration into society, only to encounter solitude, does not the writer *choose* solitude from the outset? If this were indeed the case, then the writer's sole task would be *his art*. Yet we all know that some writers *are committed* and struggle for universalization alongside or among intellectuals. Is this to be explained by factors external to their art (the historical conjuncture) or is commitment an imperative which, in spite of all we have said above, is somehow inherent in their art? These are the questions we must now examine together.

2

The role, object, means and end of writing have all changed in the course of history. We have no intention of considering the problem here in its generality. We shall confine our observations to the contemporary writer, the *poet* who has declared himself to be a *prose-writer* and lives in the post-World War II world. This is an epoch in which naturalism is no longer readable, realism is questionable, and symbolism has lost its vigour and its modernity. The only firm ground we have as a starting point is that the contemporary writer (1950–70) is a man who has taken *ordinary* language as his material: by ordinary language I mean whatever serves as a vehicle for all the propositions of the members of a single society. Language, we are told, is a means of *self-expression*. We also commonly hear that *expression* is the stock-in-trade of the writer – in other words, he is someone who has *something to say*.

But everyone has *something to say*, from the scientist reporting the

results of his experiments to the traffic policeman reporting an accident. And none of them needs a writer to express it for them. More precisely, such subjects as laws, social structures, mores (anthropology), psychological or metapsychological processes (psychoanalysis), events which have *occurred* and ways of living (history) – none of these constitute what a writer *has to say*. We have all had the experience of meeting someone who says: 'Ah! If only I could tell the story of my life – it would make a novel! You're a writer – I'll tell it to you, and you can write it down.' Here the shoe is on the other foot – the writer becomes aware that the very people who regard him as someone who has something to say, regard him at the same time as someone who has *nothing to say*. In effect, people find it quite natural to tell us the story of their life because they think the *important* thing (both for them and for us) is that we possess (in varying degrees) the technique of narrative, and that we can take the content of our story from anywhere. This is an opinion often shared by critics. For example, those who said 'Victor Hugo is a form in search of a content' forgot that a form demands certain types of content and excludes others.

3

What seems to justify this point of view is that for the purposes of his art the writer can only rely on ordinary language. Usually, as it happens, a man who has *something to say* chooses the means of communication that will transmit a maximum of information and a minimum of *misinformation*. An example of such a means of communication is a technical language: it is conventional and specialized; new words are introduced corresponding to precise definitions; its code is, as far as possible, protected from the distorting influences of history. The language of ethnologists is a good case in point. Now ordinary language (which acts, incidentally, as the basis for a large number of technical languages, leaving a certain imprint of imprecision on all of them) contains a maximum of *misinformation*. That is to say, since such elements as words or rules of syntax mutually condition each other and have no reality other than through their interrelations, to speak is in fact to recreate the entire language as a conventional, structured and *particular* ensemble. At this level, its particularities do not represent a body of information about the

object the writer is discussing; although they can become a body of information about the language – for the purposes of a linguist. But at the level of signification they are either simply superfluous or positively harmful – because of their ambiguity, because of the very limits of the language viewed as a structured totality, because of the variety of meanings that history has imposed on them. In short, the *word* the writer uses possesses a much denser *materiality* than, for instance, the mathematician's symbols, which effaces itself before its signified. One might say that the *word* tends both to point vaguely in the direction of the signified and to impose itself as a *presence*, drawing the reader's attention to its own density. This is why it has been possible for people to say that to name something means both to *present* the signified and to kill or bury it in the mass of the word.

The words in ordinary language are at one and the same time *too rich* (they largely overflow their concept, because of their long existence, the combination of shocks and rites which make up their 'memory' or 'living past') and *too poor* (they are defined in relation to the whole of the language as a fixed determination of it, rather than as a supple possibility of expressing something new). In the exact sciences, when a new phenomenon is discovered, a word to name it is simultaneously invented by a few and rapidly adopted by all in the scientific community – entropy, complex numbers, transfinity, tensors, cybernetics, or operational calculus. But even though it sometimes happens that a writer feels called upon to invent a word, in general he rarely makes use of this procedure in order to transmit a knowledge or register an emotion. He prefers to utilize a 'current' word and charge it with a new meaning that becomes superadded to its old ones – one might say that he has vowed to utilize the *whole* of ordinary language and nothing but ordinary language, with all the misinformative features that hamper it. If then the writer adopts ordinary language, he does so not simply as a means for transmitting knowledge, but also as a means for *not* transmitting it. Writing means both possessing language ('The Japanese naturalists', a critic said, '*conquered* prose from poetry') and not possessing it, in so far as language is something *other* than the writer and *other* than men. A specialist language is the conscious creation of the specialists who use it; its conventional character is the outcome of synchronic and diachronic *agreements* estab-

lished between themselves. For example, a phenomenon is often named, at the beginning, by two or more words, but with the passing of time, one of them becomes dominant and the others drop away. In this sense, the young student of the discipline in question is led tacitly to accede to these agreements as well. He simultaneously learns the thing, and the word that designates it, and he thereby becomes, as a collective subject, *master of his technical language*. The writer, on the contrary, knows that ordinary language is developed by men who speak *without agreement* with each other. Conventions are established through the activities of these men, but in so far as the groups they constitute are *other* for each other and thus other than themselves, and in so far as the whole of language develops in an apparently autonomous fashion as a materiality which mediates between men to the extent that men are mediators between its different aspects (a materiality I have elsewhere called *practico-inert*). Now the writer is interested in this materiality in so far as it seems to possess a life of its own and eludes him, in common with all the other speakers of the language. In French there are two genders – masculine and feminine – which can only be understood in terms of each other. Now as it happens, these two genders designate not only men and women, but in addition – in each case, via a long history – objects which in themselves are neither masculine nor feminine but neuter. In these cases a sexual dichotomy is devoid of conceptual significance. It becomes positively *misinformative* when it goes so far as to reverse genders, so that a feminine gender applies to men and a masculine gender to women. One of the greatest of modern writers, Jean Genet, delighted in such phrases as this: ‘Les brûlantes amours de la sentinelle et du mannequin.’* The word *amour* is masculine in the singular and feminine in the plural; *la sentinelle* is a man, and *le mannequin* is a woman. Of course this sentence transmits an item of information: a certain soldier and a woman from the world of fashion-parades love each other passionately. But it transmits this information in such a bizarre way that it can be said to be deformed as well: the man is feminized and the woman masculinized. Let us say

*Translator’s note: Literally: ‘the ardent passion the sentry and model feel for each other’. The point of the sentence is that the word *sentinelle* (a masculine concept) is grammatically feminine and the word *mannequin* (a feminine concept) is grammatically masculine.

that the sentence is eroded by a falsely informative materiality. To sum up, it is a *writer's sentence*, in which the information is invented in such a way that the pseudo-information is richer than it.

It was on the strength of this that Roland Barthes made his distinction between *écrivants* and *écrivains* – ‘literal writers’ and ‘literary writers’. The literal writer uses language to transmit information. The literary writer is a custodian of ordinary language, but he goes beyond it, for his material is language as non-significance or misinformation. He is an artisan who produces a certain verbal object by working on the materiality of words; for him, meaning is the means and non-meaning the end.

Coming back to our first description, we can say that the prose-writer has *something to say*, but that this something is nothing *sayable*, nothing conceptual or conceptualizable, nothing that signifies. We do not yet know what this something is nor whether, in the writer's quest for it, he must make an effort towards universalization. All we know is that this object is formed by his work on the particularities of a historical and national language. The object thus formed will be: (1) a concatenation of significations which control each other (for example, a *story* that is being told); (2) and yet, viewed as a totality, other and more than this: the wealth of non-signifying elements and of misinformation closes back, as it were, on the order of significations.

If to write is to *communicate*, the literary object appears as a form of communication *beyond language* – a form of communication that rests on the non-signifying silence enclosed by the words (though also produced by them). Thus the phrase: ‘this is just literature’ typically means: ‘you speak in order to say nothing’. It remains to ask ourselves what this *nothing is*, this silent non-knowledge that the literary object has to communicate to the reader. The only way to reach an answer is to go back from the *signifying content* of literary works to the fundamental silence which surrounds them.

4

The signifying content of a literary work may refer to the *objective* world (by this I mean both society, the social ensemble of the Rougon-Macquart, and the objectified universe of inter-subjectivity, as in Racine or Proust

or Nathalie Sarraute) or to the *subjective* world (here it is no longer a question of analysis nor of distanciation, but of complicit adhesion, as in *The Naked Lunch* by Burroughs). In each of the two cases the content, taken on its own, is abstract in the original sense of the word, that is to say it is cut off from the conditions which would be necessary to make it an object capable of existing on its own.

Let us consider the first case. Whether the work attempts to disclose the social world *as it really is* or to demonstrate the inter-psychology of various groups, it must be assumed – if we merely consider the set of significations it proposes – that the author enjoys a complete *overview* of his object. The writer thus appears to possess a consciousness similar in type to a ‘bird’s-eye view’: desituated, he glides above the world. To know the social world is to claim to be exempt from its conditioning; to know the domain of inter-subjective psychology is to claim to be exempt as a writer from psychological conditioning. Now it goes without saying that the novelist can never make such a claim: Zola saw the *world-that-Zola-saw*. Not that what he saw was pure subjective illusion – naturalism in France drew from the sciences of the time and Zola was, moreover, a remarkable observer. But what reveals Zola in his writings is a point of view, an atmosphere, a particular selection of details, a narrative technique, a certain rhythm of episodes. Thibaudet called Zola an *epic* writer, and there is a considerable element of truth in this. But he should also be called a *mythic* writer, because his characters are frequently myths as well. Nana, for example, is in part the daughter of Gervaise, the girl who went on to become one of the great prostitutes of the Second Empire, but she is above all a myth – the *femme fatale* who starts life as a luckless child in the down-trodden proletariat and avenges her class on the males of the dominant class. It would be interesting to go through Zola’s works and catalogue his obsessions – sexual and other – as well as to trace his diffuse feeling of guilt.

Besides, it would be difficult for anyone who had studied Zola not to *recognize* him if he were given a chapter to read from one of his works without being told the name of the author. But recognition is not the same as cognition. We read the epic-mythical description of the exhibition of linen-wares in *Au Bonheur des Dames* and we say: ‘This is Zola!’ for in it Zola is patent – recognized but unknowable, because he had no

knowledge of himself. Zola was a product of the society he described and observed it with the eyes it had given him. Was this author totally unaware of the fact that he put *himself* in his books? Of course not: had the naturalist writer not wanted readers to recognize and admire him, he would have abandoned literature for scientific pursuits. The most objective of writers will always strive to be an invisible but *felt* presence in his books: he seeks to be present in them and moreover he cannot help but be so.

Conversely, those who write their fantasies in perfect complicity with themselves necessarily deliver the presence of the world to us – precisely in so far as this world conditions them, and their place in society partially explains their style of writing. It is just when they are most in harmony with themselves, that they can readily be seen as a particularization of bourgeois idealism and individualism. Why is this so? Well, it so happens that the exact sciences, and anthropology in particular, cannot offer us an exact account of what we are. Everything they state is true – the facts cannot be otherwise – but the scientific attitude presupposes a certain *distance* between knowledge and its object. This is a valid assumption in the natural sciences (macrophysics) and in anthropology, to the extent that the scientist can situate himself in a relationship of exteriority to the object under study (ethnographic material, primitive societies, quantifiable social structures, statistical patterns of behaviour, etc.). But the assumption is no longer valid in microphysics, where the experimenter is objectively part of the experiment. And this particular condition refers us back to a capital feature of human existence, which Merleau-Ponty termed our *insertion in the world* and I have called our *particularity*. Merleau-Ponty went on to say: we have the capacity to see because we are visible. What this comes down to is the proposition that we can only see the world *in front of us* because it has *constituted* us from behind as *visual* beings, who are therefore necessarily also *visible* beings. In fact there is a fundamental link between our own being (the multiple determinations that we have to exist) and the being in front of us, that is there to be seen. The apparition that is constituted in a world that produces me by assigning me through the banal singularity of my birth to a *unique adventure*, while at the same time conferring on me by my situation (the son of a man, of a petty-bourgeois intellectual, of such and such a family) a

general destiny (a class destiny, a family destiny, an historical destiny), is none other than what I call *being-in-the-world* or the *singular universal*. This apparition is fated to expire in a universe which I interiorize by my very project to wrest myself free of it, an interiorization of the exterior accomplished by the very moment in which I exteriorize my interiority. This can be put in yet another way: I, as a part of an ongoing totalization, am the product of this totalization and thereby express it entirely; but I can only express it by turning myself into a totalizer, that is to say by grasping the world in front of me in a practical disclosure. This is the explanation for the fact that Racine reproduces his society (his epoch, its institutions, his family, his class, etc.) by disclosing and producing *intersubjectivity* in his works; and for the fact that Gide reveals the world that both produces and conditions him in his advice to Nathanael, or in the most intimate pages of his journal. The writer is not a special case: he too cannot escape his insertion in the world, and his writings are the very type of a singular universal. Whatever their category, literary works always have two complementary facets: the historical singularity of their being, and the universality of their aims – or vice versa, the universality of their being and the singularity of their aims. A book is necessarily a part of the world, through which the totality of the world is *made manifest*, although without ever being fully disclosed.

This perpetually dual character of a literary work is what constitutes its richness, its ambiguity and its limitations. This duality was not explicitly apparent to classical or naturalist writers, although they were not entirely unaware of it. Today it is clear that it is not simply a passive determination of the literary work; for the latter can have no other end than to exist on both planes at once, because its very structure as a singular universal prevents any possibility of positing a unilateral end. The writer utilizes language in order to produce a two fold object which testifies, in its being and in its end, both to its singular universality and to its universalizing singularity.

However we must be quite clear here. I know or can find out that I am determined universally; I know or can find out that I am part of an ongoing totalization that is totalized, and that my slightest gesture will retotalize it. Certain human sciences – marxism, sociology, psycho-analysis – provide me with the tools I need in order to know my *place* and the

general lines of my development. These are the facts in my own case. I am a petty-bourgeois, the son of a naval officer. I was fatherless. One of my grandfathers was a doctor and the other a teacher. I was fed bourgeois culture such as it was spooned out between the years 1915 and 1929, when my studies officially came to a close. These facts, linked to certain objective data of my childhood, endowed me with a predisposition towards a certain neurotic reaction. If I examine this ensemble in the light of anthropology, I shall acquire a certain type of knowledge about myself which, far from being useless to the writer, is *indispensable* today to deepen and develop literature. But it is indispensable in order to illuminate the literary option proper, to situate it externally, and to clarify the writer's relationship with the world in front of him. But no matter how precious it may be, knowledge of myself and of others in our pure objectivity does not constitute the fundamental object of literature, since such knowledge represents universality *without* the singular. Nor, conversely, is the literary object created by a total complicity with fantasies. What constitutes the object of literature is being-in-the-world – not in so far as it is treated externally, but in so far as it is *lived* by the writer. For this reason literature, though it must today rest more and more on universal scientific knowledge, is not concerned with transmitting items of information from any given sector of that knowledge. Its subject is the unity of the world, a unity that is ceaselessly called into question by the twofold movement of interiorization and exteriorization or, if you like, by the impossibility of the part being anything other than determined by the whole or of merging with the whole that it negates by the very determination (*omnis determinatio est negatio*) that is conferred on it by the whole. The distinction we make between the world in front and the world behind should not blind us to the fact that the two are continuous – they make but one. Flaubert's hatred of the bourgeoisie was his way of exteriorizing the interiorization of his *bourgeois-being*. The 'fold in the world' of which Merleau-Ponty used to speak is today the only possible object for literature. The writer will restore, for example, a landscape, a street scene, an event:

(1) In so far as these singularities are embodiments of the whole, which is the world;

(2) Simultaneously, in so far as the way in which he expresses them

testifies to the fact that he is himself a separate embodiment of the same whole (the world interiorized);

(3) In so far as this insurmountable duality reveals a rigorous unity that haunts the object produced without ever being *visible* in it. In effect, the individual was originally this unity, but his existence destroys it as a unity to the very extent that it manifests it. Since even the destruction of this existence would not restore it, the writer is better advised to try to make it felt in the ambiguity of his work, as the impossible unity of a suggested duality.

If such is in fact the aim of the modern writer – whether or not he is conscious of it – then a number of consequences for his works will follow:

(1) First of all, it is true that fundamentally the writer has *nothing* to say. We should understand by this that his basic aim is not to communicate *knowledge*.

(2) But he *communicates*, all the same. For he presents the human condition in the form of an object (the work) such that it can be grasped in its most radical depth (being-in-the-world).

(3) But this being-in-the-world is not presented in the same way as I am referring to it here, by verbal approximations that still strive towards universality (for I describe it in so far as it is the mode of being of all men – which could be expressed by saying: man is the son of man). The writer can testify only to his own being-in-the-world, by producing an ambiguous object which suggests it allusively. Thus the real relationship between reader and writer remains non-knowledge: when reading a writer's work, the reader is referred back indirectly to his own reality as a singular universal. He realizes himself – both because he enters into the book and does not completely enter into it – as another part of the same whole, as another view-point of the world on itself.

(4) If the writer has *nothing* to say, it is because he must present *everything* – in other words, the singular and practical relationship of the part to the whole which is being-in-the-world; the literary object must testify to the paradox of man in the world, not by providing information about men in general (which would make the author no more than an amateur psychologist or sociologist) but by simultaneously objectifying and subjectifying being-in-the-world – being-in-*this*-world – as a

constitutive and unsayable relationship between everyone and everything, and between each man and all others.

(5) If the work of art has all the characteristics of a singular universal, everything happens as if the author had taken the paradox of his human condition as a *means*, and the objectification of this condition *in the midst of the world* as an *end*. Thus beauty today is nothing other than the human condition presented not as facticity but as the product of a creative freedom (that of the author). And, to the extent that this creative freedom aims at communication, it addresses itself to the creative freedom of the reader and solicits him to recompose the work by reading it (for reading, too, is creation); in other words, it invites him freely to grasp his own being-in-the-world as if it were the product of his freedom – as if he were the responsible author of his being-in-the-world even while suffering it, or if you like, as if he was the world incarnated in liberty.

Thus the literary work of art cannot be life addressing itself directly to life and seeking to realize – by emotion, sexual desire and so on – a symbiosis between writer and reader. On the contrary, by addressing itself to freedom, it invites the reader to assume responsibility for his own life (but not for the circumstances which modify it and can make it intolerable). It does so not by edifying but, on the contrary, by demanding an aesthetic effort to recompose it as the paradoxical unity of singularity and universality.

(6) We can now understand that the total unity of the *recomposed* work of art is silence – that is to say, the free incarnation, through words and beyond words, of being-in-the-world as non-knowledge folding back over a partial but universalizing knowledge. It remains to ask ourselves how the author can engender an underlying non-knowledge – the object of his book – by means of significations; in other words, how he can fashion silence with words.

It is here that we can see why the writer is a specialist in ordinary language, that is to say the language that contains the greatest quantity of *misinformation*. In the first place, words have two aspects as *being-in-the-world*. On the one hand they are objects that have been sacrificed: for they are always surpassed towards their significations, which – once understood – become in their turn polyvalent verbal schemas which can be expressed in a hundred different ways, hence with other words. On

the other hand, they are material realities: in this sense they possess an objective structure which imposes itself and can always affirm itself at the expense of meaning. The words 'frog' and 'ox' have sonorous and visual values: they are presences. As such, they contain an important quotient of non-knowledge. Much more so than mathematical symbols. The expression 'The frog that wants to become as big as an ox'* contains, in an inextricable blend between materiality and meaning, much more corporeal density than the expression ' $x \rightarrow y$ '. The writer chooses to use ordinary language not *in spite of* this material weight but *because of it*. His art lies in his ability to attract the reader's attention to the materiality of any given word, even while conveying as exactly as possible a meaning through it, so that the object signified is at once beyond the word and yet incarnated in its materiality. Not that the word 'frog' bears any resemblance whatever to the animal itself. But *precisely for this reason*, the word should produce for the reader the pure and inexplicable material presence of a frog.

No element of language can be invoked without the whole of language foregathering behind it, in all its riches and restrictions. In this sense ordinary language differs from technical languages, of which each relevant specialist may feel himself co-author, since they are the object of intentional conventions. Ordinary language, on the contrary, imposes itself on me in its entirety in as much as I am *other* than myself and in as much as it is the conventional but involuntary product of each man as *other than himself* through and for others. To explain: in a market situation, I hope for my own good that the price of a certain commodity will be as low as possible; but the very fact of my subjective demand for it has the effect of raising its price: since for the sellers who supply it, I am *an other*, like all the others and, as such, I act in opposition to my own interests. It is the same in the case of the common language: I speak it and, in the same breath, I am, as an other, spoken by it. Needless to say, these two facts are simultaneous and dialectically linked. No sooner have I said: 'Good morning, how are you?' than already I no longer know whether I am making use of language or whether language is making use of me. I use it – I wanted to greet a particular man that I am pleased to see again; it uses me – all I have done is re-actualize (with a particular intonation, it is

*Translator's note: A phrase taken from one of La Fontaine's fables.

true) a commonplace of discourse that is affirmed through me. From this moment, the whole of the language comes into play; in the conversation that follows, I will see my intentions deflected, limited, betrayed and enriched by an articulated ensemble of morphemes. In this way language, a strange bonding device, unites me *as other* to an other *in his capacity as an other* to the very extent that it unites the two of us in so far as we are *the same* – that is to say, subjects communicating intentionally with each other.

Far from attempting to suppress this paradoxical situation, the writer seeks to exploit it to the maximum and to make his *being-in-language* the expression of his *being-in-the-world*. He employs phrases for their value as agents of ambiguity, as a way of 'presenting' the structured whole of language; he plays on the plurality of meanings; he uses the history of words and of syntax to overcharge them with unusual secondary meanings. So far from trying to struggle against the limitations of his language, he uses it in such a way as to make his work virtually incommunicable to all but his compatriots, accentuating its national particularism at the very moment that he suggests universal meanings. But to the extent that he makes the non-significant the proper matter of his art, he does not produce mere absurd word-games (though a passion for puns, as can be seen from the case of Flaubert, is not a bad preparation for a literary career), but aims instead to present obscured significations as they are filtered through his being-in-the-world. His *style*, in effect, communicates no knowledge: it produces the singular universal by showing simultaneously language as a generality that produces and wholly conditions the writer in his facticity, and the writer as an adventurer, turning back on his language, and assuming its follies and ambiguities in order to give witness to his practical singularity and imprison his relationship with the world, as lived experience, in the material presence of words. Take the sentence: 'the self is hateful: you, Miton, can cover it, but you can never remove it'.* The meaning in this sentence is universal, but the reader masters it through its abrupt non-signifying singularity, its style, which henceforth will attach itself so closely to it that he will not be able to think the idea other than through this singularization – in other words, other than through Pascal thinking it. Style is the whole of language

* Translator's note: A passage from Pascal's *Pensées*.

surveying itself, by virtue of the mediation of the writer, from the perspective of singularity. It is no more, of course, than a means – though a fundamental means – of presenting being-in-the-world. There are a hundred others, all of which should be used simultaneously, and which deliver the writer's *style of living* (supple or hard, a devastating vivacity of attack or, on the contrary, a slow start, careful preparations, leading up to brusque compressions). Everyone knows what I am talking about here – all those characteristics which conjure up so much of a man that we can virtually feel his breath, *without giving us any knowledge of him*.

(7) This fundamental way of using language cannot even be attempted if the writer does not simultaneously seek to convey meanings. Without meaning, there can be no ambiguity, and the object does not come to dwell in the word. How else could we speak of ellipses? Ellipses of what? The essential task of the modern writer is to work on the non-signifying element of ordinary language to enable the reader to discover the being-in-the-world of a singular universal. I propose to call this task a search for *significance* (*sens*). Such a significance is the presence of the totality in the part. The style of a writer lies in this respect in his interiorization of exteriority; within any singular effort to surpass conditions towards meanings, it is what might be called the *flavour* of the epoch or the *taste* of the historical moment, as they appear to an individual singularly formed by the same history.

But although style is fundamental, it remains in the background since all it figures is the writer's insertion in the world. Much more prominent is the signifying ensemble that corresponds to the world in front of him, such as it appears in its universality from a viewpoint conditioned by the world behind him. Yet the meanings of words are nothing more than quasi-meanings, and taken together they constitute no more than a quasi-knowledge. For firstly, they are chosen as means of significance and are rooted in it (in other words, they arise from style, are expressed by style, and, as such, are dimmed by their origin); while secondly, they seem to have been cut out of the universal by a singularity (thus they comprise, in themselves, the unity and explosive contradiction of the singular and the universal). Everything presented in a novel can be given an appearance of universality, but the appearance is a counterfeit which

belies itself and is belied by the rest of the book. Akinari, in *Le Rendez-vous aux Chrysanthèmes*, begins in these terms: 'The inconstant person establishes relationships easily, but they are only of short duration; the inconstant person, once he has broken with you, will never inquire after you again.' Here we would seem to have a series of universal propositions. But within *the story* this universality is counterfeit. To start with, two tautological judgements provide us with a definition – one that we already *knew* – of inconstancy. But what is their role here, since the story is not about inconstancy but, on the contrary about a marvellous constancy? The sentences thus refer us back to Akinari's singularity. Why did he choose this phrase? It occurred in the Chinese story which he used as his inspiration, though he altered the tale totally. Did he leave the phrase in by accident? Or to give a clear indication of his source? Or to surprise the reader by suggesting that it was inconstancy that prevented a friend from appearing at a rendezvous, and then later revealing his incomparable fidelity? Anyway, the phrase is indirectly problematical and its universal object is contradicted by the singularity of the reasons why the writer included it. Style constitutes the expression of our invisible conditioning by the world behind us, and meanings constitute the practical efforts of an author thus conditioned to attain *through this conditioning* the elements of the world in front of him.

(8) These few observations, in effect confirm that a literary work today is faced with the task of simultaneously demonstrating the twin facets of being-in-the-world. It must constitute itself a self-disclosure of the world through the mediation of a singular part produced by it, such that the universal is everywhere presented as the generator of singularity, and singularity as the enveloping curve and invisible limit of universality. In a literary work, objectivity should be discerned on every page as the fundamental structure of the subjective and, conversely, subjectivity should everywhere be visible as the impenetrability of the objective.

If the work has this dual intention, it matters little what formal structure it assumes. It may, as in the case of Kafka, appear as an objective and mysterious narrative, a sort of symbolism without symbols and or anything precisely being symbolized, in which metaphors never indirectly convey information, but the writing constantly indicates those modes of being-in-the-world that are lived as indecipherable. It may, as in Aragon's

later novels, take shape as a work in which the author openly intervenes in his narrative in order to limit its universality at the very moment when he appears to want to extend it. Or again, it may quite simply assume the guise, as in Proust, of a work in which a fictitious character – sibling of the narrator – intervenes in the story as judge and protagonist, instigator and witness of the whole adventure. The relation between the singular and the universal can equally be captured in a hundred other ways (Robbe-Grillet, Butor, Pinget, etc.). None of these forms has any precedence over the others – their choice depends on the enterprise in question. To claim the contrary is to lapse *both* into formalism (the universalization of a form that can only exist as *one* expression of a *singular* universal: for example, the *vous* in *La Modification** is valid only in its context – but there it is perfectly valid) and into reism (the conversion of a form into a *thing*, an etiquette, a ritual, whereas it is simply the inner unity of a content).

On the other hand, no work is valid unless it accounts, in the mode of non-knowledge, or lived experience, for *everything*: that is to say, the social past and the historical conjuncture, in so far as they are *lived* without being *known*. It follows that the singular is visible only as the non-signifying particularization of membership in a community and its objective structures. Conversely the quasi-meanings suggested by a work have significance (*sens*) as objective structures of the social, only if they appear to be concrete because lived from a particular anchorage. An objective universal will never be attained by a work of literature: but it remains the horizon of an effort of universalization which is born from singularity and preserves it while negating it.

The literary work must therefore appertain to the whole epoch, in other words to the situation of the author in the social world, and on the basis of this singular insertion, to the entire social whole – in so far as this insertion renders the author, like any other man, a being *concretely* in question in his being, who *lives* his insertion into the world in the form of alienation, reification, frustration, want, solitude, against a *suspected* background of possible plenitude. The totalization accomplished by the literary work is itself, at the same time, historically particularized as a simple moment of a wider on-going totalization. A writer today can only

* Translator's note: Michel Butor: *La Modification*.

live his being-in-the-world in the specific form of a being-in-*one*-world. In other words, he cannot avoid being affected in his life by the contradictions of the whole planet (such as the contradiction between atomic war and people's war, with its permanent reminder of man's capacity today either to destroy the human species, or to advance towards socialism). Any writer who did not attempt to render the world of the atomic bomb and space flights, in so far as he has experienced it in obscurity, impotence, and disquiet, would be recounting an abstract world, not that in which we live; he would be a mere entertainer or charlatan. The precise form in which such an insertion into the present world conjuncture is conveyed is of little importance: a vague anguish drifting from page to page is enough to demonstrate the existence of the bomb. There is no need whatever to speak openly of nuclear weapons. The totalization of a writer, on the contrary, occurs in the domain of non-knowledge; conversely, in so far as life is the ultimate foundation of everything and the radical negation of anything that threatens it, such a totalization is not passively interiorized but appropriated from the viewpoint of the unique importance of life. The ambivalence which underlies any literary work was well captured by Malraux in his dictum, 'A life is worth nothing - and nothing is worth a life.' The phrase succinctly combines the viewpoint of the world behind us (producing and crushing each life with indifference) and the viewpoint of each singularity which flings itself against death and affirms itself in its autonomy.

The commitment of the writer is to communicate the incommunicable (being-in-the-world as lived experience) by exploiting the misinformation contained in ordinary language, and maintaining the tension between the whole and the part, totality and totalization, the world and being-in-the-world, as the *significance* of his work. *In his professional capacity itself*, the writer is necessarily always at grips with the contradiction between the particular and the universal. Whereas other intellectuals see their function arise from a contradiction between the universalist demands of their profession and the particularist demands of the dominant class, the inner task of the writer is to remain on the plane of lived experience while suggesting *universalization* as the affirmation of life on its *horizon*. In this sense, the writer is not an intellectual *accidentally*, like others, but *essentially*. Precisely for this reason, the literary

work itself demands that he situate himself *outside it*, on the theoretical-practical plane where other intellectuals are already to be found. For this work is both a restitution, on the plane of non-knowledge, of the experience of being in a world which crushes us, and a lived affirmation that life is an absolute value and an appeal for freedom addressed to all other men.