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Dallas W. Smythe
COMMUNICATIONS: BLINDSPOT OF WESTERN MARXISM

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ARENDT ON POLITICS AND TRUTH

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THE INTELLECTUAL LIFE

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The editors deeply regret to learn of the death of Professor Katherine George, Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Winnipeg. As an advisory editor of the Journal, Professor George made an invaluable contribution to the early intellectual development of the review.


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COMMUNICATIONS: BLINDSPOT OF WESTERN MARXISM

Dallas W. Smythe

The argument presented here — that western Marxist analyses have neglected the economic and political significance of mass communications systems — is an attempt to start a debate, not to conclude one. Frequently, Marxists and those radical social critics who use Marxist terminology locate the significance of mass communications systems in their capacity to produce "ideology" which is held to act as a sort of invisible glue that holds together the capitalist system. This subjective substance, divorced from historical materiality, is similar to such previous concepts as "ether"; that is to say, the proof of its existence is found by such writers to be the necessity for it to exist so that certain other phenomena may be explained. It is thus an idealist, pre-scientific rather than a non-scientific explanation.

But for Marxists, such an explanatory notion should be unsatisfactory. The first question that historical materialists should ask about mass communications systems is what economic function do they serve, attempting to understand their role in the reproduction of capitalist relations of production. This article, then, poses this question and attempts to frame some answers to it. Much of what follows is contentious because it raises questions not only about changes in capitalism since Marx's death but also, in some instances, about the adequacy of certain generally accepted Marxist categories to account properly for these developments. However, as Lenin remarked in a different context, one cannot make an omelette without breaking the eggs.

The mass media of communications and related institutions concerned with advertising, market research, public relations and product and package design represent a blindspot in Marxist theory in the European and Atlantic basin cultures. The activities of these institutions are intimately connected with consumer consciousness, needs, leisure time use, commodity fetishism, work and alienation. As we will see, when these institutions are examined from a materialist point of view, the labour theory of value, the expenses of circulation, the value of the "peculiar commodity" (labor power), the form of the proletariat and the class struggle under monopoly capitalist conditions are also deeply involved. The literature of Marxism is conspicuously lacking in materialist analysis of the functions of the complex of institutions called the "consciousness industry".1
The blockage in recognizing the role of the consciousness industry traces back to a failure to take a materialist approach to communications. Both economic goods in general and communications goods in particular existed long before capitalism and monopoly capitalism. While specialized institutions for the mass production of communications (i.e. newspapers and magazines) appeared in capitalism in the eighteenth century, these institutions did not reach their mature form until monopoly capitalism shifted their principal economic base to advertising in the late nineteenth century. By a grave cultural lag, Marxist theory has not taken account of mass communications. This lag in considering the product of the mass media is more understandable in European (including Eastern European) countries than in North America. There the rise to ascendancy of advertising in dominating the policy of newspapers and periodicals was delayed by custom and by law. Even in the radio-TV broadcast media, the role of the state (through ORTF, BBC, ITV, East European state monopolies, etc.) has been resistant to the inroads of monopoly capitalism — as compared with the United States and Canada. But the evidence accumulates (recent developments in British, French, West German and Italian mass media, for example) that such traditional resistance is giving way under the onslaught of pressures from the centre of the monopoly capitalist system. Europeans reading this essay should try to perceive it as reflecting the North American scene today, and perhaps theirs soon.

At the root of a Marxist view of capitalism is the necessity to seek an objective reality which means in this case an objective definition of the commodity produced by capitalism. What is the commodity form of mass-produced, advertiser-supported communications? This is the threshold question. The bourgeois idealist view of the reality of the communication commodity is "messages", "information", "images", "meaning", "entertainment", "orientation", "education", and "manipulation". All of these concepts are subjective mental entities and all deal with superficial appearances. Nowhere do the theorists who adopt this worldview deal with the commodity form of mass communications under monopoly capitalism on which exist parasitically a host of sub-markets dealing with cultural industry, e.g., the markets for "news" and "entertainment". Tacitly, this idealist theory of the communications commodity appears to have been held by most western Marxists after Marx as well as by bourgeois theorists: Lenin², Veblen, Marcuse, Adorno, Baran and Sweezy, for example, as well as Galbraith and orthodox economists. So too for those who take a more or less Marxist view of communications (Nordenstreng, Enzensberger, Hamelink, Schiller³, Burdock and Golding⁴ and me until now) as well as the conventional writers exemplified in the Sage Annual Review of Communications Research⁵. Also included in the idealist camp are those apologists who dissolve the reality of communications under
the appearance of the “medium”, such as Marshall McLuhan. No wonder, as Livant says, that “the field of communications is a jungle of idealism”.7

I submit that the materialist answer to the question — What is the commodity form of mass-produced, advertiser-supported communications under monopoly capitalism? — is audiences and readerships (hereafter referred to for simplicity as audiences). The material reality under monopoly capitalism is that all non-sleeping time of most of the population is work time. This work time is devoted to the production of commodities-in-general (both where people get paid for their work and as members of audiences) and in the production and reproduction of labour power (the pay for which is subsumed in their income). Of the off-the-job work time, the largest single block is time of the audiences which is sold to advertisers. It is not sold by workers but by the mass media of communications. Who produces this commodity? The mass media of communications do by the mix of explicit and hidden advertising and “programme” material, the markets for which preoccupy the bourgeois communication theorists. But although the mass media play the leading role on the production side of the consciousness industry, the people in the audiences pay directly much more for the privilege of being in those audiences than do the mass media. In Canada in 1975 audience members bore directly about three times as large a cost as did the broadcasters and cable TV operators, combined.

In “their” time which is sold to advertisers workers (a) perform essential marketing functions for the producers of consumers’ goods, and (b) work at the production and reproduction of labour power. This joint process, as shall be noted, embodies a principal contradiction. If this analytical sketch is valid, serious problems for Marxist theory emerge. Among them is the apparent fact that while the superstructure is not ordinarily thought of as being itself engaged in infrastructural productive activity, the mass media of communications are simultaneously in the superstructure and engaged indispensably in the last stage of infrastructural production where demand is produced and satisfied by purchases of consumer goods. Chairman Mao Tse-Tung provided the Marxist theoretical basis for such a development as that which created the contemporary capitalist mass media when he said:

When the superstructure (politics, culture, etc.) obstructs the development of the economic base, political and cultural changes become principal and decisive.10

The basic entry to the analysis of the commodity form of communications is acceptance of the significance of the concept of monopoly in monopoly
capitalism. Baran and Sweezy's *Monopoly Capitalism* \(^{11}\) demonstrated how monopoly rather than competition rules contemporary capitalism, and it may be taken as the reference point from which to address this issue. Like J.K. Galbraith\(^{12}\), Baran and Sweezy emphasize the role of management of demand by the oligopolies which dominate monopoly capitalism. Both civilian and military demand are managed to provide the consumption and investment outlets required for the realization of a rising surplus. The process of demand management begins and ends with the market for the commodity — first as "test markets", and, when product and package production have been suitably designed and executed, as mass advertising-marketing. But Baran and Sweezy fail to pursue in an historical materialist way the obvious issues which are raised by demand-management-via-advertising under monopoly capitalism.

What happens when a monopoly capitalist system advertises? Baran and Sweezy answer, as does Galbraith, psychological manipulation. They cite Chamberlin as providing in 1931 the authoritative definition of contemporary advertising.\(^{13}\) Moreover, they somewhat prematurely foreclose further investigation by stating flatly: "The immediate commercial purposes and effects of advertising have been thoroughly analyzed in economic literature and are readily grasped."\(^{14}\) The mass media of communications possess no black box from which the magic of psychological manipulation is dispensed. Neither bourgeois nor Marxist economists have considered it worthwhile to ask the following questions which an historical materialist approach would seem to indicate:

(a) What do advertisers buy with their advertising expenditures? As hard-nosed businessmen they are not paying for advertising for nothing, nor from altruism. I suggest that what they buy are the services of audiences with predictable specifications who will pay attention in predictable numbers and at particular times to particular means of communication (TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, billboards, and third-class mail).\(^{15}\) As collectivities these audiences are commodities. As commodities they are dealt with in markets by producers and buyers (the latter being advertisers). Such markets establish prices in the familiar mode of monopoly capitalism. Both these markets and the audience commodities traded in are specialized. The audience commodities bear specifications known in the business as "the demographics". The specifications for the audience commodities include age, sex, income level, family composition, urban or rural location, ethnic character, ownership of home, automobile, credit card status, social class and, in the case of hobby and fan magazines, a dedication to photography, model electric trains, sports cars, philately, do-it-yourself crafts, foreign travel, kinky sex, etc.

(b) How are advertisers assured that they are getting what they pay for when they buy audiences? A sub-industry sector of the consciousness industry checks to determine. The socio-economic characteristics of the delivered
AUDIENCE/READERSHIP and its size are the business of A.C. Nielsen and a host of competitors who specialize in rapid assessment of the delivered audience commodity. The behaviour of the members of the audience product under the impact of advertising and the "editorial" content is the object of market research by a large number of independent market research agencies as well as by similar staffs located in advertising agencies, the advertising corporation and in media enterprises.  
(c) What institutions produce the commodity which advertisers buy with their advertising expenditures? The owners of TV and radio stations and networks, newspapers, magazines and enterprises which specialize in providing billboard and third class advertising are the principal producers. This array of producers is interlocked in many ways with advertising agencies, talent agencies, package programme producers, film producers, news "services" (e.g., AP, UPI, Reuters), "syndicators" of news "columns", writers' agents, book publishers, motion picture producers and distributors. Last but by no means least in the array of institutions which produce the audience commodity is the family. The most important resource employed in producing the audience commodity are the individuals and families in the nations which permit advertising.
(d) What is the nature of the content of the mass media in economic terms under monopoly capitalism? The information, entertainment and "educational" material transmitted to the audience is an inducement (gift, bribe or "free lunch") to recruit potential members of the audience and to maintain their loyal attention. The appropriateness of the analogy to the free lunch in the old-time saloon or cocktail bar is manifest: the free lunch consists of materials which whet the prospective audience members' appetites and thus (1) attract and keep them attending to the programme, newspaper or magazine, and (2) cultivate a mood conducive to favourable reaction to the explicit and implicit advertisers' messages. To say this is not to obscure the agenda-setting function of the "editorial" content and advertising for the populations which depend on the mass media to find out what is happening in the world, nor is it to denigrate the technical virtuosity with which the free lunch is prepared and served. Great skill, talent and much expense goes into such production, though less per unit of content than in the production of overt advertisements. Only a monstrous misdirection of attention obscures the real nature of the commodities involved. Thus with no reference to the "Sales Effort", Baran and Sweezy can say:

There is not only serious question as to the value of artistic offerings carried by the mass communications media and serving directly or indirectly as vehicles of advertising; it is
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beyond dispute that all of them could be provided at a cost to consumers incomparably lower than they are forced to pay through commercial advertising.\(^\text{18}\)

Under monopoly capitalism TV-radio programs are provided "free" and the newspapers and magazines are provided at prices which cover delivery (but not production) costs to the media enterprise. In the case of newspapers and some magazines, some readers characteristically buy the media product because they want the advertisements. This is especially the practice with classified advertisements and display advertising of products and prices by local merchants in newspapers and with product information in advertisements in certain magazines (e.g. hobby magazines). Regardless of these variations, the central purpose of the information, entertainment and "educational" material (including that in the advertisements themselves) transmitted to the audience is to ensure attention to the products and services being advertised. Competition among media enterprises produces intricate strategies governing the placement of programmes in terms of types of products advertised and types of "free lunch" provided in different time segments of the week (e.g. children's hours, daytime housewives' hours, etc.): all this in order to optimize the "flow" of particular types of audiences to one programme from its immediate predecessors and to its immediate successors with regard to the strategies of rival networks.\(^\text{19}\)

(c) What is the nature of the service performed for the advertiser by the members of the purchased audiences? In economic terms, the audience commodity is a non-durable producers' good which is bought and used in the marketing of the advertiser's product. The work which audience members perform for the advertiser to whom they have been sold is to learn to buy particular "brands" of consumer goods, and to spend their income accordingly. In short, they work to create the demand for advertised goods which is the purpose of the monopoly capitalist advertisers. While doing this, audience members are simultaneously reproducing their own labour power. In this regard, it is appropriate to avoid the trap of a manipulation-explanation by noting that if such labour power is, in fact, loyally attached to the monopoly capitalist system, this would be welcome to the advertisers whose existence depends on the maintenance of that system. But in reproducing their labour power workers respond to other realistic conditions which may on occasion surprise and disappoint the advertisers. It seems, however, that when workers under monopoly capitalist conditions serve advertisers to complete the production process of consumer goods by performing the ultimate marketing service for them, these workers are making decisive material decisions which will affect how they will produce and reproduce their labour power. As the Chinese
emphasized during the Cultural Revolution, if people are spending their time catering to their individual interests and sensitivities, they cannot be using the same time also to overthrow capitalist influence and to build socialism.

(f) How does demand-management by monopoly capitalism, by means of advertising, relate to the labour theory of value, to "leisure" and to "free time"? As William Livant puts it, the power of the concept of surplus value "... rests wholly on the way Marx solved the great value problem of classical political economy, by splitting the notion of labour in two, into labour in productive use and labour power (the capacity to labour)". Labour in productive use in the production of commodities-in-general was Marx's concern in the three volumes of Capital, except for Vol. 1, chapter 6 and scattered passages in the Grundrisse. It is clear from these passages that Marx assumed that labour power is produced by the labourer and by his or her immediate family, i.e., under the conditions of handicraft production. In a word, labour power was "home-made" in the absence of dominant brand-name commodities, mass advertising, and the mass media (which had not yet been invented by monopoly capitalism). In Marx's period and in his analysis, the principal aspect of capitalist production was the alienation of workers from the means of producing commodities-in-general. Now the principal aspect of capitalist production has become the alienation of workers from the means of producing and reproducing themselves. The prevailing western Marxist view today still holds the incorrect assumption that the labourer is an independent commodity producer of labour power which is his to sell. Livant says it well:

What often escapes attention is that just because the labourer sells it (his or her labour power) does not mean that he or she produces it. We are misled by fixating on the true fact that a human must eat and sleep into thinking that therefore the seller of labour power must also be the producer. Again the error of two combines into one.

We need a dialectical materialist description of the production of labour power, of the capacity and incapacity to labour and of the relationship of the production of labour power to our ability to live as human beings.

Am I correct in assuming that all non-sleeping time under capitalism is work time? William Livant in commenting on a draft of this article, points out that the assumption should be plainly stated. As he puts it, a Marxist view
... sees leisure time correctly as time of production, reproduction and repair of labour power. This production, reproduction and repair are activities. They are things people must do. As such, they also require labour power. To be sure, this latter labour power you do not have to sell directly to capital. But you do have to use it to produce labour power in the form you do have to sell.

Why was this hard to see? I think we can find the answer if we look at ‘non-work’ time. Marx points out many times (e.g. Capital, Vol. I, Ch. 6) that wage labour only becomes possible if your labour power becomes a personal possession, which it is possible for you to sell. You can do what you ‘want’ with it ... Non-work time is labour power which is yours not-to-sell. Hence it seems to be doubly your personal possession ...

When we see this, we can fit it within what Marx called the ‘false appearance’ of wage labour (citing Wages, Prices and Profit, Peking, 1973, pp. 50-1) ... I think this false appearance has its other side. Just as it appears, at work, that you are paid for all the labour time you do sell, so it appears, off-work, that the labour time you are not paid for is not sold ...

Work and non-work time bear interesting relations that need examination, to see beneath the false appearances. They in fact divide the whole world of commodities into two. For at work it is principally commodities-in-general that are made and distributed. Those who make and distribute these commodities do not sell them. But off-work, we find something else. What is being produced there is primarily the peculiar commodity, labour power. And off-work, those who make this commodity, also do not sell it. But it is sold, as surely as commodities-in-general made at the workplace.24

It should be clear that for at least several generations labour power in advanced monopoly capitalist countries has been produced primarily by institutions other than the individual and his/her family. The mass media of communications and advertising play a large and probably dominant role...
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through the process of consumption (by guiding the making of the shopping list) as well as through the ideological teaching which permeates both the advertising and ostensibly non-advertising material with which they produce the audience commodity.\textsuperscript{25} When cosmetic counters in department stores display ‘Boxed Ego’ (Vancouver, December, 1975), the dialectical relation of the material and consciousness aspects of the production of labour power should be evident.

What has happened to the time available to workers and the way it is used in the past century? In 1850 under conditions of cottage industry, i.e. unbranded consumer goods, the average work week was about 70 hours per week (and the work force was predominantly male).\textsuperscript{26} At about the time when Marx was writing the Grundrisse, workers’ savings, under the most favourable conditions of exploitation, could make possible

\[ \ldots \text{the worker’s participation in the higher, even cultural} \]
\[ \text{satisfactions, the agitation of his own interests, newspaper} \]
\[ \text{subscriptions, attending lectures, educating his children,} \]
\[ \text{developing his taste, etc., his only share of civilization} \]
\[ \text{which distinguishes him from the slave} \ldots.\textsuperscript{27} \]

In that simple stage of capitalist development, Marx could see that the relentless accumulative process would proliferate commodities:

\[ \text{Capital’s ceaseless striving towards the general form of} \]
\[ \text{wealth drives labour beyond the limits of its natural} \]
\[ \text{paltriness (Naturbedürftigkeit), and thus creates the} \]
\[ \text{material elements for the development of the rich individuality which is as all-sided in its production as in its} \]
\[ \text{consumption} \ldots\textsuperscript{28} \]

Many other references may be cited from the Grundrisse to similar effect. But all this assumed that consumer goods were not monopolized by brand names and that workers could dispose of their non-work time subject only to class and customary (i.e. traditional) considerations. In 1850, the average American worker could devote about 42 hours per week (168 hours minus 70 hours on the job and 56 hours of sleep) to such “cottage industry” type of production of labour power.
By 1960, the average time spent on the job was about 39.5 hours per week — an apparent reduction in work time of almost 30 hours per week (to which should be added 2.5 hours as a generous estimate of the weekly equivalent of annual vacations). Capitalist apologists equated this ostensible reduction in work time with a corresponding increase in "free" or "leisure" time. The reality was quite different. Two transformations were being effected by monopoly capitalism in the nature of work, leisure and consumer behaviour. On the one hand, huge chunks of workers' time were being removed from their discretion by the phenomenon of metropolitan sprawl and by the nature of unpaid work which workers were obligated to perform. For example, in the contemporary period travel time to and from the job can be estimated at 8.5 hours per week; "moonlighting" employment at a minimum of one hour per week; repair work around the home, at another five hours per week; and men's work on household chores and shopping at another 2.3 hours per week. A total of 16.8 hours per week of the roughly 32 hours of time supposedly "freed" as a result of capitalist industrialization is thus anything but "free". A further seven hours of the 32 hours of "freed" time disappears when the correction for part-time female employment is made in the reported hours-per-week. Three-fourths of the so-called "freed" time has thus vanished.

The second transformation involves the pressure placed by the system on the remaining hours of the week. If sleeping is estimated at eight hours a day, the remainder of the 168 hours in the week after subtracting sleeping and the unfree work time thus far identified was 42 hours in 1850 and 49 hours in 1960. We lack systematic information about the use of this "free time" for both dates. We do know that certain types of activities were common to both dates: personal care, making love, visiting with relatives and friends, preparing and eating meals, attending union, church and other associative institutions, including saloons. We also know that in 1960 (but not in 1850) there was a vast array of branded consumer goods and services pressed on the workers through advertising, point-of-sale displays, and peer group influence. Attendance at spectator sports and participation in such activities as bowling, camping, and "pleasure driving" of the automobile or snowmobile — all promoted for the sake of equipment sales by the consciousness industry — now take time that was devoted to non-commercial activities in 1850. In-house time must now be devoted to deciding whether or not to buy and then to use (by whom, where, under what conditions, and why) an endless proliferation of goods for personal care, household furnishing, clothing, music reproduction equipment, etc. Guiding the worker today in all income and time expenditures are the mass media — through the blend of advertisements and programme content.

How do Baran and Sweezy deal with the use made of this illusory increase in free time? Deploying Veblen's concept of conspicuous consumption and
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thereby emphasizing the status-seeking character of workers’ consumption decisions, they treat leisure time (without quotation marks) in psychoanalytic terms as time spent willfully in passivity and idleness:

This propensity to do nothing has had a decisive part in determining the kinds of entertainment which are supplied to fill the leisure hours — in the evening, on weekends and holidays, during vacations. The basic principle is that whatever is presented — reading matter, movies, radio and TV programs — must not make undue demands on the intellectual and emotional resources of the recipients: the purpose is to provide ‘fun’, ‘relaxation’, a ‘good time’ — in short, passively absorbable amusement.30

What is wrong with this partial truth is: (1) it ignores the relationship of monopoly capitalism’s Sales Effort, particularly advertising, to the problem; and (2) it substitutes casual bourgeois observations for an historical materialist attack on the problem.

As against the seven hours per week of apparent “non-work” time gained by the average worker between 1850 and 1960, how much time does he now spend as part of the audience product of the mass media — time sold to the advertisers? Here the audience-measurement sub-industry gives us some information. David Blank, economist for the Columbia Broadcasting System, in 1970 found that the average person watched TV for 3.3 hours per day (23 hours per week) on an annual basis, listened to radio for 2.5 hours per day (18 hours per week), and read newspapers and magazines one hour per day (7 hours per week).32 If we look at the audience product in terms of families rather than individuals, we find that in 1973, advertisers in the U.S. purchased TV audiences for an average of a little more than 43 hours per home per week.33 By industry usage, this lumps together specialized audience commodities sold independently as “housewives”, “children” and “families”. In the “prime time” evening hours (7:00 to 11:00 p.m.), the TV audience commodity consisted of a daily average of 83.8 million people, with an average of two persons viewing per home. Women were a significantly larger proportion of this prime time audience than men (42 percent as against 32 percent, while children were 16 percent and teenagers, 10 percent).

We do not know even approximately how the worker’s exposure to the mass media articulates with the other components in his/her use of “free time”. It is relatively easy to determine how much radio listening and newspaper and
magazine reading takes place while travelling to and from work. But much TV and radio programming is attended to incidentally while engaged in other activities such as performing household chores, visiting with friends, reading, and now even while attending spectator sports.  

This is the context in which we may pursue the question, how demand management by means of advertising in monopoly capitalism relates to the labour theory of value, to "leisure" and to "free time". It should now be possible to obtain some clues to the nature of work which workers perform in relation to advertising. If freedom is the act of resisting necessity, what is the nature of the process by which workers react to advertising, and why is it profitable for advertisers to advertise? An advertising theorist, Professor T.N. Levitt, says, "Customers don't buy things. They buy tools to solve problems." It appears that the purpose of advertising, from the perspective of the advertising corporation, is to establish in the worker's consciousness (1) the existence of a "problem" facing the worker (acne, security from burglars, sleeplessness), (2) the existence of a class of commodities which will solve that problem, and (3) the motivation to give top priority to purchasing brand X of that class of commodities in order to "solve" that "problem". Given this situation, the realistic process of audience-members' work can be best understood in terms of the ever-increasing number of decisions forced on him/her by "new" commodities and by their related advertising. Unfortunately, while workers are faced with millions of possible comparative choices among thousands of "new" commodities, they lack scientifically objective bases on which to evaluate either the "problem" to be solved by buying the proffered "tool" or the efficacy of the "tool" as a solution to the "problem". In this situation, they constantly struggle to develop a rational shopping list out of an irrational situation. As Linder puts it, the most important way by which consumers can cope with commodities and advertising is to limit the time spent in thinking about what to buy.

Reduced time for reflection previous to a decision would apparently entail a growing irrationality. However, since it is extremely rational to consider less and less per decision there exists a rationale of irrationality.

Monopoly capitalist marketing practice has a sort of seismic, systemic drift towards "impulse purchasing". Increasingly, the work done by audience members is cued towards impulse purchasing. Again, Linder is insightful:
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To begin with advertising is a means of making factual knowledge more accessible than otherwise. Second, it serves to provide quasi-information for people who lack time to acquire the genuine insights. They get the surrogate information they want to have, in order to feel that they are making the right decisions ... The advertiser helps to close the information gap, at the same time exploiting the information gap that is bound to remain.38

As the scarcity of time increases, the emphasis in advertising will be displaced in the direction of ersatz information. The object will be to provide a motive for an action for which no solid grounds exist ... Brand loyalty must be built up among people who have no possibility of deciding how to act on objective grounds. As routine purchasing procedures gain in importance as a means of reducing decision-making time, it will become increasingly important to capture those who have not yet developed their routines.39

In this connection, the new and sophisticated interest of market researchers in the relationship of advertising to children is very significant. According to the publisher of one recent study:

As the authors see it, consumption is a perfectly legitimate and unavoidable activity for children. Consequently they reject a strategy directed at protecting kids from marketing stimuli. What is necessary, then, is to acknowledge that children are going to watch television commercials and to prepare them to be selective consumers.

How Children Learn to Buy provides evidence to confront existing theories in the emerging field of consumer socialization. The work is essential to everyone concerned with the effects of advertising: sponsors, ad agencies, the television industry, educators, governmental regulators, consumer researchers, and parents.40

Constrained by the ideology of monopoly capitalism, the bourgeois notion of free time and leisure is only available to those who have no disposable income.
(and for whom it is, of course, a bitter mockery) and to those who are so rich that, as Linder says, for them, "the ultimate luxury is to be liberated from the hardships of having to do one's own buying." For everyone else, "free time" and "leisure" belong only in the monopoly capitalist lexicon alongside "free world", "free enterprise", "free elections", "free speech", and "free flow" of information.

What has happened to the time workers spend off-the-job while not sleeping is that enormous pressures on this time have been imposed by all consumer goods and service branches of monopoly capitalism. Individual, familial and other associative needs must be dealt with, but in a real context of products and advertising which, taken together, make the task of the individual and family basically one of coping while being constantly on the verge of being overwhelmed by these pressures. In this context, the work of the audience members which advertisers find productive for them is one of learning cues which are used when the audience member makes up his/her mental shopping list and spends his/her income.

(g) Does the audience commodity perform an essential economic function? Baran and Sweezy state that "advertising constitutes as much an integral part of the system as the giant corporation itself" and that "advertising has turned into an indispensable tool for a large sector of corporate business." In this they go as far as Galbraith who said "... the marginal utility of present aggregate output, ex-advertising and salesmanship is zero."

But is the production and consumption of the audience commodity for advertisers a "productive" activity in Marxian terms? Baran and Sweezy are contradictory in answering this question. They tell us that advertising expenses "... since they are manifestly unrelated to necessary costs of production — however broadly defined — (they) can only be counted as part of aggregate surplus." But after some agonizing over whether finance, insurance and real estate (which account for about twice the volume of national income as represented by advertising) are productive, they abandon their theoretical footing for rejecting expenses of circulation as unproductive of surplus:

Just as advertising, product differentiation, artificial obsolescence, model changing, and all the other devices of the sales effort do in fact promote and increase sales, and thus act as indispensable props to the level of income and employment, so the entire apparatus of 'finance, insurance, and real estate' is essential to the normal functioning of the corporate system and another no less indispensable prop to the level of income and employment.
The prodigious volume of resources absorbed in all these activities does in fact constitute necessary costs of capitalist production. What should be crystal clear is that an economic system in which such costs are socially necessary has long ceased to be a socially necessary system.  

I am aware that Capital can be and has been read frequently as denying the productivity of the expenses of middlemen in general. As I read the work, however, it seems to me that in Capital Marx was concerned to analyze the operation of capitalism under the then realistic conditions of competition and the organization of industry as being generally unintegrated from raw material processing through exchange to the consumption process. Marx also clearly did not assume the predominance of branded commodities or the prevalence of advertising. If one turns to Marx's "Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy", however, it seems probable that his analysis of monopoly capitalism, had such been possible in his time, would have answered the question of the productivity of advertising differently. Indeed the following passage accommodates the phenomena of advertising, branded merchandise, and monopoly capitalism in managing demands.

Consumption produces production in a double way . . . because consumption creates the need for new production, that is it creates the ideal, internally impelling cause for production, which is its presupposition. Consumption creates the motive for production; it also creates the object which is active in production as its determinant aim . . . No production without a need. But consumption reproduces the need . . . Production not only supplies a material for the need, but it also supplies a need for the material. As soon as consumption emerges from its initial state of natural crudity and immediacy — and, if it remained at that stage, this would be because production itself had been arrested there — it becomes itself mediated as a drive by the object. The need which consumption feels for the object is created by the perception of it. The object of art — like every other product — creates a public which is sensitive to art and enjoys beauty. Production thus not only creates an object for the subject, but also a subject for the object. Thus production produces consumption (1) by
creating the material for it; (2) by determining the manner of consumption; and (3) by creating the products initially posited by it as objects, in the form of a need felt by the consumer. It thus produces the object of consumption, the manner of consumption and the motive of consumption. Consumption likewise produces the producer’s inclination by beckoning to him as an aim-determining need.48

It is clear, firstly, that the exchange of activities and abilities which takes place within production itself belongs directly to production and essentially constitutes it. The same holds, secondly, for the exchange of products, in so far as that exchange is the means of finishing the product and making it fit for direct consumption. To that extent, exchange is an act comprised within production itself. Thirdly, the so-called exchange between dealers and dealers is by its very organization entirely determined by production, as being itself a producing activity. Exchange appears as independent and indifferent to production only in the final phase where the product is exchanged directly for consumption.49

On such a footing it is possible to develop a Marxist theory of advertising and of branded commodities under monopoly capitalist conditions. When the president of the Revlon corporation says: “We manufacture lipsticks. But we sell hope”, he is referring to the creation of products initially posited by it as objects in the form of a need felt by the consumer — similarly with Contac-C, the proprietary cold remedy which so disturbed Baran and Sweezy.50 The denial of the productivity of advertising is unnecessary and diversionary: a cul de sac derived from the pre-monopoly-capitalist stage of development, a dutiful but unsuccessful and inappropriate attempt at reconciliation with Capital.

(h) Why have Marxist economists been indifferent to the historical process by which advertising, brand-name merchandise, and the mass media of communications have developed in monopoly capitalism over the past century? Why do they continue to regard the press, TV and radio media as having the prime function of producing news, entertainment and editorial opinion and not audiences for sale to advertisers? The evidence for the latter is all around us. Baran and Sweezy do indeed indicate how much advertising has grown and when, i.e., by a factor of ten between 1890 and 1929.51 But not why, how and with what connections.
In the first three quarters of the nineteenth century, newspapers and magazines in the countries going through the Industrial Revolution were characterized by: (a) diversity of support as between readers’ payments, subsidies from political parties, and advertising (most of the latter being information about commodity availability and prices and not about branded merchandise); and (b) a cyclical process of technological improvement with consequent larger printing capacity, lower unit costs, lower unit prices of publications, larger profits, capital accumulation and reinvestment in new and more productive plants, etc. In that period, marketing of consumer goods was characterized by: (a) predominance of unbranded merchandise; (b) unintegrated distribution of commodities with the middleman being the most powerful link in the production-to-consumer chain; and (c) consequently, lack of massive advertising as a means of managing demand.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, capitalism faced a crisis. The first stage of the development of the factory system under conditions of competition between relatively small capitalists had succeeded in mobilizing labour supply and exploiting it crudely under conditions documented so ably by Marx in *Capital*. The very success of the system bred grave threats to it. Politically conscious labour unions posed revolutionary threats to capitalism. Moreover, capitalist manufacturers were vulnerable to the power of the workers because the highly skilled workers possessed more knowledge about the production process than did their employers. Manufacturers were thus blocked from ready control of their work force and from innovating the new and increasingly sophisticated machine processes of mass production which the rapid progress in physical sciences and engineering made possible. When they looked at their marketing methods, manufacturers were also beset by chronic insecurities. The periodic business cycles in their crisis and liquidation phases forced manufacturers into cut-throat pricing (of unbranded merchandise, typically) because of the pressure of overhead costs. The result was a short life expectancy for competitive industrialists.

In sum, a watershed in the development of capitalism had been reached. As M.M. Knight said, “Down to the last quarter of the nineteenth century, commerce dominated industry; after it industry dominated commerce.”

Capitalism’s systemic solution to the contradiction between its enormous potential for expanding production of consumer goods (and the profits to be thus realized) and the systemic insecurities posed by people as workers and people as consumers was to move to large scale rationalization of industrial organization (through vertical, horizontal and conglomerate integration). This conferred control over supplies and prices in the factor markets, and in the marketing of end-products. But to make such giant integrated corporations viable, their operations had to address directly the problem of people (1) as workers at the job where they were paid, and (2) as buyers of the end prod-
ucts of industry. The systemic solution was a textbook example of the transformation of a contradiction on the principle "one goes into two". This was an ideological task and it was solved by capitalizing on the deeply held ideological reverence for scientific rationality in the pursuit of possessive individualistic material goals.

After militant unions had been crushed by force between 1890 and 1910, scientific management was applied to people as workers. Knowledge about the work process was expropriated from skilled workers to management. The work process was reduced to "ladders" of dead-end "tasks" to complement which ever more sophisticated generations of mass production machines were innovated. And through varieties of "incentive" wage plans, linked with promotion-from-within on the basis of seniority, supported by company welfare plans (and later social insurance through government), the workplace where people got paid was transformed ideologically. People learned there that work under monopoly capitalism involves competition between individuals whose possessive needs necessarily set them in conflict with each other rather than with the owners of the means of their (concealed) cooperative production. The carrot which systemically motivated them was the pursuit of commodities, which joined this half of the ideological exercise with the next.

Simultaneously the system dealt with its problem of people as buyers of end products. As on the job front, science was invoked. The objective was personal satisfaction, and the rationale was efficiency. The term "consumer" was invented to describe the desired object. Advertising and the creation of mass produced communications (press, radio and TV principally) were developed as the specialized means to this systemic end. Even if a seeming "over-production" of consumer goods threatened the profitability of an industry the ability of a company to distinguish its products from unbranded similar products allowed its sales and profits to grow in security. If studies are done — I have been able to locate none — of the history of brand names, it will be found that this was how brand name loyalty became an essential weapon in industry when the trusts which produced the present oligopolistic empires of monopoly capitalist industry became dominant features of the industrial landscape. Certainly the Baran and Sweezy thesis that monopoly capitalism manages demand through market controls and advertising would seem to carry as its corollary the hypothesis that something like the suction of commodities from the material production line to the oligopolistic end-product markets has replaced the atomistic circulation of commodities typical of Marx's time as the model of monopoly capitalist marketing. While historical scholarship in marketing seems conspicuously undeveloped, fragmentary evidence from studies of marketing history tend to confirm the outline of the process here sketched.
For example, Joseph Palamountain says, “Great increases in the size of manufacturers or retailers have changed much of the distribution from a flow through a series of largely autonomous markets to a single movement dominated by either manufacturer or retailer.” Simultaneously, the newspaper and magazine industries found themselves in a position to vastly increase the productivity of the printing trades in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Technical advances in typesetting, printing (including colour), photographic reproduction, etc., could be financed if someone would foot the bill. The newspaper and magazine entrepreneurs (the William Randolph Hearsts and their rivals) invented the “yellow journalism” which took advantage of this situation. The cycle of capital expansion ensued in accelerated speed and scope. Production and circulation were multiplied, while prices paid by the readers were held constant or decreased. And the “mass media” characteristic of monopoly capitalism were created in the 1890’s. It was these mass media, increasingly financed by advertising, that drew together the “melting pot” working class from diverse ethnic groups which were flooding in as migrants to the United States into saleable audiences for the advertisers.

The advent of radio-telephony in the first two decades of this century made possible the use of the same principle which had been proven in the print media. And so commercial radio broadcasting became a systemic innovation of, by, and for monopoly capitalism. When the pent-up civilian demand at the end of World War II, and the generous capital subventions of a government intent on winning that war had provided electronics manufacturers with shell-loading and other war plants easily convertible into TV set manufacturing, and when a complaisant FCC could be manipulated into favouring TV over FM broadcasting, TV was approved and largely financed out of capital accumulated from commercial radio broadcasting’s profits.

Why was this media complex rather than some other mode of marketing developed by monopoly capitalism to create and control “consumers”? Because it offered a cheaper and more efficient mode of demand management than the alternatives which could be devised. What alternatives? The obvious alternative was “more of the same” methods previously used in marketing: heavier reliance on travelling salesmen to push goods to retailers, heavier use of door-to-door salesmen. To calculate the opportunity cost with a hypothetical elaboration of a marketing system designed to sell branded commodities without advertising was and is a horrendous prospect. Moreover, it would be pointless because mass production of (branded) consumer goods and services under capitalism would not have happened, absent advertising. An indication of the efficiency of the audience commodity as a producers’ good used in the production of consumer goods (and a clue to a possible measure of surplus value created by people working in audiences) is provided when we compare
advertising expenditures with "value added" by retailing of consumer goods and services. In 1973 in the U.S. some $25 billion was spent in advertising while personal consumption expenditures were about $800 billion. Three percent of the sales price as the cost of creating and managing demand seems very cheap — and profitable. The system also accrued valuable side-benefits. Institutional advertising and the merchandising of political candidates and ideological points of view in the guise of the free lunch and advertising messages were only appreciated and exploited systematically after World War I when propaganda and its associated public opinion polling were developed for war promotion purposes.

To summarize: the mass media institutions in monopoly capitalism developed the equipment, workers and organization to produce audiences for the purposes of the system between about 1875 and 1950. The prime purpose of the mass media complex is to produce people in audiences who work at learning the theory and practice of consumership for civilian goods and who support (with taxes and votes) the military demand management system. The second principal purpose is to produce audiences whose theory and practice confirms the ideology of monopoly capitalism (possessive individualism in an authoritarian political system). The third principal purpose is to produce public opinion supportive of the strategic and tactical policies of the state (e.g. presidential candidates, support of Indochinese military adventures, space race, détente with the Soviet Union, rapprochement with China and ethnic and youth dissent). Necessarily in the monopoly capitalist system, the fourth purpose of the mass media complex is to operate itself so profitably as to ensure unrivalled respect for its economic importance in the system. It has been quite successful in achieving all four purposes.

If we recognize the reality of monopoly capitalism buying audiences to complete the mass marketing of mass produced consumer goods and services much further analysis is needed of the implications of this "principal and decisive" integration of superstructure and base which reality presents. First, the contradictions produced within the audience commodity should be understood more clearly. I refer to the contradiction as between audience members serving as producers' goods in the marketing of mass produced consumer goods and their work in producing and reproducing labour power. I think that the consciousness industry through advertising-supported mass media produces three kinds of alienation for the members of the audience commodity: (1) alienation from the result of their work "on the job"; (2) alienation from the commodities-in-general which they participate in marketing to themselves; and (3) alienation from the labour power they produce and reproduce in themselves and their children. It would seem that the theory of work needs reconsideration.
Then connections to other areas need to be examined. Among such connections there come to mind those to Marxist theory about social consciousness (and false consciousness), to theory about the nature of the class struggle, the nature of the proletariat under monopoly capitalism and sex chauvinism, and to theories of the state. The last of these seems obvious if this analysis is considered in connection with the recent articles by Gold, Lo, and Wright.63 The role of the mass media and the consciousness industry in producing the audience commodity both as commodity-in-general and peculiar commodity might provide the real sinews to the structural-Marxist model of the state of Poulantzas and to the theoretical initiatives of Claus Offe in seeking the processes within the state which “guarantee” its class character. The connection to the work of de Bord 64 regarding consciousness is proximate. The relation of industrially produced images to the “real” world of nutrition, clothing, housing, birth and death is dialectical. The mass media are the focus of production of images of popular culture under monopoly capitalism, both through the explicit advertising and the “free lunch” which hook and hold people in audiences. Because the consciousness industry produces consumable, saleable spectacles, its product treats both past and future like the present — as blended in the eternal present of a system which was never created and will never end. The society of the spectacle, however, cannot be abstractly contrasted with the “real” world of actual people and things. The two interact. The spectacle inverts the real and is itself produced and is real. Hence, as de Bord says, objective reality is present on both sides. But because the society of the spectacle is a system which stands the world really on its head, the truth in it is a moment of the false. Because the spectacle monopolizes the power to make mass appearance, it demands and gets passive acceptance by the “real” world. And because it is undeniably real (as well as false) it has the persuasive power of the most effective propaganda.65

Finally, another example of necessary connections is that to the theory of imperialism and socialism in the present stage of monopoly capitalism. There are many ways by which a theory of commodity production through mass communications would strengthen the analysis, for example, of Samir Amin.66 The cocacolonisation of the dependent and peripheral countries cannot be grounded in Marxist theory without attention to the production of audience commodities in the interest of multi-national corporations. It would link Amin’s theory to Herbert Schiller’s work on the relation of the mass media to the American empire.67 And, when linked with analysis of the ideological aspects of science and “technology”, it could strengthen the development of a non-economic, non-positive, non-Eurocentered Marxism. Analysis of such connections is inviting but beyond the scope of the present essay.
To demonstrate this in detail would require a lengthy analysis which would deflect the present article from its affirmative purpose. Gramsci, the Frankfurt School writers (Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, Lowenthal), Raymond Williams, Poulantzas, Althusser, and Marxists concerned with the problems of developing nations (e.g. Samir Amin, Clive Y. Thomas) — none of them address the consciousness industry from the standpoint of its historical materialist role in making monopoly capitalist imperialism function through demand management (concretely through the economic processes of advertising and mass communications). This is precisely the blindspot of recent Western Marxism. In the developing debate it would be useful to have studies bearing on whether and why such writers have or have not dealt with this aspect of monopoly capitalism. Reality imposes a burden of proof on them as well as on me.

Lenin held a manipulative theory of the mass media and admitted naiveté in this respect. "What was the fate of the decree establishing a state monopoly of private advertising issued in the first weeks of the Soviet government? ... It is amusing to think how naive we were ... The enemy i.e., the capitalist class, retaliated to this decree of the state power by completely repudiating that state power." "Report on the New Economic Policy", Seventh Moscow Gubernia Conference of the Russian Communist Party, October 21, 1921, in Lenin About the Press, Prague, International Organization of Journalists, 1972, p. 203. Lenin's Imperialism is devoid of recognition of the relation of advertising to monopoly capitalism and imperialism.

The objective reality is that the ostensible advertisements and the material which comes between them, whether in the print or electronic media, have a common purpose of producing the audience. It is an interesting consequence of the idealist perspective that in most liberal analysis the "advertising" is considered to be separate from the "news", "entertainment", "educational material" which is interlarded between the advertisements.

The annual cost to audience members of providing their own broadcast receivers (and paying for Cable TV), consisting of depreciation, interest on investment, maintenance and electric power, amounted to slightly more than $1.8 billion, while the over-the-air broadcasters' (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation plus private broadcasters) and Cable TV operators' costs were about $631 million.


15. It is argued by one of my critics that a better term for what advertisers buy would be ‘‘attention’’. At our present naive stage concerning the matter, it does seem as if attention is indeed what is bought. But where people are paid for working on the job, should Marxists say that what the employer buys is ‘‘labour power’’ or ‘‘the manual dexterity and attention necessary for tending machines’’? Where I refer to audiences as being produced, purchased and used, let it be understood that I mean ‘‘audience-power’’; however it may turn out upon further realistic analysis to be exercised.

16. The pages of Variety report on cases where the ostensibly non-advertising matter in the media, which I call the ‘‘free lunch’’, attracted an audience which had propensities incongruous with the particular product or service being advertised; in such cases the program is cancelled and the audience discarded.

17. The ‘‘free lunch’’ concept of the mass media was first stated by Liebling A.J., The Press, N.Y. Ballantine, 1961.


22. In arguing that all non-sleeping time under capitalism is work time, I go beyond Samir Amin who says "Social time is split into non-working time and working time. But here too the former exists only to serve the latter. It is not leisure time, as it is called in the false consciousness of alienated men, but recuperation time. It is functional recuperation that is
socially organized and not left up to the individual despite certain appearances', ('"In Praise of Socialism", Monthly Review, September, 1974, p. 8). Amin also has the blind spot which does not recognize the audience commodity which mass media have produced.

23. I am perhaps wrong to exclude sleeping time from work. The dividing line between recreation of the ability to work while awake and sleeping may be illusory. It may be that the head coach of the Washington, D.C. "Redskin" professional football team, George Allen, is closer to the mark than most economists when he tells his players, "Nobody should work all the time. Leisure time is the five or six hours you sleep at night. You can combine two good things at once, sleep and leisure." Quoted in Terkel, Louis, Working, N.Y. Pantheon, 1974, p. 389.


25. For present purposes I ignore the ancillary and interactive processes which contribute to the production of labour power involving also the educational institutions, the churches, labour unions, and a host of voluntary associations (e.g. YMCA, Girl Scouts).


28. Ibid., p. 325.

29. Part-time workers (probably more female than male) amounted in 1960 to nineteen percent of the employed labour force in the United States and worked an average of 19 hours weekly. If we exclude such workers in order to get a figure comparable to the 70 hours in 1850, we consider the weekly hours worked by the average American male who worked at least 35 hours per week and find that they averaged 46.4 (as against 39.5 for all workers). For the sake of brevity, I omit the counterpart calculation of "free time" for women. No sexist implications are intended.


31. "... the manufacturers of paper and ink and TV sets whose products are used to control and poison the minds of the people..." (Ibid., p. 344).


34. For many years patrons at professional baseball and football games have been listening to portable radios broadcasting the same game. In 1975 I observed that patrons at professional football games are beginning to watch the same game on portable TV sets for the "instant replays".


36. I use the term "rational" here in the common sense usage, that the result should be one which can be "lived with", is "the right decision", which "makes sense". I imply no Benthamist calculus of utilities or pleasure or pain.


47. At the outset of Volume II, *Capital*, Marx says: "It is therefore taken for granted here not only that the commodities are sold at their values but also that this takes place under the same conditions throughout. Likewise disregarded therefore are any changes of value which might occur during the movement in circuits." (Marx, Karl, *Capital*, Vol. II, Book II, p. 26. Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1967.)

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49. Ibid., p. 99.

50. Referring to a reported $13 million advertising budget which produced $16 million in drug store sales, expressed in wholesale prices, they say: "Allowing for a handsome profit margin, which of course is added to selling as well as production cost, it seems clear that the cost of production can hardly be more than a minute proportion of even the wholesale price." (Op. cit., p. 119).

51. Ibid., Monopoly Capitalism, p. 118.


57. Jeremy Bentham and Charles Babbage had publicized the ideas; Taylor and his successors were the experts who applied them. See Braverman, Harry, Labour and Monopoly Capital, N.Y., Monthly Review Press, 1974; Stone, Catherine, "The Origins of Job Structures in the Steel Industry", op. cit., and Palmer, Bryan, "Class, Conception and Conflict: The Thrust for Efficiency, Managerial Views of Labour and the Working Class Rebellion, 1903-1922.", Review of Radical Political Economy, Summer, 1974, p. 31-49.

58. Edwin H. Lewis argues that: "Prior to Civil War, in the United States, the wholesaler was typically the dominant factor in the channel. Small retailers and frequently small manufacturers as well, depended on the wholesaler to carry stocks and to give credit or financial support. Following the Civil War, large scale retailers became the dominant element in the distribution of convenience goods and certain shopping goods. As manufacturers have grown larger and as oligopolistic conditions have prevailed in many industries, the manufacturer has held a position of strength in the channel." Lewis, Edwin H., Marketing Channels, N.Y., McGraw Hill, 1968, p. 163.

According to Philip Kotler: "A change began in the 1890's with the growth of national firms and national advertising media. The growth of brand names has been so dramatic that today, in the United States, hardly anything is sold unbranded. Salt is packaged in distinctive manufacturers' containers, oranges are stamped, common nuts and bolts are packaged in cellophane with a distributor's label, and various parts of an automobile — spark plugs, tires, filters — bear visible brand names different from that of the automobile." Kotler, Philip, Marketing Management, 2nd ed., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1972, p. 446.

60. Stuart Ewen, in Captains of Consciousness (N.Y., McGraw-Hill, 1976) provides abundant documentation of the purposiveness with which monopoly capitalism used advertising and the infant mass media for this purpose in the period around and following World War I.


62. Why did the cinema, generally conceded to be part of the mass media, not become producers of audience products as part of the systemic bulge of the consciousness industry after 1875? To this, there are several obvious answers. The cinema requires an audience assembled outside the home. It is in the ancient traditional mode of the theatre, arena, assembly, etc. As such it had its own momentum and defined its prime product as the sale of a seat at a particular location and time in relation to the exhibited film. What the advertisers needed — and what capitalism developed as a specialized part of the process of mass producing and mass marketing consumer goods — was a method of mobilizing people to work at being consumers in their alienated separate homes. This advertising supported media made possible. The motion picture industry is not so isolated from the marketing process as this explanation might suggest. "Tie-ins" for consumer goods are a normal part of the planning and receipts (often unreported for tax purposes) of the producers, directors, writers and star performers in theatrical films.


64. de Bord, Guy, The Society of the Spectacle, Detroit, Black and Red, Box 9546, 1970.

65. Ibid., p. 6-9.


The crisis of the present world is primarily political. Its gravity lies not in particular shortcomings or imperfections of political practices or modes of political thinking. Modernity is plagued not so much by the existence of a defective politics as it is marked by its virtual non-existence. For what it takes for politics is a fake; and by not recognizing the fake for what it is, it bids fair to render the crisis unresolvable. Through its almost total misconception of itself modern politics beclouds its very reality and thus existentially defies its own remedy.

This, in essence, is Hannah Arendt’s diagnosis of our times. Her disdain for modern man’s incapacity to perceive the true nature of politics is matched only by amazement over the enormity of his capacity for self-deception. Yet despite her disdain and her amazement she does not altogether falter. If only man could be made to see that he worships idols, that he mistakes a fabricated substitute for authentic reality, genuine politics might still be recoverable.

Authentic reality, or genuine politics, is not, however, something given, waiting to be discovered. Neither is it made or made up; for a reality or a politics that is the product of making — whether it involves wilful deceit or not — is a fabricated reality or a fabricated politics. Reality and politics, if they are to embody or convey intelligible and valid meaning, have to be enacted, not made. The tragedy of our age consists in confusing acting with making. This confusion is so deep-rooted that it has warped modern man’s political sensibility. This is the heart of the matter, the prime source of our crisis, the malaise of our times.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the confusion between making and acting is the cardinal theme of Arendt’s principal work, The Human Condition, and a subject to which she repeatedly returns in subsequent writings. My concern in this article is twofold. In the first place, I wish to explore the major categories and distinctions Arendt invokes in the course of elaborating her position. Beyond this I am anxious to reflect and comment on the position itself as I see
it. Clearly, the significance of a political thinker's normative position does not hinge wholly, or even decidedly, on the intrinsic meaning of any single claim made, nor, indeed, on the logical consistency of all the claims. Some of the most profoundly imaginative insights in political thought have lost little of their merit by not forming part of a coherent or comprehensive system or body of thought. My second concern, then — which, however, is not altogether separable from the first — is to evaluate Arendt's insights, their expressed or implied meanings and their possible impact, intended or otherwise. In particular I wish to focus on her polarization of political action in its boundless infinity, and truth, in its unchanging finality. Though strangely myopic and disturbingly ambivalent, her political vision strikes me as profoundly exciting; its redemptive thrust is unmistakable; what is less unequivocal is the redemption it envisages.

I shall draw, in varying degrees, on Arendt's published writings, but there is one work which merits special consideration, the highly seminal essay on "Truth and Politics". For the latter essay not only discloses her most pervasive anxieties, it also remarkably typifies the paradoxical tensions in her conceptual approach. And it certainly raises issues of pivotal importance to the central concerns of this article.

I

Manifestations of discontent with political reality have a long tradition. Janus-like, they frequently do two things simultaneously: they give vent to disenchantment over unfulfilled expectations and they sound a clarion call for a society's soul-searching, for its quest toward a better understanding of itself. No less frequently, a highly polarized terminology is used in order to sharpen awareness of, and concern for, the presumed decline of politics, the deterioration or loss of its avowed dignity. Hannah Arendt's work is a fitting contemporary example of this tradition. Its major theme, the lament over the passing of the Greek polis and, with it, the loss of the distinctiveness and dignity of political action, finds eloquent expression in The Human Condition. There she sees the profound difference between the modern and the ancient Greek understanding of politics in the disappearance of the gulf that the ancients perceived as a deep hiatus separating the political from the non-political domain. In the modern world politics has become subservient to economic and social interests; as a result of this "functionalization" of politics, the distinction between labour, work and action (Arendt's threefold division of human activity), has been blurred, and the uniqueness, greatness and integrity of the political realm almost forgotten. No more is it possible "to perceive any serious gulf between the two realms", they "constantly flow into each other like the waves in the never-ending stream of the life process itself."
Acute uneasiness over this ceaseless inter-penetration of the political and the non-political realms is the most pervasive impulse of Arendt’s political thought. To her the loss of a clear realization of their separateness is both the source and the symptom of a general blunting of modern man’s sensibility for distinctiveness and meaning. Her fear is that modern theories of behaviourism could well be accurate in depicting modern trends, the trends of ‘sterile passivity’ and purely routine behaviour. For just as the social has swallowed the political, so the ordinary has devoured the extraordinary; the drab and commonplace has ousted the great and unexpected. Behaviour, in short, has come to replace action, depriving, as it did, individuality and spontaneity of the space and scope they need for inserting themselves in the public realm. What is more, the social itself has, in enveloping the political, lost its own distinctiveness, as it simultaneously destroyed the distinctiveness of the private and the public. If the public has ceased to have a life and integrity of its own, so has the private. Gone is the privacy of family life, of fraternity and friendship, of the ‘intimacy of the heart.’ What we witness, according to Arendt, is a drastic reversal of existential meanings, a virtual metamorphosis of reality itself. What is meant to be hidden is now exposed, and what is meant to reveal and illuminate human greatness is condemned to darkness and obscurity. Speech, which confers upon the public realm the hallmark of the political — for speech is what makes man a political being — is degraded to ‘idle talk’. Freedom, originally identifiable with politics, and solely with politics, is now almost totally located outside the political realm and indeed opposed to politics. Force or violence, originally confined to the private household, now emerges as the defining characteristic, as the sole monopoly, of politics. Incapable of facing the inherent uncertainty of action, and the unpredictability of its consequences, modern man substitutes making (where he knows the outcome or end-product) for acting, and ‘reckoning with consequences’ for reasoning. Thus reality and human reason come to part company; modern realism is no more rational than modern rationalism real. The flight from infinity, uncertainty, and spontaneity generates another reversal: the denigration of death and daring and the adoration of life and security. Taking care of life’s necessities, together with labouring activity, wholly foreign to the polis, now usurp the primacy of honourable deeds. This preoccupation with biological requirements, with social needs and economic wants, is, in Arendt’s view, at the base of the deformation of politics, perverting a plurality of equals, acting and speaking together, for the sake of intrinsic principles, into the ‘pull and pressure and the tricks of cliques’, motivated by greed, lust for domination, group and class interest, and factionalism of every sort. Thus a politics of diversity turns into a politics of divisiveness, the ‘judicious exchange of opinion’ gives way to inveterate party strife, loyalty to one’s fellows and commitment to principle debases itself to implacable partisanship and violent
militancy. Even the relation between politics and truth, inherently antinomic though it (according to Arendt) necessarily is, deteriorates in the course of this transformation, the nature of their opposition evidently being determined by the character of human relationships in which the clash occurs. Thus, in a world of partial, conflicting interests, where nothing counts but pleasure and profit, truth clashes with the political only on the lowest level of human affairs, whereas Plato’s philosophical truth clashed with the political “on the considerably higher level of opinion and agreement.”

Now, it is of lesser moment to our purpose whether Arendt’s portrayal of the modern world, or, for that matter, of the Greek polis — her model of genuine politics — is accurate or not; for what we are chiefly interested in are the meanings which her principal concepts are intended to carry and the extent to which these meanings illuminate her vision of political redemption in which politics and truth come to confront each other at a level compatible with human excellence and dignity. Consequently, in subsequent sections, we shall look more closely at Arendt’s contradistinction of making and acting, basic to her theory of political action, and to her polarization of politics and truth, which is equally basic to her conception of a politics of freedom and plurality.

Arendt traces the modern confusion of acting with making to Plato who, she maintains, was the first to provide a rationalization for the retreat from the infinity of genuine politics and from the “exasperation with the threefold frustration” attending it, its unpredictability, irreversibility and the anonymity of the authors of its processes. The Platonic rationalization was the first major attempt to replace the haphazardness and irresponsibility inherent in a situation in which a plurality of agents is enacting something new whose outcome is unforeseeable in its infinite boundlessness. Intended to shore up arguments against the frailty and fickleness of democracy, it actually spelled the doom of politics itself. For it transmuted the meaning of political action: in place of acting in the sense of taking an initiative, of starting something new, of causing, together with others, things to happen in the public realm, the Platonic rationalization substituted ruling, the issuing of commands; and in place of plurality and diversity it put forward the monarchic idea of a philosopher-king. Henceforth the paradigmatic actor in politics came to be viewed as the master-craftsman, the architect, the expert, who knew what was to be done and why. To Arendt this change of conception constitutes the transfer of the organizational ethic of the household and private business into the sphere of politics and is the source of its virtual assimilation by the social, as it also signals the extinction of the private household itself as a distinct and
distinctive entity. Henceforth public business becomes indistinguishable from private business in that means-ends relationships apply equally to both. The notion that he who wills the end must also will the means thus becomes ubiquitous, a commonplace. Implicit in this notion and the means-ends relationship underlying it Arendt sees the Platonic separation of knowing and doing. In the light of this separation knowledge comes to be associated with giving orders, issuing commands and rulership generally, while action comes to be associated with taking orders, obeying commands, and being ruled, with executing a plan or blueprint rather than designing it. For Arendt the separation between knowing and doing is tantamount to the destruction of action in its innermost meaning; not surprisingly, therefore, she is distressed that it is this mutilated or perverted meaning of action, in terms of knowing without doing or doing without knowing, which “overruled all earlier experiences and articulations in the political realm and became authoritative for the whole tradition of political thought.” For what the separation typifies is not action but fabrication; it is in fabrication that processes “obviously” fall into a prior cognition or perception of the end-product and a subsequent organizing of its execution. And that affairs in politics generally came to be so intimately linked with violence is wholly attributable to the warped understanding of action in terms of making; for no fabrication could ever come to pass without violence.

Further elaborations soon make it evident, however, that in her critique of Plato, and to a lesser degree of Aristotle, for handling political matters in the mode of fabrication, she has in mind not knowing and doing, but thinking and doing. In the very same passage in which she discusses the division between knowing and doing, she suddenly switches from “knowledge” to “thought”: action now loses its validity and meaning “the moment thought and action part company.” Presumably Arendt herself became aware that only the latter formulation is compatible with two essential characteristics of action as she conceives it. Since, on her view, no other human performance requires speech to the same extent as action, and since thought is expressed in speech; thought, speech and action are one and the same thing, and hence the notion of action being devoid of thought is simply incomprehensible. But the same cannot be said of knowledge and action; for while thought being constitutive of action forms one essential characteristic of action, and, one might qualify further, a positive requirement, the necessary absence of knowledge from action forms the second essential characteristic of action, albeit a negative requirement. Indeed one would probably not be wrong in regarding knowing and acting as inherently opposed notions in Arendt’s scheme of things, at any rate in her conception of acting in the public realm. Law-making, for example, which since Plato and Aristotle has been considered as the highest form of political activity, involving precisely the sort of superior knowledge the Platonic ruler is
supposed to possess, is judged by Arendt as a type of fabrication, laws being the
products of making and not the result of acting, for what the legislator does is
to devise a plan or design a blueprint, the execution of which is the very
negation of acting, for what is to be done is not unknown and unpredictable,
but fixed and certain.\textsuperscript{30}

That Arendt denies rather than affirms the linkage between knowledge and
action is even more apparent from another work in which the closest analogue
to action is seen in the occurrence of a \textit{miracle}.\textsuperscript{31} Now, clearly, we do not speak
of events as miracles when we know why and how they occurred. Arendt \textit{deliberately}
chooses the analogue of a miracle \textit{because} she sees in \textit{not} knowing
one of the most disclosing qualities of action proper. She says so explicitly
enough herself: men do not, and cannot, in acting, as distinct from making, \textit{know}
what they are doing, and thus can never be masters of their own
destiny.\textsuperscript{32} Marx is sharply taken to task for having applied Vico’s idea that
history was made by man to political action; to her this is a telling illustration of
an all-too-frequent conceptual switch from history to politics. To derive politics
from history, or to apply to politics the vantage point of the historian, is to con-
fuse, once again, acting with making. For to view action from the vantage point
of the historian is to look upon it as a completed process; it is a sort of mirror
image of Plato’s blueprint. Hence Marx’s conception of political action, no less
than Plato’s is dismissed by Arendt as just another attempt to rationalize the
escape from the frustrations and the fragility of human action, as another exer-
cise in “construing action in the image of making.”\textsuperscript{33} Action — in contrast to
fabrication which has a definite beginning and a definite, predictable end —
though it has a definite beginning, never has a predictable end.\textsuperscript{34} In a very real
sense, therefore, action is infinite — it has no end. “The process of a single
deed can quite literally endure throughout time until mankind itself has come
to an end.”\textsuperscript{35} From this Arendt deduces, logically enough, that man, never
quite knowing what he is doing, may easily be “guilty” of consequences he
never quite intended or foresaw, and thus should be looked upon much more
as the “victim and sufferer” than the author of his action.\textsuperscript{36} But, surely, if this
is so, if man plunging into action scarcely knows what he is accomplishing, the
separation between doing and knowing is in Arendt’s portrayal of action as
severe as in Plato’s, in spite of profound differences in their conceptions of
“doing”.

If action, however, has no end, or, at any rate, no end knowable to the actor,
what is the source, motivation, or point of acting, wherefrom does it derive its
validity or meaning? Arendt is bent on showing that here, too, there is a radical
difference between acting and any other human activity. While labour is
bound up with biological needs and the satisfaction of material wants, which
constitute both its motivation and its goal, and fabrication is governed by
means-ends relationships and thus clearly delimited processes, action is free
from internal (physical or psychological) motivation as it is free from the determination of set ends or common standards of ordinary (private or moral) behaviour.\textsuperscript{37} In other words, action, unlike labour or work, is in a certain sense motive-less as well as aim-less, and it is also amoral in terms of ordinary codes of morality. Admittedly — and Arendt fully concedes this — action, like any other form of conscious human behaviour, has motives and aims, as it is also constrained by external reality, including its norms of conduct, but its defining characteristic lies beyond and transcends these determining and limiting factors. Arendt calls this "non-determining" characteristic a principle, by which she understands a distinctive but highly diffuse or general ethos or sentiment, whose validity, meaning, or worth, lies wholly in itself, and is neither derivable from, nor reducible to, anything else. She mentions such principles as honour, glory, love, or equality, and likens them to Montesquieu's "virtue", "distinction" or "excellence", though she also adds fear, distrust, and hatred, that is, dispositions which, to my mind, are scarcely distinguishable from "motives" in the usually accepted sense. Arendt seems to think otherwise; she takes great pains to set principles sharply apart from motives, and for her the crucial difference lies in their mode of operation. Motives, in the form of dispositions, feelings, states of mind, intentions, aims, or reasons (the "because of" and "in order to" types of motivation), issue from "within the self", whereas principles are sentiments which "inspire from without". To actualize such principles is to act, and to act freely; not because of this or that personal motive or in order to produce this or that result, but for its own sake.\textsuperscript{38} Action, thus conceived, in other words, carries its value and justification within the performance itself: indeed, action is performance, and it is an activity which is, as to its meaning and validity wholly self-sustaining. The political actor resembles, therefore, on Arendt's view, the performing artist, the virtuoso, rather than the creative artist, the latter being much closer to the modus operandi of the fabricator.\textsuperscript{39} The raison d'être of the political is to establish and maintain a space where "freedom as virtuosity" can make its appearance, where it finds a tangible reality in "words which can be heard, in deeds which can be seen, and in events which are talked about, remembered, and turned into stories."\textsuperscript{40}

The defining characteristic or the distinguishing criterion of action as performance is "greatness". Unlike ordinary human behaviour, action cannot and must not be judged according to standards and rules applicable to every-day affairs, because it is in its nature "to break through the commonly accepted and reach into the extra-ordinary, where whatever is true in common and everyday life no longer applies because everything that exists is unique and sui generis."\textsuperscript{41} But greatness and glory, like the performance which they characterize, have nothing whatsoever to do with motives, intentions, or consequences; what matters, and what solely matters, is that the act is performed in
public and is inspired by principles. Feats, thus performed, so shine in their radiance as to be worthy of remembrance.\textsuperscript{42}

A number of puzzling questions come to mind concerning Arendt's sharp distinctions between acting and making, acting and knowing (as distinct from thinking), and motives and principles. One cannot help feeling that she deliberately overdraws the contrasts in order to hammer in her eloquent plea for the unique distinctiveness of political action. And, likewise, one cannot help wondering whether her intense didactic impulse is not somewhat self-defeating. For while the didactic effectiveness of her choice of sharply polarized categories is undeniable, and the suggestiveness of her insights profoundly stimulating, the content of her categories, despite — and at times because of — painstaking elaborations remain irritatingly obscure or unreal or provokingly odd. What is more, she herself seems to realize at times that she is simply overdoing it. Thus she is clearly reluctant to face the full implications of her amoral conception of "greatness". She would like to suggest that somehow things need not get out of hand. Somehow political actions that are truly great would avoid brutality, words uttered in the public space would not be used to deceive;\textsuperscript{43} but she stipulates no moral restraints within the conception itself that would lend support to such assumptions. Here, as elsewhere (as I shall argue) Arendt reveals a disturbingly selective moralism which verges on what I would call a form of moral separatism. One may formally distinguish between acting in accordance with, or for the sake of, an external principle, and acting out of personal feelings or in order to promote a particular end; but one can hardly speak of judging actions by only taking into account their inspiring principles and not caring where these could or did lead or why or how they came to exercise their inspiring influence.

Moreover, the matter goes deeper than this. Should one act as if one had no image of the end in mind, as if the outcome of actions were unknowable, as if personal feelings counted for nothing and the principle counted for everything? Or are such questions, puzzling and troublesome though they are, wholly beside the point when greatness is at stake? To be sure, Arendt is fully aware of these frustrating puzzles; time and again she acknowledges the depressingly frustrating predicament of being seen and being heard in public, of acting politically, yet every attempt to resolve or reduce the problematical, if not paradoxical, tensions, represents to her a retreat from acting, an escape from greatness. But this inevitably raises the most fundamental question, the question that touches the core of the matter: why should man aim at greatness, why should he embark upon action so pregnant with futility and frustration; why should he shun being a worker or a fabricator if, in so doing, he achieves results that are wholly intangible, uncontrollable, and unfathomable, where he is groping in the dark, not knowing whether he be the author or victim of his deeds? What, in short, would he miss by not acting, by not performing in
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public, by avoiding greatness and glory? Arendt's reply is as starkly simple as it is devastatingly complex: man, by not acting robs himself of himself, he annihilates his distinctive identity as a human being. For to act means to reveal oneself as an individual human entity, as a person. It is this reply which compels us to take the redemptive thrust of Arendt's political thought seriously, however circumspect we might feel about her conceptual approach, about her passion for polarities and paradoxes, about her poetic allusions, about her provoking oddity.

Unfortunately, it is not clear how or why — hence the complexity of Arendt's reply — the greatness or glory of an action is to disclose the personal identity of the actor, the "who" as distinct from the "what" a person is. For it is by no means evident that the nature of the performance is necessarily identifiable with the nature of the performer, with the kind of person he is. Admittedly, it is only through famous deeds that one can acquire immortal fame. But why or how should the principle for the sake of which the deed was performed self-evidently reveal the character of the person who acted upon it? Could not, putting it simply, a timid man perform feats by word or deed that others judge to be bold and courageous? Arendt concedes as much: the hero the story discloses needs no heroic qualities; an action is no less great, "and may even be greater", if the "hero" happens to be a coward. But if this is so, if men do not do what they do because they are who they are, it is hard to grasp in what revelatory manner their actions disclose their "personal qualities", their distinctive individual identities as persons, as Arendt claims. Her distinction between the "who" and the "what" of a person does not, I fear, make the task any easier. For how does she envisage the dissociation of the "who" — his personal qualities, from the "what" — "the qualities an individual possesses"? That she has more in mind than the difference between actualized and latent qualities is perfectly obvious, for she distinguishes not only between kinds of individual qualities but also between phases of an action in which these different qualities surface and reveal themselves. Thus only the story of the performance itself discloses who a person was, everything else we know of him, "including the work he may have produced and left behind", only discloses what he was. Moreover, the "who" to be revealed is not simply the person qua man, but the person qua citizen, and hence, notwithstanding Arendt's distinction, the "what" is not really entirely detachable from the "who"; only the free man qualifies as citizen, and not the slave or the labourer who is subject to coercion by others or driven and urged on by the necessities of life. Evidently, it does matter what the who is; and, what is more, on Arendt's own showing, it is the "what" rather than the "who" that the actor himself is capable of having at least some knowledge of. He would, that is, most likely be aware of his status as labourer or slave and he would most pro-
bably have a fair idea where his own strength and weaknesses lie. But he could
only very inadequately know who he is, for the disclosure that action is meant
to yield is of no direct cognitive benefit to the actor himself. It is only to the
others that he discloses himself, not to himself. Man can never know himself as
a direct result of plunging into action; he can only know of himself what others
think of him.\footnote{50}

Perhaps one could interpret Arendt to mean that what matters in politics is
not the character qualities of a person but the manner in which he plays a role
or wears a mask. The analogy she draws between politics and the theatre might
lend support to such an interpretation.\footnote{51} Yet this does not dispose of the
problem of whether a role is identifiable with the who of a person rather than with
the what. Possibly, this unclearness concerning the relationship between an ac-
tion and the ‘‘who’’ and ‘‘what’’ of its performer stems again from an essen-
tially ambivalent stance on Arendt’s part. She appears as reluctant to derive
greatness from internal personality traits, as she is loath to deprive the actor of
his distinctive individuality and to view him as a mere cog that is pushed and
pulled from the outside.

Be that as it may, one thing is made unequivocally manifest: human
greatness can be achieved solely by acting publicly, by taking part in arche, by
starting new things in the political realm, by being a citizen. In viewing the
connection between human excellence and political action so inextricably tight,
as Hannah Arendt does, she markedly departs from the tradition that spans
from the age of the Greek polis to the present day. Indeed, it is her opposition
to this intervening tradition which decisively typifies her political thinking.
Although she is manifestly far from indifferent to the moral content of political
action, the gravity of her intellectual energies centres on the uniqueness and in-
trinsic meaning of politics per se, apparently, even at the risk of moral
separatism. What she laments above all is the passing of an era in which politics
was valued as the most distinctive human activity and taken seriously on its own
terms.

No other single work reveals more strikingly the extent to which Arendt is
prepared to uphold the distinctiveness and autonomy of the political realm
than her essay on ‘‘Truth and Politics’’. For the saliency of its juxtaposition of
truth and politics lies in presenting truth as not only outside politics but as
potentially hostile to it. The externality of truth is as much a condition for the
autonomy of politics as it is the basis of its own inherent validity. Neither can
preserve its integrity if invaded by the other. The dignity of the political realm
rests, therefore, on its intrinsic autonomy, on the underivative character of the
principles sustaining it.\footnote{52}
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III

Disregarding the question of the ontological meaning of truth, Arendt makes that much clear: truth is not of one piece; it has at least two faces which she distinguishes as "rational" and "factual". Rational truth, whether produced or disclosed by the human mind, comprises mathematical, scientific, and philosophical concerns, concerns pursued "in solitude and remoteness", while factual truth chiefly refers to the "outcomes of men living and acting together." Although both varieties of truth are external to politics, factual truth shares with politics, as a matter of necessity, a common involvement with man in the plural. This shared characteristic accounts for one reason why facts are often mistaken for opinions; the other derives from the "annoying contingency" of facts. Things could always have occurred otherwise than they actually did, so that what in retrospect appears as inexorable necessity is a sort of illusion. The possibility of mistaken identity clearly harbors the risk of facts being deliberately discredited, manipulated or indeed destroyed, in that events or individuals are utterly wiped out from the historical record.

But the risk of encroachment by the political powers that be upon the domain of factual truth is not the only danger to guard against. It is not only truth that needs saving from the designs of politics, politics itself needs saving from the onslaught of truth. For all forms of truth contain, in Arendt's view, a coercive, if not tyrannical propensity which threatens the very existence of politics. Factual truth, through its closer proximity to the political realm, is the most likely to clash with political action, and hence needs watching in particular. It is, therefore, factual truth that Arendt claims to be chiefly concerned with in her treatise on "Truth and Politics".

What precisely does she mean, however, by factual truth? This is not altogether clear; for she tends to run together at least three distinct meanings: (i) what actually is, that is, the objectively given in any situation; (ii) what, in point of fact, is said about it, by witnesses and others; and (iii) what, by way of reaction, is thought and felt about it. Thus, if factual truth is coercive in any one of these senses, it is so quite differently from that of any of the others. Judging by the only example she cites as typifying "factual truth", one would infer that it is the first meaning, the objectively given, that she has principally in mind. At the same time she makes it perfectly clear that she considers personal truthfulness as the hallmark of factual truth, which suggests that she is thinking in terms of the second or third meaning given above.

The example of "factual truth" repeatedly cited throughout the essay on "Truth and Politics" is the invasion of Belgium by Germany during the First World War. Whatever interpretation we may construct upon "brutally elementary data of this kind" cannot alter their existential finality, their bedrock of inescapable factness. It could be objected that simple observation
statements, such as "Germany invaded Belgium in August 1914", true though they are as descriptions of events, imply no justification or explanation for action; that, stripped of a context of meanings, such truths have no compelling force whatsoever. There is, of course, soundness in the objection, but I doubt if it really hits the mark. Arendt is quite aware that facts need interpretation to disclose intelligible meaning. Her point is, if I understand her correctly, that, unless there is something we can take to be true in the unequivocal sense in which we accept the factness of the German invasion of Belgium in 1914, we have no way of knowing how anything could be false.

Perhaps a phrase Arendt uses in another essay, "Lying in Politics", may help to clarify this point. In it she takes the American Administration to task for not having been able "to confront reality [in Vietnam] on its own terms because it had always some parallels in mind that ‘helped’ it to understand those terms." Because of this failure to realize that we cannot readily apply criteria or perspectives to a new situation that may have served us well in a previous situation, lying had been resorted to. Yet Arendt’s principal worry here, despite the title of the essay, is not so much lying as a total loss of a sense of reality, which is far more disastrous in so far as it renders us utterly helpless. It is a condition which negates all judgment, truth-telling or lying.

A familiar predicament of human action reveals "reality", however, as having both a passive and an active quality: man sees himself, in any situation, constrained by facts which exist independently of his own designs and desires, while at the same time he is conscious of his capacity to choose between alternative courses of action. On the one hand, he is confronted by reality as an inescapable given; on the other, he acts upon it. His world, therefore, is a field of tension between a realm of factual givens, the domain of "finality", and a realm of potential deeds, the domain of "infinity". For Arendt, action in politics revolves around initiating processes designed to "change the world". Factual truth — in the sense of the objectively given — thus confronts man, bent on changing the world, as inescapable reality, as something he has to come to terms with. Arendt sees this confrontation as a clash between "what is" and what is to be, and derives from this meeting of opposites her coercion theory of truth as well as her theory of lying in politics. Lying enables the political actor to overcome the coerciveness of "what is". He says "what is not so because he wants things to be different from what they are." Lying is one response to the challenge of factual truth, one way of bridging the gap between facts and deeds, between finality and infinity; it is one way of "reconciling" compulsion with freedom. Arendt speaks of our ability to lie as one of "the few obvious, demonstrable data that confirm human freedom." From this perspective, factual truth presents a potential threat to politics as a free activity, just as rational truth, with its zealous hankering for changeless finality is liable to imperil its boundless infinity.
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This, however, as Arendt realizes and indeed stresses, is only one side of the coin. Granted that factual truth in its existential coerciveness and stubborn resilience inhibits political action — in view of which Arendt calls factual truth non-political or even anti-political, can we therefore ignore it and turn a blind eye to its existence? In other words, can we dismiss reality as though it were otiose? Arendt’s reply is that we cannot; for if we refuse to face reality, or at least that part of reality which directly impinges upon acting in the public realm, we have no benchmark, no point of reference from which to start something new. Not knowing “what is”, we can hardly strive for “what is not”. We are adrift, having lost the ground on which to stand.

It is precisely for having lost its bearings that the American Administration is taken to task in Arendt’s essay on “Lying in Politics”.

Arendt’s position, then, on the relation of truth to politics is undeniably ambivalent. But while disturbing in some of its implications, it is not contradictory so long as factual truth is identified with the first of the three meanings mentioned earlier. As soon, however, as the other meanings are brought into play, the cognitive content of “factual truth” becomes blurred; the category can no longer sustain the weight put upon it. Arendt’s elaboration of her position threatens, as we shall see, its own viability, its very ground on which to stand.

IV

To reinforce her argument in support of the distinctiveness of political action Arendt introduces a further juxtaposition. Although she insists that the only real opposite to factual truth is the fabrication of deliberate falsehoods, she finds Plato’s distinction (in the Line allegory) between knowledge and opinion useful for contrasting factual truth with “opinion”. (Unfortunately, she misleadingly suggests that Plato equates opinion with illusion. Plato does not oppose opinion to knowledge as something non-existent or necessarily false; opinion can be true or false, for one can have “correct beliefs without knowledge”. [Republic, 506 c] Curiously enough, Arendt herself subsequently refers to Plato’s concept of “right opinion”; could one have “right illusions”?) Whereas truth, as an absolute, or as a self-evident fact, entails an “indisputable” claim to validity, opinion stakes no such claim. Axioms, or facts, are “beyond agreement”; opinions, by contrast, are inherently discussable; if the former preclude debate, the latter invite it, and hence are the very “hallmark of all strictly political thinking.” While self-evidence confers upon truth a coercive propensity, the lack of self-evidence to be found in opinion defines its distinctly persuasive character.
necessarily involving numbers, differs drastically from truth, which is independent of numbers, in the "mode of asserting validity".73

Arendt’s presentation here remarkably echoes Aristotle’s reasoning in the \textit{Rhetoric}, in particular his distinction between "things about which we deliberate" and things which are beyond the scope of deliberation.74 Once again the "finality" of truth is contrasted with the "infinity" of politics, the former being beyond agreement, the latter forever seeking agreement through discussion and deliberation, through persuasion and argument. And once again the blurring of the distinction is sadly deplored. Modern man is said to confuse truth and opinion as easily as he confuses acting with making, and this makes it so much more plausible to present opinion as truth or to dismiss truth as mere opinion.75

But having drawn the line separating truth from opinion, Arendt herself succeeds — albeit unwittingly — in blurring it by elevating opinion to a degree of universality which makes it scarcely distinguishable from truth. The confusion which this qualitative leap produces is made complete by her use of the term "impartiality" — the hallmark of truth — to characterize opinion "at its best".76 But this is not merely confusing; it seriously imperils the very foundations of Arendt’s theory of political action. For what is at issue here is no longer a matter of adhering to a formal distinction, or of blurring it, but a question of political substance of the first order. It will be necessary, therefore, to trace briefly the steps by means of which Arendt, starting from a pluralistic and diversitarian base, shunning unanimity in the best Millian tradition, arrives at consensual unity strangely reminiscent of Rousseau’s general will — I say "strangely", because Rousseau’s notion of the general will is anathema to Arendt.

Political thought is representative — that is her major premise. The more people’s standpoints I have present in my mind while I am pondering a given point in dispute, the stronger will be my capacity for representative thinking and the more valid my final conclusions, my opinion.77 That representative thinking is disinterested, in that it excludes consideration of one’s own private interests, constitutes her minor premise.78 From these premises it is supposed to follow that, however diverse opinions might be to start with, and however strongly they might conflict over particularities, they are bound to "ascend to some impartial generality", by being publicly discussed from all sides.78

Since there is no suggestion that this eventual common understanding or agreement would ensue through the assistance of physical force or the exercise of group pressures, Arendt must assume, as Rousseau did, that conflicts are not real or fundamental or permanent if individuals think as citizens and not as private persons, and if they think exclusively as individual citizens and not as members of sectional groups. Having liberated themselves from their subjective
idiosyncracies and private conditions, men, evidently must attain agreement. Yet, what warrants this belief? Why should it be taken for granted that there is but one single conception of the common or general good? Is it not conceivable that even in the absence of “private interests” there could be disagreement not only over “particularities” but over general ends? And, if so, who is to judge between different conceptions of the general good? Arendt does not suggest an equivalent of, or substitute for, Rousseau’s Legislator, so there is no way of knowing how she proposes to resolve such differences. Presumably, she rules out such a possibility; presumably, she holds that individuals — unlike parties, classes, or interest groups — would differ only over particularities which are invariably resolvable through discussion, through a process of disinterested reasoning. Stalemate, anarchy, or permanent conflict, evidently could not occur.

Moreover, Arendt’s position on representative thinking in politics seems oddly ambivalent. On the one hand she approvingly cites Aristotle’s warning that men who are unconcerned with “what is good for themselves” cannot very well be trusted with representing the down-to-earth interests of the community. On the other hand, however, she regards disinterestedness, the “liberation from one’s private interests”, as the defining quality of representative opinion. Admittedly, a cynic could argue that there is no necessary inconsistency involved here, since politicians know very well “what is good for themselves” by not appearing to be motivated by their private interests. But this is not Arendt’s argument. On the contrary, she makes it perfectly plain that representative thinking must be sharply distinguished from representative government (for opinions, unlike interests, cannot be represented), or from trimming one’s sail, or from counting noses, or from joining majorities; and she certainly does not mean identifying with the interests of the group to which one happens to belong. Nor is representative thinking contingent on deliberating with others in common assembly. Even when completely alone “can I make myself the representative of everybody else.” Adopting Kant’s notion of an enlarged mentality and his concept of universality of intent (not to be confused with actual universality), Arendt is combining here aesthetic and moral criteria for judging and acting. Thus, when she is invoking Aristotle in this context, she obviously is not identifying the “down-to-earth interests of the community” with Bentham’s aggregate of private interests. The man not to be trusted in politics is not one who is incapable of “representing” private or group interests, but one who is incapable of taking into account diverse — albeit down-to-earth — opinions of those with whom he shares a common interest as a fellow citizen. However, — and here lies the apparent ambivalence — men should also be concerned with “what is good for themselves”. How is this requirement to be reconciled with disinterestedness? The only interpretation of this phrase which seems compatible with Arendt’s position is a tautological and
“moralistic” one, namely, one which implies that only those capable of representative thinking also reveal, in so doing, a proper concern for what is truly good for themselves. It is they who are the paradigmatic opinion holders.

Clearly, nothing could be further removed from Plato’s view (or, for that matter, the most current view) of political opinion than this highly universalist and moralist understanding of opinion. When, in the Republic (vi, 493) Plato poses the (to him insoluble) problem of combining “representative thinking” (in terms of what an assembly of men think or would approve of) with doing what ought to be done, he brings into sharp relief what Arendt oddly fails to recognize or accept, namely, that “opinion” in politics is what people do think and not what they ought to think. I advisedly say “oddly fails to recognize”, because in the light of the universalist and moralist flavour of her notion of political opinion the juxtaposition of truth and opinion becomes practically forceless. With so much emphasis on universality and impartiality we no longer know a political opinion when we see one.

The central point of the didactic enterprise, therefore, the sharpening of our awareness of the distinctiveness of politics as a realm of plurality and diversity seems utterly lost in this virtually apolitical vision of consensual unity. One finds it hard to resist the suspicion that, for Hannah Arendt, political opinions are indistinguishable from discussion points. Clashes of views are presented not as confrontations between settled positions or commitments but as multiple dialogues in a debate in which impartial reasoning cannot but attain consensus, if not unanimity. Even if it is conceded that political positions are changeable, that convictions are rarely so firmly held that they are wholly impervious to persuasive counter-arguments, this is still far from saying that political opinions are fluid to a degree that would totally negate a sense of abiding antagonism or opposition. Clearly, an image of political redemption that did so, that issued in the negation of dissent, would empty the concept of plurality of all meaning.

Since Arendt claims to be concerned with truthfulness rather than truth, per se, it is surprising that this distinction is constantly lost sight of in her essay on “Truth and Politics”. For throughout her discussion it seems that truthfulness as well as truth is made contingent on disinterestedness, impartiality, and non-commitment. No doubt, partisanship, the allegiance to causes and organizations, will entail a higher premium being put on loyalty to one’s fellows and on steadfastness of purpose than on truth. This, indeed, is one important reason why Arendt values human fellowship (humanitas) above truth. All the same, can we not be perfectly truthful when we are explaining
or defending purposes or principles that we cherish or interests that we consider vital to others or to ourselves? Personal truthfulness by itself, admittedly, is no guarantee for the truth content of a proposition. For the only cognitive test of a truth claim is its challengability on grounds recognized as intrinsic or non-special-pleading. Whatever be the ontological status of truth, it is essential that we hold that there are criteria for discerning truth which are self-sustaining and do not derive from our likes and dislikes, our class or group interests or personal advantage. But it seems to me that Arendt is confusing (in “Truth and Politics”) two quite distinct sets of criteria, those of a man’s personal attributes, and those which apply to impersonal propositions.

To establish the truthfulness of first-order observation statements of the kind Arendt cites — the German invasion of Belgium — we refer to objective reality for verification (as witnessed and recorded by impartial observers). When, however, we are presented with second-order statements which embrace interpretations, evaluations, and explanations of, or personal responses to, first-order observation statements, we can no longer simply refer to the objective “elementary data” (as Arendt calls them) to form a judgment of their validity as truth claims. In other words, the criteria we apply to “what is said” about what is or was, and to “what is being thought or felt about it” (the second and third possible meanings of “factual truth”, mentioned earlier), involve judgmental considerations of a kind that do not arise in examining the correspondence of first-order truth claims to elementary facts. Attitudes, assessments, and specific action responses entail in varying degrees subjective commitments which are either non-existent in first-order truth claims or easily discountable.

There is no need to dwell at length on the rather unproblematic way in which the notion of commitment is used in “Truth and Politics”. But even in the very general sense in which Arendt speaks of commitment, equating it with partisanship, or one-sided dedication to a cause or interest, one may wonder whether “non-commitment” is necessarily synonymous with impartiality, as she seems to hold. For, while there are, no doubt, commitments which militate against impartiality, non-commitment could do so likewise, since it may simply mean indifference; and indifference clearly is not the same as impartiality. When we are indifferent we do not care one way or the other about moral, aesthetic, factual, or any other considerations or values. But to be impartial, we have to care for such values as objectivity, fairness, or justice. Should we not, therefore, regard impartiality itself as a form of commitment rather than as a form of non-commitment? Arendt does not explore this question; it is evident, however, that but for one occasion where she speaks of a “commitment to truth”, truth and commitment are, for her, inherently opposed categories.

The polarization of truth and commitment does prove, nonetheless, of heuristic merit when we consider each as constituting the end of a continuum
which comprises variants of either or combinations of both. Thus we might think on the one extreme of those who at all times feel compelled to proclaim the truth (or what they conceive to be the truth) regardless of consequences, and on the other extreme of those so committed to causes or interests that they feel compelled to suppress the truth or have recourse to downright lying. Indeed, we could speak here of two rival absolutist ethics, the ethic of unconditional veracity, and the ethic of unconditional commitment. In any politics, but particularly in a politics of public controversy, the viability of both absolutist ethics will be highly precarious, not only because they are likely to breed intolerance or impair credibility, or both, but also because political action, unlike moral action, is commonly not evaluated — as Arendt wholly acknowledges and indeed insists — by its motives or intentions, but by its outcomes — notwithstanding Arendt’s dismissal of “consequences”. The conflict in politics, therefore, is not between non-partisan truth and partisan commitment (although it frequently is one between private conscience and public posture), but between weighing the responsibility for the action itself against strict adherence to truth or set commitments. When Robert Stanfield, previous leader of the Progressive Conservatives, reportedly stated, after the last Canadian Federal election, that “being truthful was more important than being a leader”, he poignantly captured the essential difference between moral thinking and political thinking. No doubt, what is right and wrong in political terms can never be strictly known in advance — in view of which Arendt speaks of an action’s boundless unpredictability — but this does not alter the fact that we hold men engaged in public affairs responsible for what they say or do in light of the consequences we attribute to their words or deeds.

If speaking the truth in public would invariably prove to be the best policy there would clearly be no problem. Likewise, if lying invariably achieved desirable results in public life there would be no problem either. Yet, clearly, neither alternative is the most likely one in politics; for both the wholly “irresponsible” truth-teller and the wholly committed liar will find their absolutized ethic counter-productive to their political ends. All this is obvious enough, and I am not suggesting for a moment that Arendt would deny it. But I am wondering whether, by so pointedly focusing on the polarized extremes, she does not unwittingly obscure what throughout her writings she has persistently been determined to maintain, namely, the inherently absurd, or tragic, nature of the predicament that acting publicly involves. For, clearly, the choice is not simply between truth and politics, or, as Plato and Machiavelli saw it, between clean hands and soiled hands; nor is it a matter of thinking impartially or of being committed or not. The potentially agonizing problem is rather that of acting responsibly, or merely successfully, in a sphere where outcomes are incalculable, and where moral and political imperatives conflict.
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This problem may indeed be insoluble in principle, yet action demands that it be mounted by the incessant balancing of diverse, conflicting and, at times, irreconcilable ends or purposes. We may be deceived about our ends, but we would scarcely act at all on the principle of endlessness.

VI

Perhaps the most intriguing part of Hannah Arendt's essay on truth and politics is that devoted to the problem of self-deception in politics. Self-deception, she maintains, should be treated as far more serious a problem in politics than lying to others. For, while in lying to others the existence of truth is not in jeopardy, since the liar knows the truth which he is wilfully distorting, in the case of self-deception truth itself is lost. This is an interesting and unusual way of viewing self-deception, which, generally, is considered as a mitigating factor. I must admit, however, that I do not find Arendt's reasoning in support of her thesis very convincing.

First of all, although self-deception may indeed be recognized as a potentially serious source of political misjudgment, "lying to oneself", the phrase Arendt uses for self-deception, is a rather problematical way of speaking, since it inevitably raises the question of who is relating to whom when I am lying to myself. Admittedly, we often use such figures of speech as "debating with myself", or being "angry with myself", or "pulling myself up". Yet what we thus express are circumlocutions for states of indecision, conflict, unhappiness, resolution, and so on, within ourselves. We feel torn, or uncertain, or under some illusion, but none of these states or feelings involve wilful deceit tantamount to the deliberate fabrication of untruths which we present to ourselves as truths. Lying, no less than veracity, is a moral category; being the victim of an illusion, whatever else it is, is not, and hence being deluded about oneself or about others is not a variant of lying.

Secondly, there may be occasions when I am not fully informed, or actually ill-informed, or plainly mistaken and, realizing this ex post facto, I conclude that, in this unintended sense I have been deceiving myself. But, once again, this is not "lying to myself", for we commonly assume that lying is an intentional effort to deceive and not a case of ignorance, superstition, or inflexibility of thinking. Of course, I may pretend to believe what in fact I do not hold to be true, or no longer hold to be true (out of loyalty, a sense of commitment, opportunism, or sheer stubbornness), but then I am not lying to myself, I am simply lying. Putting it differently, I can have false beliefs, but I cannot believe falsely. Just as truth is distinguishable from truthfulness, beliefs are distinguishable from believing. For, whereas beliefs are propositions that can be true or false, believing is an activity or a state of mind which can exist or
not exist, but which cannot be true or false. Although I may feel profoundly
costitute realizing that I upheld beliefs which I now find to have been false, I
can hardly accuse myself, or be accused by others, of having lied to myself, or
having destroyed truth, in the problematic moral sense Arendt talks about.

Finally, though I may be induced, by what Arendt calls "organized lying",
for example, to believe what is patently untrue, I cannot be said to be deceiving
myself. For if I accept as true whatever I am told, I am neither lying, nor lying
to myself, but believing. Such a possibility is indeed not to be ruled out and,
with it, the danger of truth being "lost". And perhaps this is what Arendt has
in mind. Only I fail to see that this danger emerges from lying to myself rather
than from being lied to by others.

In her Origins of Totalitarianism Hannah Arendt denies (quite properly)
that concern for consistency, which she regards as the hallmark of ideology, is
the same as concern for truth. But it does not follow from this that adherents
of an ideology are not truthful about their convictions. Nor does it follow that
those who have no ideological convictions are necessarily more truthful or more
determined seekers after truth. Indeed, Arendt herself suggests that the very
opposite could well be the case, at any rate under a totalitarian regime of terror,
where "the ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or
Communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction...
and the distinction between true and false ... no longer exists." Similarly, is
the ideologically convinced not likely to be more truthful in genuinely
believing what he professes to believe than one who merely pays lip-service to
an ideology, out of fear, or for personal advantage, or for both reasons? To be
sure, he may well be judged to be deceiving himself, either because all
ideological thinking is by definition held to be illusory or false, or because his
particular ideology is considered illusory or false; but in neither case is the
ideologically convinced lying to others or lying to himself.

No doubt Arendt's close linkage of ideology with terror and totalitarianism
leads her to maintain that adherents of a political ideology quite openly
proclaim it to be a political weapon and, apparently, for this reason, "consider
the whole question of truth and truthfulness irrelevant." It is perfectly true,
of course, that exponents of an ideology may not themselves believe what they
are propagating or that they may be indifferent to its truth content. It is equally
true that citizens living in countries where ideology is sanctioned by terror often
adopt a cynical attitude toward an ideology which, though backed by force,
carries no conviction. But this does not alter the fact that even totalitarian
power holders can scarcely afford to be unconcerned over the degree to which
the official ideology is conducive to their political ends. Even if it is granted
that they rely on terror rather than persuasion, they presumably wish their
persuasive efforts to ring true.
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By the same token, does it necessarily follow, as Arendt implies, that the prevalence of official lying, sanctioned by terror, leads to an impaired understanding of truth in the factual sense? If people find it imprudent or hazardous to tell the truth publicly, are they thereby rendered incapable of knowing or discerning the true facts in a given situation? Here again, it seems to me, a distinction is clearly called for, namely, the distinction between knowing the truth and telling the truth. Widely shared knowledge of factual truth is perfectly consistent with officially disseminated lies and officially backed terror, for truths do not necessarily cease to be known by not being aired in public. Terror frequently destroys trust among men, but factual truth may well be less vulnerable than mutual trust, and those meant to be deceived may defy being deceived.

An anecdote, circulating in one of the Eastern European countries, illustrates this point rather well. A man, so the story goes, compares at some leisure two cars parked next to one another, one being a Rolls Royce, the other a Moskvitch. A bystander approaches him. "Which of the two cars do you consider the best?" Before replying the man looks at the bystander, looks again at the cars, and finally says: "I think the Moskvitch". "Man, don't you know your cars?" the bystander says in astonishment. "Oh, I know my cars all right," comes the reply, "but I don't know you." Sagging trust evidently affects truth-telling, but not necessarily truth-knowing; and while mutual deception frequently follows in the wake of terror, it does not necessarily generate self-deception.

VII

According to Arendt, the diverse juxtapositions in "Truth and Politics" are designed merely to shore up her plea for delimiting the political sphere. This seems a rather formidable understatement, for the impression that the essay provokes goes some distance beyond this modest claim. Without wishing to dispute that the impression provoked in the reader is unintended by Arendt, I cannot help feeling that it is but another version of what I earlier referred to as "moral separatism". For the image it projects is that of a Manichean-like world, of lying in politics and of truth-telling outside politics. Evidently, reporters, professors, judges, or churchmen, who are allegedly outside the political realm, have a concern for truth which is conspicuously absent among politicians, statesmen, or administrators, presumably because the latter depend on opinions and numbers, while the former, being self-authenticating, do not. Surely, however, there are other forms of dependence than dependence on popular support. What is more, personal independence is not in itself a sufficient warrant for impartiality or honesty. In any event, the appearance of moral separatism which this sharp disjunction so easily conveys, bears rather
disturbing similarities to the “friend-foe, we-they” syndrome found in ideologies which few despised more intensely than Hannah Arendt herself.

The separation and opposition between the political domain and the nonpolitical domain also suggests that the boundary between the two domains which, in principle, is indeed to be insisted upon, is unalterably fixed and thus once and for all definable. Even if these domains were identifiable with “the public” and “the private” — as Arendt at times, though, I believe, mistakenly, urges — the notorious difficulty of comprehending the private in terms of self-regarding actions would render the distinction highly problematical. But the problem is compounded still further by Arendt’s extension of the private or non-political to what she calls “life’s necessities”, for we are then confronted with the no less notorious difficulty of determining what constitutes a life’s necessity, and who rightfully is to judge. More seriously still, if all “life’s necessities” were removed from the public domain, what indeed would remain? Arendt has no illusions about the answer: “there would be no political realm at all if we were not bound to take care of life’s necessities.”

Yet it is precisely this preoccupation with taking care of life’s necessities which, for Arendt, corrupts the political realm and causes its deformation. To it she attributes the dominance in modern politics of parties, interest groups, bureaucracies, ideologies, class-conflict, and factionalism of every sort, which, in turn, create a climate of strife and greed, of partisanship and the lust for domination, in which truth and politics clash on the lowest level of human existence. Arendt repudiates the idea of a politics that is little more than a tool of wealth, trade, labour, or welfare. Recurring to the ideals of the ancient world, she adopts without reserve Aristotle’s maxim that the polis exists for the sake of honourable deeds, not for the sake of joint livelihood.

Tempting though it is to speculate how far Arendt’s diverse proposals for some kind of direct and fragmented democracy, or her ideas on selective participation and voting rights, or the banishing of social, economic, and educational concerns from the political sphere, would succeed in effecting a redemption of modern politics, it is clearly beyond the scope of this article even to attempt to do so. Suffice it to say, therefore, that her vision of politics is at once more restrictive and more comprehensive than its modern conception. More restrictive, in that it excludes practically all the concerns that loom so large in the “policy sciences” of our day; more comprehensive, in that it massively reinforces the vigour, exhilaration and nobility of acting in the pursuit of public deeds.

Both this vision and Arendt’s disaffection not merely with “totalitarianism” but with the very institutions commonly regarded as the mainstay of freedom and democracy, at any rate in the West, enjoin us to re-open questions held to be settled and to reflect upon possible alternatives. The prospect of men acting
together as a plurality, combining equality and distinction, begetting im-
memorable deeds, free from domination of any kind, in a climate of spon-
taneity, understanding, and forgiveness, is an appealing one; that it enshrines a
drastic redefinition of the political, as it is commonly understood, scarcely
needs saying. Notwithstanding the loftiness of the vision, there is, however, (as
the previous sections sought to indicate) cause also for circumspection con-
cerning both its conceptual underpinnings and its normative implications.
Among the latter, three worries in particular bear reiterating. Neither the more
specific treatment of opinion in “Truth and Politics” nor the more general
glimpses elsewhere (notably in On Revolution) of the envisioned polity in-
spire sanguine confidence in “plurality” as a modality through which dissent is
assured secure political expression. Diversity without divisiveness, disagreement
without confrontation, may be desirable modes of “acting together”, but to
insist on the absence of divisiveness and confrontation as a prerequisite for
political redemption raises serious doubts about its political content. Secondly,
while infinity may indeed be inescapably constitutive of human action, should
it absolve political actors of the responsibility to those whose lives (or interests)
are palpably affected by the consequences of their words and deeds? Does not a
redemptive doctrine which thus invokes the postulate of infinity ominously
smack of attempting to rationalize political irresponsibility? Finally, although
the loftiness of a vision in which men, by inserting themselves into the public
realm, acquire and sustain their true personal identity, is surely beyond
dispute, it is less certain that a politics that soars to heights from which the
needs, tribulations, and follies of ordinary men are no longer within sight,
could offer gratification to any but the few while denying comfort to the many.
Who or what will take care of their lives’ necessities? Men fear finality, but they
despair over infinity. Hannah Arendt knew this well.

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3. Ibid., pp. 204-6.


5. The Human Condition, p. 31.

6. Ibid., p. 295.


8. Ibid., p. 36; see also p. 61.

9. Ibid., p. 65.

10. Ibid., p. 186 and p. 4.


12. The Human Condition, p. 29.

13. Ibid., p. 257.


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18. Ibid.


20. Ibid.


22. Ibid., p. 198; see also "What is Authority?", op. cit., pp. 112-14.


24. Ibid., p. 205.

25. Ibid., p. 201.


27. Ibid., pp. 202-204.


29. Ibid., p. 159.

30. Ibid., pp. 173-74; it may be recalled here that Rousseau also thought of the Legislator as a non-political "authority"; he had, of course, expressly Lycurgus in mind who left the political realm before making laws for the Spartans.

31. "What is Freedom?", op. cit., p. 169; see also The Human Condition, pp. 222 and 290.


33. Hannah Arendt, "The Concept of History" in Between Past and Future, p. 79.

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35. Ibid., p. 209.

36. Ibid., pp. 209-10.

37. Ibid., p. 125, and "What is Freedom?", op. cit., pp. 151-2; see also On Revolution, p. 137.


40. Ibid., pp. 154-55.

41. The Human Condition, p. 184.

42. Ibid., pp. 184-85.

43. Ibid., p. 179.

44. "The Crisis in Culture", op. cit., p. 223.


46. The Human Condition, p. 166.


50. The Human Condition, pp. 159, 171, and 209; see also "The Crisis in Culture", op. cit., p. 223.


65. *Ibid*.

66. *Ibid*.


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71. Ibid., p. 241.

72. Ibid., p. 240.

73. Ibid., p. 239.


76. Ibid., p. 242.

77. Ibid., p. 241.

78. Ibid., p. 242.

79. Ibid., see also "The Crisis in Culture", *op. cit.*, pp. 219-222.

80. Ibid., p. 220.


82. Ibid., p. 242.

83. Ibid., p. 241; see also *On Revolution*, p. 229.

84. Ibid., p. 242; In "The Crisis of Culture", however, Arendt denies that representative thinking can function in strict isolation or solitude; it needs the presence of others. (*op. cit.*, p. 220)


88. "Truth and Politics", *op. cit.*, p. 239.
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92. Ibid., p. 474.


94. Ibid., p. 263.

95. Once again there is a suspicious suggestion of homogeneity rather than "plurality" as a feature characterizing the political domain, for does not the sharp separation between the political and non-political imply that the political domain itself is a homogeneous entity? Arendt may rightly question the nature of plurality in modern pluralistic politics, but she can scarcely deny its existence in one form or another. In the case of Watergate as also in the case of the Pentagon Papers, for example, the initiative of "truth-telling" did by no means originate outside politics. Indeed, the deliberate "leaks" from the political sector to the press, illustrate rather tellingly the plurality within the political domain, including its administrative agencies, such as dissident members of the F.B.I. and the Department of Justice in the United States who systematically divulged information to the newspapers, presumably in an attempt to resist White House domination. (On this point see the perceptive article by Edward Jay Epstein, "Journalism and Truth", Commentary, 57, No. 4 (1974), 36-40.) For a comparable situation in a Communist country, see my "Between Opposition and Political Opposition", Can. J. of Pol. Sci., 5, No. 4 (1972), 533-51 and Socialism with a Human Face: Slogan and Substance (Saskatoon, 1973), pp. 4-14. In Czechoslovakia during the late sixties the disclosure of truth also originated from inside the political realm.


When you start on your journey to Ithaca,
then pray that the road is long,
full of adventure, full of knowledge.

And if you find her poor, Ithaca has not defrauded you.

C. Cavafy

Neither its origins nor its genesis are known to us. Both remain veiled in impenetrable anonymity and obscurity. Though its existence has always been precarious, its perpetuation, from epoch to epoch, is taken for granted; yet neither sovereign command nor rituals secure its continuity. Its history, in oracular fashion, discloses a myriad of visions and revisions without ever permitting them to crystallize in a single, precise, harmonious totality. Without ever lapsing into incoherence, it retains its enigmatic aura. Perhaps by nature, or force of circumstance, it is paradoxical, contradictory, elusive; a peculiarly unique way of life.

It is a life whose oceanic scope engulfs the silenced dreams, fears and prophesies of the past; it arches into the unborn future remaining firmly anchored into the demands of the present. Its continuity yields no uniformity, no convenient slogan. It evinces meaning, but no messages. Its past does not bind with the authority of tradition. Its temperament and mode of being cryptically allude to its hidden grandeur and potential heroism. Its fiercely intense, solitary individualism with a passion for the public space and a melancholy propensity toward the tranquility of contemplation reveals its inner, contradictory dimensions. Society, when convenient, celebrates, admittedly with a

* For Alexis and Pia, that they might experience the proud silence and the courage of the poetry of Ithaca.
touch of discomfort and anxiety, its devotees; occasionally they are persecuted, mocked, ridiculed, killed; mostly, society ignores them with that absolute indifference reserved only for complete irrelevancies. They, at times, bow to society's visible power and honours. More frequently, they are lured and seduced by the tangible effectiveness of political power and the fabulous fetishism of the market place. They happily surrender. But mostly, they shroud themselves in paralyzing doubt and despair. Also, they do become, without shame, intoxicated with their self-centred importance and, in self-adoration, they seek the political and social instrumentalities by which to implement their visions which are easily translatable into schemes of fanatical righteousness and excessive narcissism.

Such are the adventures, dangers, temptations, illusions and delusions of those who pursue the intellectual life.

The historical stage admits the intellectual life into its drama relatively late. War heroes had arrived already, followed by poets who immortalized their deeds in the field of violence. Only then did the intellectuals emerge in the guise of philosophers. Of course, the merchants were there from the beginning, supreme rulers of the market place. Historical documentation registers the momentous entry of this new *dramatis persona*. The founding act of the intellectual life as philosophy, in the West, is identical with the strange phenomenon of Socrates: a bizarre figure in the market place.

The Socratic enigma is rooted in the dualism of a proclaimed radical ignorance and the avowed commitment to pursue knowledge. Socrates' radical ignorance would not have been problematic had it been cured by his desire for knowledge. But this was not the case. His radical and profound ignorance persisted, rendering difficult, if not impossible, the meaning of wisdom.

Socrates, in essence, has no philosophic doctrine to enunciate, no theoretical perspective to proclaim. He writes nothing, he advocates no set of ideas, no system of thought. He is loyal to his quest for truth as much as he is to his self-knowledge of total ignorance. His insistence to engage and consume his life in a dialogical quest for knowledge inverts from the beginning the image of the intellectual as the knower and shatters any possibility of locating the official sources of knowledge: no institutional, educational structure of truth exists. Socrates is thrown into the everyday life, having exhausted, in utter dissatisfaction, the authoritative route to knowledge. No guru, no teacher, no book does he find. The quest never ends, never does it become a conquest. The philosopher's experience of the quest transforms it into an exhilarating odyssey, an end in itself. Yet nowhere do we hear Socrates say that the so cherished and treasured truth does not exist.

A careful and systematic study of the historical Socrates, even if it were to resolve conflicting evidence — Plato, Xenophon, Aristophanes — and identify Socrates' inner motive and meaning, cannot erase the problematic character,
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the paradoxical features and episodes of his whole life and, finally, his last public performance, his death. The relentless questioning, the profound, conscious denial and avoidance of an articulated position, cannot but fascinate and irritate. Here we have Socrates the teacher without a teaching, the extraordinary in the most ordinary. Socrates' concrete simplicity and great complexity are disturbing to the intellectuals. They cannot renounce him or ignore him; neither can they nor are they willing to emulate him.

Perhaps it is the nemesis of Socratic irony that the founding act of the intellectual life, by the very personality of its founder, did not consolidate its future performance under the aegis of an explicit testament. Intellectuals have as their beginning a dilemma. No patron saint guides their thoughts and choices. The demonic and the divine agonize them from the start.

It is this deeply haunting, disturbing and intriguing beginning, this paradoxical and enigmatic Socratic image that some tend to romanticize, exaggerate, distort and, lending it, incorrectly, Plato’s authoritative approval they project it as the archetype of the intellectual life: contemplative purism.

Contemplative purism affirms, quite erroneously, the intellectual life as an endless voyage in the boundless sea of eternity. Intellectuals are seen as detached from external reality. The world of the mind gains a privileged status, as if all else is false. Lucidly mystical, the intellectuals’ world resides outside history and its violence. Essence, fully spiritualized, is pitted against the whole of appearance. The intellectuals’ mind is faithfully fixed upon other worlds, worlds of beauty and order, without history, struggle and anguish. Intellectuals are urged, in this view, to think like true believers and not to succumb to the temptations of the world, to remain pure, untouched by the horror of the suffering children of time.

The intellectuals are imagined as trans-worldly creatures whose beautiful souls are immune to, and distant from the real world. Their minds and thoughts are autonomous and self-sufficient. Thought and action are absolutely severed. They become antagonistastic, irreconcilable and truly antinomic. The intellectual life offers a privileged escape from the pressures and demands of the world; it becomes the perfect refuge and grand rationalization. Ascetic mystics are more in touch with the world than these so grotesque, irrelevant creatures of intangible thoughts and passive minds, hearts and bodies.

This is one scenario of intellectual men and women in bad faith, worshipping a false Socrates under the presumed priesthood of Plato, oblivious to the vibrant, sensual transparency of the Greek sun under which no such insult to the world could have been conceived.

The central point of the Socratic experience that concerns us here is this: Socrates did introduce a dimension in the intellectual life which cannot constitute, in its significance, the totality of its meaning. The Socratic example has injected in the image of the intellectual life a paradox by its noble but perverse
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consistency, its inversions and reversions stabilized only in the specific personality that acted them out.

The Socratic way of life and fate are the source of a mood in intellectual life from which a serious, fascinating and, at times, confusing ambiguity emanates.

Plato struggled successfully with the Socratic dimension. He comprehended Socrates' unique and immense talent for mid-wifery, but he also sensed his ultimate limitation and sterility. With Plato, the intellectual is situated in a tense, potentially dangerous interaction with the polis. For Plato the tension between knowledge and power, truth and opinion, is embodied in the philosopher's voyage in the world. These tense, antagonistic but inescapable dualisms constitute the core of Plato's political philosophy.

Plato's unique and historic contribution to the meaning and significance of the intellectual life is that he totalized existential and intellectual features of Greece previously thriving only in disparity. He realized that they could not be unified. He located them in his brilliant totalization and liberated himself from the fascinating yoke of Socrates. Now, in Plato, the intellectual is the articulator of a world view, a cosmology. The intellectual life becomes a state of being, an orientation. Theorizing is open to the indeterminacy of experience and meaning; but a solid centre exists. The vast oceans of time are navigated with elegance and purpose, with creative discrimination. These new navigators, the philosophers, could transmit part of their visions, adventures and experience in the discourse of lucid minds. Other parts must be uttered in poetic allegories and metaphors in order to be experienced vicariously by others, until they, in their turn, by inspiration or of necessity, will come to navigate the vast oceans of the polis. The intellectual now passionately engages in the public space. The contemplative mood, that intelligent and so necessary solitary hour, is situated in the most individualistic, private recesses of the thinker; it is not extinguished. Yet it neither exhausts nor does it determine the whole of the intellectual life. It only constitutes an aspect, indispensable, enriching, of the intellectual's life.

The intellectual armed with the vision of the imagination, the penetrating, comprehensive totalizations of theory and the poetic articulation is now, in Plato's cosmos, simultaneously, the hero, the poet, the philosopher, who declares war on the merchants. This is an unprecedented war: it constitutes the life of the allegory of the cave. The intellectuals must maintain their integrity and dignity. Their solitary being could easily succumb to loneliness. The temptations of power and luxury are strong. The futility of the effort can be overwhelming. Plato the intellectual, who has now politely refuted and in essence transcended the sterility of the otherwise inspiring Socratic image, has reinterpreted and transvaluated the past as well as his existential predicament, becomes the new educator of Greece. Plato appropriates and transforms Homer's meaning and lesson. Only then is he self-enthroned as the educator of
educators. Now the intellectuals have a precise and immense task: to educate the unphilosophic city. But also to continue educating themselves. Their philosophy cannot be allowed to become an ossified system. The Socratic odyssey is now given structure and substance of public significance, even though its innermost essence remains highly individualistic and solitary.

The intellectual, according to the thematic interpretation I give to the Platonic paradigm, situated in the specificity of an existential predicament, does not seek a comprehensive, once and for all answer to his/her condition. If this were the case, intellectuals would be nothing else but religious believers who seek and find the true answers at the feet of their benevolent god.

Intellectuals do not open their eyes only in order to close them again blissfully under the auspices of the thoughtless murmur of mechanized doctrines. The proselytized do not theorize, interpret, interrogate, think, develop and assert a perspective on the world. The intellectuals do.

Plato's insistence that the intellectual-philosopher is the educator par excellence, profound as it is, cannot be taken literally today. Plato is correct in asserting the dangers of political office and power — the programmatic non-dialectical implementation of thought — but the philosophers' educational task — the Academy — as their public role has been tarnished drastically in modern culture. Its transfigurations and monstrous deformations constitute the tragedy of modern times.

The difference between Plato's Academy and the modern university is as great as that between Plato's genius and the mediocrity of that modern functionary, that merchant of ideas, the professor. The university ought to be the appropriate milieu for the nourishment of intellectuals. It is not. The contemporary university is a bureaucratic institution structurally tied to the established order of society. The university, it is true, is not identical to any other bureaucratic institution. It is incorrect to compare it to a factory where products are processed. It is less oppressive than the atmosphere of a factory. Its monotony is less destructive. But being less dehumanizing does not render it human or creative. It fails in its historic mission.

Though still, at particular times and in certain areas, universities allow the fleeting emergence of creative intellectual discourse, they do so by default. The prevailing, intentional policies and attitudes are those appropriate to academic mediocrity and parasitic scholarship. Footnotes, that panoply of scholarship, become the emblem of academic "creativity". Universities are fundamentally not so much, as the radicals think, the puppets of the establishment that lend respectability to various "objective" scholarly endeavours; rather, they are the grand refuge of the "educated philistines" — Nietzsche's phrase — who pretend to be the guardians of our cultural achievements and mental development.
Obviously, not every member of Plato’s Academy was a brilliant, original mind. Nor each original, great mind was instantly acknowledged as such and given its due respect. After Plato’s death an insignificant relative of his takes over the Academy; Aristotle departs. The most crucial difference between then and now is that now, the exceptional scholar is lost, obscured in the sea of mediocrity, in the market of opinions. Furthermore, the modern university suffers from its size and the confusion between teaching either as an activity meant to initiate the young to great ideas and to critical thinking, or as proselytizing, rendering them meek echoes of one’s self. It is the exaggerated, fetishistic attachment to books and libraries that mystifies the academic life. There is greater truth in the caricature of the academic than we suspect or we are willing to admit. The unreality of the academic realm of ideas and the irrelevancy of the effete academic who, in essence, is the modern bureaucrat of ideas, ideas which belong to others, which were the creative, lived experience of others constitute a pantomime, a mimicry of genuine intellectual activity.

When Plato warned us that the intellectuals’ worse enemy is not the unphilosophical polis — yes, the polis can be their mortal enemy — but themselves, he prophesied the fate of intellectual life in the hands of modern academics.

Plato also warned us of the unholy alliance between wisdom and power which can only foster tyranny. Such would be another scenario of intellectual bad faith: the violent, forceful, artificial creation of what can only be voluntary, individualistic, self-determined. As the intellectual betrays his/her task when passively abstaining from the affairs and destiny of the world so does he/she when the meaning of the intellectual life is treated as tantamount to a fierce, frantic crusade to intellectualize the whole universe.

The tension and ambivalence of the intellectuals regarding their impact on the world is central to Plato’s political philosophy and his resolution to this anguished predicament stands as a corrective to the Socratic example and experience. It also, cryptically, intimates a hidden, tragic dimension: the lucid conviction that indeed the scheme of things could be otherwise. Underneath Plato’s philosophic tranquility exists the restless passion for an absolute reorganization, a tempting madness for total change. This is contained by reason and metaphor. Like a wild beast it is caged but never politicized.

Of all great thinkers since Plato, Hegel is the one who, in his historicosophy, exorcizes this possibility completely. Action, the making of history, precedes its understanding. The philosopher arrives at the scene to interpret, to bestow meaning, to decipher the oracle of History. Minerva’s owl spreads its wings not like reckless, impatient young Icarus against the luminous sun. Only when the day’s creation has been completed do the springs of wisdom begin to flow. After the creation, unlike god who rests, the activity of the logos commences to grace chaos and incoherence with unity and order.
Plato managed to keep in abeyance the desire to create ab initio and thus transform thought, the Idea, completely into action without residue and without regret. He knew of the danger; he sensed the adventure. The perfect circle could be visualized but could not be realized. The contemplative mood provided a silent catharsis of the twilight of the cave-polis as much as the poetic expression offered, in its logos, a catharsis of the secret, all too human, dream of the imagination: to create a totally other world. Contemplation and poetry constitute for Plato the completely private and the public modes of the therapeutic exorcising of the intellectual life. The latter, in perfect reciprocity, playfully civilizes contemplation and poetry so that the polis could receive them never fully knowing or suspecting their true educator: the authentic philosophic intellect.

With Hegel thought and action are chronologically inverted. Theorizing, the expression of thinking, becomes, after the fact, a philosophy of history. The intellectual, unlike the non-intellectual, understands the motion of the world, the meaning of which is put into a philosophic narrative. The world is not recreated but rather re-discovered through the active mind. Hegel is the idealist-purist, not Plato.

If education for Plato was a dynamic form of action, of creation, for Hegel the philosophic narrative was a restorativemode of comprehending the meaning of the fragmented whole, history's true movement, a veritable phenomenology, the bacchanalian glory of the mind.

The panoramic observation of the mind after the battle of the day, as posited by Hegel suffered a Promethean onslaught by the impatient, political Marx. The famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach reopens Plato's cryptic tension and seeks a new, more satisfactory relation between thought and action. Neither the Hegelian narrative nor Plato's therapeutic satisfy Marx. The world offers itself to be moulded, if only properly understood.

The mind's understanding of the world is inadequate when executed from afar. A new, dialectical unity is advocated. Thought is invited to enter the world, to escape its confinement and seclusion.

In a single, momentous, magical gesture, Marx imposes a specific, tangible and measurable task on both, the workers of the hands and the workers of the head. The intellectuals' tasks are no longer abstract, distant and unhealthily autonomous. The new imperative is to achieve a transformative interpretation of the world, one which by its very truth can be fully substantiated and validated in praxis.

That Marx occasionally was more ambiguous and indeterminate about thought and action, about voluntarism and mechanistic action we should have no doubt. But it is also certain that the tenor of his whole thought asserts a rigid politicization of the mind. The old, classical dilemmas are now transformed into problems. And for Marx problems have solutions.
With Marx the intellectuals have the touch of secular prophets; theory leads into action, formulating the channels of transformation and social change. As much as Machiavelli loathed contemplative, effeminate minds, tormented by self-imposed indecision which wasted historic opportunities, so did Marx despise that mortification of the mind, that nightmare of the phantoms of the mind which obscured and mystified the concrete, scientifically lucid, humanist intervention in the real world.

The intellectuals must, now, become revolutionaries. Theorizing and the dynamics of reality are as intimately connected as scientific knowledge is connected to the laws of Nature. It is in Marx that we find the prototype of the intellectual as radical ideological activist, the opposite of the contemplative purist. The intellectual becomes an ideologue. Intellectualism is mechanized. A fixed truth is appropriated which can be programmatically implemented. The realm of thought now has specific boundaries and a mapped out route. It is a closed system.

The intellectual life is propaedeutic to the discovery of a method of acting which springs from the subscription to a certain doctrine. The intellectual life is viewed as needing the gravitational pull toward action in order to complete itself, to humanize it. The intellectual life, in itself, is an inadequate life devoid of redeeming qualities. Without its practical counterpart it remains sealed in its lifeless abstraction, a fragment, a form of dehumanized existence.

Similar to the radical view and the tangible demands that it imposes upon the intellectual life is the view of the intellectual as the liberal civic activist. The intellectuals’ role is that appropriate to the intelligent, well-informed, privileged citizen. The intellectual life becomes identical with the life of the active, concerned citizen epitomized in the active, civic humanist. Intellectuals are the active advocates of honourable, noble causes. Signing petitions and manifestoes exhausts their energy and appeases their conscience.

The other-worldliness of the contemplative purist leaves the status quo unchallenged. The structure of the society does not concern such purists. It is not that the purists believe that nothing can be done to ameliorate human suffering. They are not defeatists. They simply do not see it within their intellectual province to act.

The radical activist substitutes energy for thought. Immediate, direct action, mobilization, organization are the primary tasks. The radical believes that plunging into the ocean is the best practice in learning how to swim. Preliminary thinking and learning are manifest signs of procrastination. Of course the polar opposite is equally pathetic. The individual who assumes that he/she can become a swimmer without ever setting foot in water.

The humanist activists function within the limits of legal protest. They are philanthropists with causes. They emulate the frenzy of the activist and rejoice in the rationalized wisdom of their compromise. They transform the in-
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tellectual life into sophisticated social work. They even lack the courage of the
tue missionary. They safeguard their security. After all, they are reasonable
people.

Perhaps the fate of the intellectuals will remain that of the high priest or
court jester; of the effete aesthete or crude crusader as long as intellectuals
themselves suffer from a severe confusion about their identity — their om-
nipotence and impotence — and as long as intellectuals and non-intellectuals
tend to identify intelligence and sophistication devoid of expertise with the
essence of the intellectual life. So far, in this essay, I have attempted to
disentangle the intellectual life from a certain web of confusion and
inauthenticity. Though I rejected directly and explicitly some images of the
intellectual life, I have only suggested obliquely aspects of its authenticity.
Now I turn to a more explicit statement regarding what the intellectual life is.

The intellectual life defies any precise, exhaustive definition. It is a state of
being, a lived experience injected with meaning from within; it is not a
tangible object bound by its clear, visible, exterior form. But unlike other states
of being, worlds of the interior, the intellectual life is inherently ambiguous
and its manifestations are frequently conditioned by its socio-historical times
and circumstances. Certainly it is amenable to clarification.

The intellectual life is the state of being of particular individuals, of a certain
personality, temperament and mode of thinking. The intellectual like all other
individuals, is rooted in a particularity: an historical era, a specific society, a
culture, a language. Like some other individuals, the intellectuals proceed to
question the world, to wonder about it and their particularity in terms of
meaning. But the intellectuals, unlike others, are intensely individualistic,
existential, whose lived experience is a constant, continuous mediational
theorizing between the particular and the universal. The intellectual demands
a meaningful existential totality, not a systemic whole or a mere set of answers.
The intellectual differs from the scientist, the religious believer, and the artist,
though there are great affinities between intellectuals and artists.

The scientific quest for understanding and explanation and the religious
quest for theodicy are alien to the intellectual life's interpretive performance.
The intellectual's particular predicament, existential space and time, is never
assimilated in a larger unit, in a universal category or law. The particular is
never subsumed or fully transcended. There is no unity between the particular
and the universal; there can be between them only a precarious affinity.

The intellectual affirms, negates, rejects. The intellectual's interpretive
voyage is, in its most strict existential sense, a voyage in the interior, an in-
dividualistic odyssey, a self-reflective establishment of the ground upon which
to found personal identity and an entry into the world.

This is the most esoteric, privatized, contemplative moment of the in-
tellectual life, not an end in itself but the beginning. Here the intellectuals
simultaneously, passionately engage in their worldly existence but also restlessly rebel against its structure. Attracted to the facticity of vibrant life, they rebel against denied possibilities of freedom. This is the root of their ambiguity as well as their difference from the artists. The latter counter-create. Their rebellion is exhausted in the objectification-exteriorization of the artistic expression. The scientist cannot rebel under the enslaving light of the facts of discovery. The believers cannot rebel without sinning. The intellectuals cannot think without rebelling.

The essence of the intellectual life is not then an exploration of or mystical encounter with the world. Nor is it a withdrawal from it. It is a reconstruction, recreation of the meaning of a concrete particular, an individual life, affirmed and asserted in the world as such, against the actual, historical condition of the world.

The intellectual’s predisposition is not simply a proclivity toward thought and abstraction, but a vital engagement with the world’s actuality. Intellectuals do not live in a vacuum. Their active, lucid minds interact with an external, real world. This interaction combines the imaginative dimension of the artistic creation, the rigour of the scientific inquiry and reasoning with the clarity, comprehensiveness, and adventure of self-knowledge and active creation of our condition of existence — the interpretation of the human drama and the merciless interrogation of history.

The intellectual, unlike the romantic dreamer-thinker, bookish individual who trembles in fear and terror at the sheer sound and sight of life, desires life in its concreteness and in its totality. The intellectual is not the individual who never had any experience of life, who like a virgin mind engages in substitutes and fantasies. The intellectual life is the life of actual, lived, vital experiences raised to full consciousness under the luminous auspices of the imagination and the theoretical dynamism of the mind. Such is the way in which sensuality, intelligence and insight are given meaning and elegance. Flesh and concreteness are not renounced and spiritualized but are blessed with eloquence and comprehensive universality in order to tell the human story in its full depth.

The intellectual begins from a highly personal, individualistic predicament and perspective. Just as aspects of existence must in private self-reflection be interpreted and integrated into a meaningful totality, so must the past of the intellectual life, of that unique passion, be interpreted. The mind and life thought of the luminaries of the past must be studied, articulated and experienced.

Just as Collingwood insisted that historical knowledge is self-knowledge, knowledge of the limits of human potential and a measure of its greatness, so it is with the past of the intellectual life.

But unlike the diligent, faithful student of history or the meticulous archaeologist, the intellectual’s past is buried in the silence of the dead without
testament or explicit directives; only mere fragments, obscure voices are available. The intellectual must plunge into the ocean of the past in a creative gesture of interpretation. In a monumental, imaginative monologue the meaning and truth of the past must be re-created and then united with time present and the promise of the future. This monologue founds and discloses the structure of the intellectual life: its rebellion and critical spirit, its wisdom, its ambiguity and passionate commitment.

The existential and experiential self-interpretation of the intellectual is a totally solitary, private, individualistic act. The archetypes of the past, their voices, their re-created story, permit a constructive rupture of the silence of the past and of the intellectual’s privatized, utter solitude. With this rupture the intellectual completes the metaphysical grounding of the self. The intellectual remains immensely individualistic and genuinely ambiguous: private and public, contemplative and active. Intellectuals are so adamantly individualistic that even among themselves they cannot form a cohesive group. Perhaps Malraux was correct when he indicated the irreconcilability of intellectuals and authority (Man’s Fate). Anarchistic, rebellious in temperament they can serve the public but they will obey none.

The monologic exploration-re-creation of the past provides the intellectuals with the symbols of their articulation. Personages of the past are signs, ideas, characters in a drama. It is not so much that the intellectuals cannot function without reference to them but that it is convenient and meaningful to refer to them be it in praise or critique.

The intellectual life possesses no immediate, direct relevance to the practical affairs of the world. Its essence is the lucidity of the mind; the intelligent allegiance to the truth; the courageous, wise rebellion against the inertia of society. It bears witness, past and present, and judges the inhumanity of history.

The intellectuals speak out as the guardians of the logos of the imagination, the conscience of the polis, the castigators of its dormant consciousness and its damaged life.

The intellectuals’ passion for freedom and truth, their alertness of mind, engage them with the world in an active, constant interaction. The intellectuals have a responsibility toward the world, but they are not responsible for the world’s woes. Nietzsche told us that it takes an ocean to absorb a dirty river. The intellectuals cannot be that ocean. No one alone can, except mythic heroes and non-existing gods. But the intellectuals can be a clean, lucid river flowing into the dirty, cruel ocean of History. Many would say: this is not enough. It does not feed the hungry, it does not liberate the oppressed. The intellectuals know this already.

The intellectual life cannot be either fully private or fully public. It is uniquely marginal: it exists in two universes. Their common root is the in-
intellectual's experience. The significance of both is the meaningful, poetic utterance of truth, its affirmative universality.

This constitutes the very soul of the intellectual life. That it is impotent against the oppressive structure of society is a well known fact. But whatever force can penetrate and overthrow such structure warrants the enlightening alliance of the intellectual life, its guidance. Otherwise, brute force would be challenging brute force. One form of oppression would succeed another. Darkness shall prevail.

Uttering the truth does not destroy the world of lies. It does prevent its total supremacy. And this is a good beginning. This indispensable beginning is the authentic task of those committed to the ambiguous blessing of the intellectual life, the Archimedean point of a non-intellectual world.

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Notes

1. I treat philosophers and intellectuals as identical. Any sophisticated, erudite, cultured individual who can think is not an intellectual. Not anyone who can run is an athlete.

2. Exceptions exist. Ironically, the greatest philosopher of this century, Heidegger, was an academic.

3. Some would like us to believe in a dialogue. Animosities among intellectuals are quite common and fierce. Unanimity is absent among them. Friendships do not stem from the mere fact of intellectualism. Think of these encounters: Plato and Homer, Weber and Marx, Marx and Hegel, Nietzsche and Plato. No conversation would take place. Consider these broken associations: Sartre-Camus, Sartre-Merleau-Ponty. It is the monological aspect that allows the creative articulation.