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From One *Fin de Siècle* to Another: Some Notes on ‘Intellectuals’

The phrase *Fin de siècle* is usually associated with an unprecedented flourishing in the arts announcing some of the crucial aesthetic and cultural developments in the twentieth century. If, however, we look a bit closer, beyond familiar but rather distorting images such as the one of “Vienna 1900”, we shall easily find out that the turn of the century was also marked by a deep social crisis where nationalism and (particularly in Central Europe) anti-Semitism cast their already very long shadows. In this context, the so-called “Dreyfus affair” undoubtedly represents one of the stronger symptoms of the social and political instability in European affairs that would eventually lead to World War I. In the course of this affair, as is well known, the word “intellectual” first came into widespread public usage, following the publication in *L’Aurore*, in January 14th, 1898, of the “manifeste des intellectuels” in defense of the unjustly sentenced Jewish captain, carrying among its 102 signatures those of Emile Zola, Anatole France, Marcel Proust, Léon Blum and of many other prominent personalities.¹

¹ See Dietz Bering, *Die Intellektuellen. Geschichte eines Schimpfwortes*, Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta, 1978; Christoph Charle, *Naissance des “intellectuels”. 1880-1900*, Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, 1990. According to Bering’s account, usage as a term of abuse has always been predominant. In his *Keywords. A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London, Fontana, 1976, p. 142), Raymond Williams expressed his conviction that the negative uses of the word were giving place in English to a neutral or even favourable usage. Although this would require language-specific investigation, I strongly doubt whether this really is the case, both in common and in learned discourse, as is suggested by the context of postmodernism.

Together with Zola's famous "J'accuse", published the day before in the same newspaper, this manifest has become paradigmatic of an idea of the intellectual as someone deeply committed to universal values such as justice, reason, and democracy, and ready to actively defend those values taking advantage of the conditions of resonance offered by the new public space of mass-circulation press. Against this background, the alignment with particularistic values such as national or racial prejudice, or quite simply self-interest, would have to be seen as the "betrayal" of a "mission" and the denial of a "responsibility". These, as a matter of fact, are notions central to Julien Benda's famous essay on *The Betrayal of the Clerks*, first published in 1927 and polemically aimed in the first place at nationalism and chauvinism as represented in France by the ideas of Maurice Barrès (once one of the most prominent detractors of the "Dreyfusards" with his polemics against the "intellectuals as the logicians of the Absolute") and particularly of Charles Maurras, the founder of the *Action Française*.

It is precisely this claim to universality that, when approaching our turn of the century, has increasingly come to meet with suspicion and rejection. In the "society of the spectacle", some argue, the conditions for rational discourse have been radically undercut, leaving no space for universalistic claims. In many recent accounts the intellectual thus tends to appear as a rather pathetic representative of modernity, inextricably entangled in its contradictions and making futile claims that, in the end, represent nothing other than a will to power. The critique of Progress brought about by an acute awareness of the dialectics of Enlightenment, the crisis of utopian thinking, the new relativism and perspectivism, the discredit of the notion of avant-garde, in short, that sweeping ideological and cultural trend that received the rather awkward label of postmodernism, has, among other similar proclamations, given occasion to the proclamation of the "death of the intellectual". The very notion of responsibility and of the right to act as a representative, an essential

component of the concept, are now strictly denied. This is all too clear, to name a conspicuous example, in Jean-François Lyotard's dismissal of a concept of the "responsibility of the intellectuals" which, to his mind, remains "indissociable from the idea of an universal subject", the intellectual being someone that considers himself to be speaking "in the place of man, humanity, nation, the people, the proletariat, the creature, or some such entity."²

The history of our century no doubt justifies some of the scepticism implicit in Lyotard's critique of the "great narratives" of modernity and, correlatively, of its privileged interpreters. The form of the argument, however, remains clearly unsatisfactory, as is the general case with every paradigm of "post", forced to posit a reductive and unidimensional view of what it is intended to supersede. In fact, Gerald Graff had already in the seventies perspicuously identified what he called the "argument of death" as typical of the rhetorical strategies dominant in the new context of postmodernism. "Now that right and wrong are 'meaningless' categories," he writes, "it is better to identify the opposition as 'dead'. The Death Argument saves a lot of trouble because reasons are irrelevant; it is basically unanswerable, and it implies that the prosecutors are 'the lively ones'."³

Like with so many similar announcements, the burial of the "intellectual" does not seem, as a matter of fact, to have been particularly effective. Looking at political transformation in Eastern Europe, Wolf Lepenies could recently find reasons to rejoice over a new "justification of the intellectual" at the occasion of his "heroic come back to the political stage".⁴ Shortly afterwards, Pierre

² See Jean-François Lyotard, "Tombeau de l'intellectuel", in J.-F.L., *Tombeau de l'intellectuel et autres papiers*, Paris, Galilée, 1984, p. 12. All translations are mine.

³ See the chapter "The Use and Abuse of Death", in Charles Newman, *The Post-Modern Aura. The Act of Fiction in an Age of Inflation*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1985, p. 149-170 (here, 158).

⁴ Wolf Lepenies, *Aufstieg und Fall der Intellektuellen in Europa*, Frankfurt am Main, Campus, 1992, p. 56.

Bourdieu was able to put into practice his proposal of an “international of the intellectuals”⁵, by being particularly instrumental in the founding of the so-called “International Parliament of Writers”. I will not discuss here whether this project, as some critics have implied, is or is not “scandalously self-serving”. But the fact remains that the very crisis of the traditional representations of the intellectual has brought about a very large discussion, aimed at a reevaluation and redefinition of the concept and at the demarcation of a space where intellectual intervention not only seems possible, but necessary.⁶ The theme of the responsibility of the intellectuals seems to have lost nothing of its momentum as is clearly testified by frequent complaints about their “betrayal”.⁷

⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, “The Corporatism of the Universal: The Role of Intellectuals in the Modern World”, *Telos*, n° 81 (1989), p. 99-110.

⁶ Recent contributions in book form, different in scope and representing different positions, would include, even if the list is far from exhaustive: Hauke Brunkhorst, *Der entzauberte Intellektuelle. Über die neue Beliebigkeit des Denkens*, Hamburg, Junius-Verlag, 1990; Bruce Robbins (ed.), *Intellectuals: Aesthetics, Politics, Academics*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1990; Charles C. Lemert (ed.), *Intellectuals and Politics. Social Theory in a Changing World*, London, Sage, 1990; Bernard-Henry Lévy, *Les aventures de la liberté. Une histoire subjective des intellectuels*, Paris, Grasset, 1991; Ian MacLean et al. (eds.), *The Political Responsibility of Intellectuals*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991; Martin Meyer (ed.), *Intellektuellendämmerung. Beiträge zur neuesten Zeit des Geistes*, München, Hanser, 1992; Wolf Lepenies, *Aufstieg und Fall der Intellektuellen in Europa*, Frankfurt am Main/New York, Campus, 1992; Christopher Norris, *Uncritical Theory: Postmodernism, Intellectuals and the Gulf War*, London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1992; Bernhard Giesen, *Die Intellektuellen und die Nation. Eine deutsche Achsenzeit*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1993; Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual. The 1993 Reith Lectures*, London, Vintage, 1994; Ron Eyerman, *Between Culture and Politics. Intellectuals in Modern Society*, Oxford, Polity Press, 1994; Wolfgang Müller-Funk, *Der Intellektuelle als Souverän*, Wien, Deuticke, 1995.

⁷ This, for instance, is the tenor of a recent newspaper article scourging the silence of Parisian intellectuals and their complicity with the French government’s new nuclear policy (see Fredy Gsteiger, “Atomtests: Warum nicht?”, *Die Zeit*, n° 30, July 21st, 1995, p. 37).

It is against this background of a simultaneous crisis and revival of the idea of the “intellectual” that we must ask ourselves about the meaning of intellectual strategies and about a necessary revision of our sense of the historical role of intellectuals. Has the time come for an “intellect that has become egalitarian and fallibilistic”, having rejected both “the elitist humanism of canonical culture and the emphatic concept of truth of a philosophical tradition that has remained Platonic”, as Habermas would have it?⁸ To that, there can be, of course, no general answer. I will simply attempt to provide some, inevitably fragmented, perspectives based on my own research both about contemporary Portuguese culture and about Austrian culture since the turn of the century.

Let me begin by quoting in full Bourdieu’s definition, which, in its putting into evidence the double binding of the intellectual’s role — the source, after all, of its ambiguities — possesses, to my mind, a clearly strategic value:

Intellectuals have come about historically in and by their overcoming the opposition between pure culture and engagement. Thus they are bi-dimensional beings. To claim the title of intellectual, cultural producers must fulfill two conditions: on the one hand, they must belong to an intellectually autonomous field, one independent of religious, political, economic or other powers, and they must respect that field’s particular laws; on the other, they must deploy their specific expertise and authority in their particular intellectual domain in a political activity outside it. They must remain full-time cultural producers without becoming politicians.⁹

In the sense of this definition, not all cultural producers are intellectuals: they only become so when they are able to use the specific capital accumulated in their own field for social and political intervention, an intervention of its own kind, because it does not coincide with the rules of the

⁸ Jürgen Habermas, “Heinrich Heine und die Rolle des Intellektuellen in Deutschland”, *Merkur*, n° 448 (1986), p. 466.

⁹ Bourdieu, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

political field and refuses to obey the particular logic of that field.¹⁰ On the other hand, the statement that all intellectuals are cultural producers is also crucial in that it characterizes their specific authority as essentially symbolic. This is why the institution of art, and, particularly, of literature remains central to the concept of the intellectual: he is not, in this sense, a technical expert nor simply an abstract thinker, he is someone with a visible presence in the sphere of public communication, a presence legitimized not simply by his own rhetorical capacity but also by the symbolic and cultural capital granted through the place he occupies in a specific cultural field. The influence he will eventually be able to exert depends exclusively on the uncommanded response of the public, and this is his only source of power.¹¹

To be fully operative, however, and to escape the aporias of the traditional sense of the word, Bourdieu's definition must be complemented by an awareness of that the role of the "universal intellectual" or, to use Zygmunt Bauman's terminology, of the "legislator" — a privileged position as one with special access to knowledge not available to others — has to give way to a more humble strategy (that of the "interpreter"), rooted in the command of language and on the ability to secure an effective place within public discourse.¹² This latter position does not renounce a claim to authority; but this is a kind of authority no longer rooted on intellectual privilege arising from

¹⁰ That a writer, as can often be heard, should intervene strictly by means of his specific artistic labour, does not, in this sense, make him an intellectual; for this, it is essential that his writing's presence in the public sphere transcend the strict limits of the literary field.

¹¹ This would justify the correlation thus established by Bourdieu: "at a given level of overall autonomy, intellectuals are, other things being equal, proportionately more responsive to the seduction of the powers that be, the less well-endowed they are with specific capital. [...] The most heteronomous cultural producers (i.e. those with least symbolic capital) can offer the least resistance to external demands, of whatever sort." (Pierre Bourdieu, "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed", *Poetics*, vol. 12, n° 4/5 (1983), p. 322).

¹² See Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters. On Modernity, Post-Modernity and*

some sense of absolute truth, but an authority that must permanently legitimate itself within the play of dialogic relations pertaining to the universe of discourse.

This is why Wolf Lepenies's claim that we are now witnessing a triumphal return of the intellectual seems to me rather off the point. Lepenies combines a rejection of the Sartrean type of the "total intellectual" with a very optimistic stance based on the important role some intellectuals have played in the new political contexts of Central and Eastern Europe. As he writes, it would be necessary "to go back to the turn of the century, to the Dreyfus affair, to find a political situation in which intellectuals have developed such an intense political activity as, in the last few years, György Konrad und Václav Havel, Milan Kundera, Czeslaw Milosz and Bronislaw Geremek."¹³ This is, of course, true. And yet Lepenies's almost euphoric view of the intellectual's "heroic return to the political stage" can scarcely be supported by his few examples.¹⁴ There is no shortage of counter-examples: Lepenies states himself how difficult it is to conceptualize the situation in Germany after the unification¹⁵ and in Western Europe, with the exception, he writes, of those countries "which have recently emerged from dictatorships (Portugal, Spain, Greece)".¹⁶

Intellectuals, London, Polity Press, 1989.

¹³ Wolf Lepenies, "Fall und Aufstieg der Intellektuellen in Europa", *Neue Rundschau*, n° 1/1991, p. 9.

¹⁴ The brief last chapter of György Dalos's *Vom Propheten zum Produzenten. Zum Rollenwandel der Literaten in Ungarn und Osteuropa* (Wien, Wespennest, 1992) touches upon reactions of disquietude to the social devaluation of literature and to the correlative loss of prestige and of social status very similar to the ones I met upon in my own research about political transition in Portugal.

¹⁵ The German post-unification debates have witnessed, among other things, a strong resurgence of anti-intellectual resentment. For a balanced view, see in English, Jochen Vogt, "Have the Intellectuals Failed? On the Sociopolitical Claims and the Influence of Literary Intellectuals in West Germany", *New German Critique*, n° 58 (1993), p. 3-23.

Underlying this model is, to my mind, a problematic distinction between “complex” and “simple” social and political configurations. I would argue, instead, that in a globalized world such an implicit distinction has no heuristic value; like any other problem, the questioning of the role of the intellectuals is a global problem, indissociable from the current redefinitions of culture which are inevitably taking place in a global scale.

As a matter of fact, my own research on the Portuguese literary and intellectual field during 1974-1975, the years of democratic transition following the “Revolution of Carnations” of April 25th, 1974, in no way corroborates Lepenies’s assumption. It would lead too far here just to summarize this research.¹⁷ I will simply point out that in the context I analyzed neither did the writers and intellectuals play any particularly prominent role in politics (not only the figure of the writer turned into a political leader à la Havel but also the figure of the “adviser” current in Eastern European countries are totally lacking), nor were they actually willing to play the traditional role of the intellectual. In some way, deliberately or not, they ended up clinging to the role of the “interpreter”. The politicization of social relations at the period led very quickly to a crisis of legitimation which was answered, not by straightforward compliance with external pressure, but by a strong emphasis on the autonomy of the literary field. The notion of a social responsibility is very much present in a literary field that at the time is socially and politically essentially progressive, but so is also the notion that the writer has to situate himself first and foremost within the practice of writing and that his public intervention only makes sense if it originates in this particular constellation. There is a great awareness of the problems of form, that is, of the specific complexities of the institution of writing:

¹⁶Op. cit., p. 10.

¹⁷See António Ribeiro, “Configurações do Campo Intelectual Português no Pós-25 de Abril: O Campo Literário”, in Boaventura de Sousa Santos (ed.), *Portugal — Um Retrato Singular*, Porto, Afrontamento, 1993, p. 481-512.

Mayakovski's saying that "there can be no revolutionary art without revolutionary form" enjoys wide circulation. On the one side, this amounts to the defensive reaction of a field put under pressure and under an unexpected necessity to legitimate itself;¹⁸ but, on the other side, it is not only a negative reaction. It also means an awareness of the conditions in the new "semiotic society":¹⁹ although still relatively untouched by the problems of the new mass culture governed by television and still in many ways attached to a traditional sense of culture, the Portuguese literary field of the period is already fully immersed in the complexities of a highly diversified public sphere and is inevitably driven by questions pertaining to a redefinition of culture that no longer allow for the conventional answers.

In the debates I analysed in my research, there emerges a sometimes very clear-cut, sometimes rather blurred, distinction between the "writer" and the "intellectual". The problem, it would seem, lies in the complex intertwinement and the compatibilization of these two roles, of the practice of writing with public intervention, which would fully comply with the double binding central to Bourdieu's definition cited above. This is by no means a new problem. Indeed, I would argue, it points to a tension and a contradiction that have been present throughout the whole modern history of intellectuals and that are therefore central to their very definition. I will briefly deal with this subject by going back to "Vienna 1900" and centring on the case of Karl Kraus, that major figure of Austrian culture and literature in the first decades of our century.

¹⁸Unexpected because, having played an important part in the opposition to dictatorship, literary intellectuals at first seemed to expect a "natural" recognizance of their social role. Instead, they had to compete in a very complex situation, armed only with their specific capital.

¹⁹See Scott Lash, "Learning from Leipzig — or Politics in the Semiotic Society", *Theory*,

In July 15th, 1927, the Viennese police, trying to stop a massive worker's demonstration triggered by a scandalous court sentence practically acquitting extreme right killers, opened indiscriminate fire against the crowd. As a result, ninety people died and several hundreds were injured. About two months later a poster containing only a few lines was hanging in Vienna's advertising pillars:

To the Chief of Police of Vienna / Johann Schober: / I demand / that you resign. / Karl Kraus / Editor of *Die Fackel*.²⁰

In the second volume of his autobiography, Elias Canetti provides an emphatic description of the impact of this message:

His posters were the only thing that kept us going in those days. I went from one to the next, I stopped before each of them and I had the feeling that all justice on earth was epitomized in the letters of his name.²¹

The signature under Kraus's demand testifies to his full personal exposure, but also (note the imperious laconism of his text) to his notion of himself as an authority. However, he is fully conscious of the limits of this authority, and of the fact that the public impact of his moral stance is totally dependent on his acceptance as a writer.²² In fact, the general public reaction

Culture & Society, vol. 7, n° 4 (1990), 145-58.

²⁰ One is reminded of other famous intellectual interventions overtly challenging the power of the State, like Sartre selling *La cause du peuple* in the streets of Paris. But Kraus's solitary action, and the form of that action, are therefore so illustrative because they directly testify to his identity and self-science as a writer.

²¹ Elias Canetti, *Die Fackel im Ohr. Lebensgeschichte 1921-1931*, Frankfurt am Main, Fischer, 1982, 232.

²² Brecht points very incisively to the sources of Kraus's authority: "his [Kraus's] position must be well known, supported by many examples and not put in doubt by any of these. Kraus detains such authority in the measure that already the external impression of a page of the 'Fackel', printed with unending care, arouses in the reader a sense of order and honesty, a sense that originates before the reading, *because it so often originated after it.*" (Bertolt Brecht,

to his poster was very different from the one described by Canetti. The press launched savage attacks on him, characterizing his initiative as inappropriate and ridiculous. This, of course, had been foreseen by the satirist: As he will later write, the failure had been calculated: he had expected no more than to posit a “moral example”, hoping to speak to the conscience “of a moral island world.”²³ He chooses his “themes”, he states, out of a moral compulsion grounded only on his “personal intellectual experience” and on the right to public intervention as “a witness in representation of a general interest.”²⁴

Small wonder that, alluding to what he learnt from Karl Kraus, Canetti first mentions “the conscience of absolute responsibility”; if he would have to choose only one attribute to describe the satirist, he writes, he would simply choose this one: “Karl Kraus was a master of indignation” (“Meister des Entsetzens”).²⁵ This amounts of course to the classic description of the “intellectual”. But for that indignation to be effective, it must be made public, Kraus’s strategy depends entirely on his ability to play with the opportunities offered by the public sphere. This explains why, in the sequence, he tried to create further public resonance for his fight against Schober by raising against the chief of police grave accusations of complicity in corruption; he hoped, as in other previous cases, to have his opponent bring him before a court of Law. This procedure, however, aptly defined by the late Michael Pollak as “sociology in act,”²⁶ proved a failure in Schober’s case. It is consonant with Kraus’s strategy that he then retreats into the artistic field, proceeding to point

“Über Karl Kraus”, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 19, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1966, p. 431, italics mine).

²³ “Der Hort der Republik”, *Die Fackel*, n° 766-770 (October 1927), p. 71.

²⁴ “Mein Abenteuer mit Schober”, *Die Fackel*, n° 771-776 (December 1927), p. 28.

²⁵ Elias Canetti, “Karl Kraus, Schule des Widerstands”, in E.C., *Das Gewissen der Worte*, Frankfurt am Main, Fischer, 1982, 47.

²⁶ See Michael Pollak, “Une sociologie en acte des intellectuels. Les combats de Karl

out the poetic substance of his poster, “an epic poem of five words”, representing “the sacrifice of a teacher of language that went out in the street” and destined to remain a classic, regardless of immediate success.²⁷ Strictly speaking, he states, his whole endeavour is the aesthetic one of dealing with “the strongest psychic content resorting to the most concise verbal means,” in order “to confirm in a more plastic manner what has been recognized as insurmountable.”²⁸

An allusion in Kraus’s “Der Hort der Republik” (“The Hoard of the Republic”), his first text against Schober, to the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti will bring me back even more directly to the questions I raised previously in this essay. Scourging Vienna’s public opinion, Kraus alludes to the representatives of the liberal press who “from Dreyfus to Sacco and Vanzetti” are only able to protest against violence when this does not bring them in personal danger and who are blind to the injustice and to the abuses of public power in their own land.²⁹ It was a coincidence that the birth of *Die Fackel* took place around the same time that the word “intellectuel” came into widespread use in the course of the Dreyfus affair. Kraus’s career as a young writer eager to find a place in Vienna’s literary field had begun by a strong support of Naturalism against its detractors; the first relevant instances of his polemic verve center on a fierce critique of aestheticism.³⁰ According to Michael Stark, it was precisely the critique of l’art pour l’art that first brought the word “Intellektueller” in circulation in the German-speaking countries after the

Kraus”, *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, n° 36/37 (1981), p. 87-103.

²⁷ “Mein Abenteuer mit Schober”, p. 15.

²⁸ “Das Ereignis des Schweigens”, *Die Fackel*, n° 777 (January 1928), 12.

²⁹ “Der Hort der Republik”, p. 55.

³⁰ See namely his “Zur Überwindung des Hermann Bahr” (“Overcoming Hermann Bahr”), written in 1893 at the age of nineteen. This essentially anti-aestheticist thrust will remain a

turn of the century.³¹ Karl Kraus would not be a case in point: despite the social engagement very much present in the first years of his magazine, he consistently refuses to assume the role of an “intellectual”. On the contrary, it will be very easy to find in *Die Fackel* multiple examples of a pejorative use of the word, sometimes even in a rather dubious formulation.³² This can only be properly understood by keeping in mind that the critique of the press as a vehicle for the commodification of culture and of human relations as a whole entirely determines Kraus’s polemic and satiric endeavour. The press is the site par excellence of irresponsible language; a public sphere moulded by the press cannot but be a medium for cultivating the false inhuman façades he sees as his task to overthrow. This, the creation of a counter-public sphere, is the very sense of his launching a magazine of his own. Throughout his entire life he will try not to play by the rules, on the contrary, he sees as his task to expose those rules as expressed in the routines of public life and public discourse. In order to be able to do this, he first secures a space of his own (his magazine, later his public readings) from where to launch his repeated raids on the placid quietude of Vienna’s cultural life.

Against this background, it can easily be understood why the spectacle of the liberal press, his main opponent, taking side with the Dreyfusards by occasion of the revision of the process, makes Kraus thoroughly suspicious. In the first year of *Die Fackel* this is a subject that takes up considerable space in

dominant feature of Kraus’s aesthetics throughout his entire life.

³¹ See Michael Stark, *Für und wider den Expressionismus. Die Entstehung der Intellektuellendebatte in der deutschen Literaturgeschichte*, Stuttgart, Metzler, 1982, p. 6.

³² This is particularly the case of “Intelligenzbestie” (“the intellectual beast”). In his 1911 text “Mona Lisa und der Sieger”, Kraus writes of the necessity to liquidate “the universal intellectual beast of whose hate the artist dies but from whose hate art lives” (*Die Fackel*, n° 331-332, p. 2). The reference here is, like almost always in similar passages, to the figure of the irresponsible and sensationalistic journalist. Notwithstanding, Kraus would later regret to have coined this expression, following its

the magazine. Although Kraus is not convinced of Dreyfus's innocence, he does not very explicitly take sides as a "Dreyfusard" or an "anti-Dreyfusard". He just wonders at the fact that Austrian liberals are so passionately taking the defense of Dreyfus, while remaining indifferent to all kinds of evils in their own land —social injustice, the repression of the worker's movement, electoral fraud, and several others he mentions concretely.³³ He reminds the defenders of Dreyfus that in Germany or in Austria the "scream of a convicted" would not have been heard.³⁴ "The J'accuse of an Austrian Zola," he writes, "will never upset the inhabitants of Vienna."³⁵ His main argument is the inconsistency and irresponsibility of public discourse, his direct target is not Dreyfus or the French Dreyfusards, but the incoherent logic of Austrian liberal journalism, which derives capital from sensationally reporting on the process but whose humanistic and democratic rhetoric barely masks its total unwillingness to seriously engage in social and political reform in its own land. When, on the other side, Barrès's newspaper *L'Action Française* translates and prints a series of articles by Wilhelm Liebknecht first published in *Die Fackel*, Kraus sharply distances himself from these "chauvinistic gentlemen" that are all too eager to take advantage of Liebknecht's position, one that, apart from sharing the conviction of Dreyfus's guilt, has absolutely nothing in common with theirs.³⁶

After the years 1905-1906 *Die Fackel* would, according to Kraus's ironic statement, take an "aesthetic turn".³⁷ This implies explicitly adopting an

adoption in Nazi discourse.

³³ See for instance *Die Fackel*, n° 6 (May 1899), 18-20; *Die Fackel*, n° 14 (August 1899), p. 5.

³⁴ *Die Fackel*, n° 7 (June 1899), p. 4.

³⁵ *Die Fackel*, n° 14 (August 1899), p. 2.

³⁶ *Die Fackel*, n° 26 (December 1899), p. 10.

³⁷ See for example the essay "Bekentnisse" ("Confessions") (*Die Fackel*, n° 185,

apolitical stance and permanently stressing the claim to an aesthetic status for Kraus's writing. This claim, however, will not preclude strong public intervention, which will again become directly political in the context of the satirist's pacifistic fight during World War I. In the years of the Great War, the internal critique of the intellectual field loses nothing of its momentum, as is illustrated by the satiric condemnation of that legion of writers and academics who irresponsibly speak up in favour of war.³⁸ An outstanding episode, in 1919, of Kraus's sociology in action clearly elucidates the full purport of this question.

The post-war years coincide with the period when Kraus's political radicalism and public political intervention are most salient. He is an active supporter of the new Republic, is close to the Austrian Social-Democratic Party and has clearly given a more directly political twist to his radical critique of the bourgeois world. Notwithstanding, his mistrust of the "intellectual", his self-definition of an aesthetic and intellectual identity through an always alert attention to and critique of the positioning of other members of his field, continue to play a fundamental role. In the text "Proteste" ("Protests"), published in July 1919, he begins by mentioning a telegram sent to Munich protesting against the "execution" of Ernst Toller (whose process following the

October 1905, p. 1-9), where Kraus ironically admits to the "moral decline" of his magazine, states that a magazine where the loss of readers is not due to the conscious will of its editor is not having a sound policy, and proclaims the priority of "aesthetic sense" over "moral indignation" (p. 1, 3-4, 8).

³⁸ The manifest of the notorious "93 intellectuals" issued shortly after the outbreak of war in support of the militaristic policy of the Central powers and in praise of the "ideas of 1914" will repeatedly be alluded to by Kraus, as will many other cases of intellectual complicity. In contrast, Kraus will write an epigram in praise of Arthur Schnitzler (an author who had previously been the occasion of frequent satirical allusions), because, by keeping silent, he tacitly refused to become, like so many others, an "organic intellectual" of the political-military block responsible for war: "amidst battles and victories / he kept his silence" ("Arthur Schnitzler", *Gedichte, Schriften*, ed. Christian Wagenknecht, vol. 9, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1989, p. 154).

defeat of the Bavarian Council's Republic had not yet even begun). This protest was signed by a number of very prominent names in Vienna. While, however, personalities like Karl Seitz, Otto Bauer, Friedrich Adler, Arthur Schnitzler, Julius Tandler, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Richard Beer-Hofmann, Stefan Zweig, did not react or simply declared not to have signed the document,³⁹ the rest of those whose signatures had been illegitimately used, a group built up by Franz Blei, Albert Ehrenstein, the actor Alexander Moissi, Alfred Paris von Gütersloh, the actress Ida Roland, Hugo Sonnenschein and Franz Werfel, publicly thanked the "courageous anonymous person" who had sent the telegram for having used their names without their consent. Shortly afterwards, two of the leading Vienna newspapers published a declaration signed by the same group. In it they thanked again the "anonymous person" for having "relieved them of the fulfilment of a humanitarian duty". They solemnly stated they would never again let a similar "opportunity" pass by without "taking advantage" of it and they insisted further "that our protest against the millions of murders and executions of innocents that took place between the beginning of the war and the collapse of the military monarchies could not be spoken out loud because at that time silence was an imperative."⁴⁰

The originator of both documents was of course Karl Kraus. The episode turned out to be a fully successful literary-sociological experiment, as the *Arbeiterzeitung*, the organ of the Social-Democratic Party, was quick to point out under the heading "a serious satire". Kraus's coup totally achieved two related goals: in the first place, it exposed the lack of ethics on the part of a

³⁹The writer and critic Hermann Bahr, a favourite target of Kraus's satire, first declared that his name had been used without his knowledge, but with his consent, and, in a second statement, that he had been actually asked to sign, taking the opportunity to protest against the fact that it had been thought necessary to explicitly ask for his permission.

⁴⁰*Die Fackel*, n° 514-518, July 1919, p. 1-2.

press which considered compromise and the pursuit of naked self-interest the normal way of things; in the second place, Kraus was able to demonstrate that precisely those who, in the new post-war context, were anxious to show their love of mankind and their social commitment, were those who, for the most part, had previously given intellectual back up to the war machinery. He thus forced them to make public statements and to resort to other awkward forms of self-defense, falling into contradictions that in the end denounced their intellectual opportunism and lack of ethical legitimacy.⁴¹ Kraus's avowed aim is to explode the cohesion of the literary field with its inner logic of mutual compromise. His own authority rests on his uncompromising stance during the war. But he does not assert it in an abstract and superior manner; instead, by playing with the classical form of the intellectual's petition, he is able to let his opponents expose themselves through their own discourse, betrayed by the "abysses" of language.⁴² The issue, in this way, is completely and literally acted out, leading in the end to a further strengthening of the satirist's own moral and aesthetic position.

In his final years, as is well known, Kraus would take another, fateful, political turn, by endorsing the dictatorship of Engelbert Dollfuß, under the illusion that it could provide a barrier against Hitler and be a guarantee for Austria's independence. His chief polemic piece against Nazism, with the title *Dritte Walpurgisnacht (Third Night of Walpurgis)*, whose opening sentence — "I can think of nothing to say about Hitler" — is probably one of the most often misread and misquoted sentences in world literature,⁴³ was to remain

⁴¹ For a judicious commentary on Kraus's strategy in this particular episode, see Michael Pollak, op. cit., p. 96-97.

⁴² "To teach people to see abysses where there are commonplaces", thus would Kraus define his "pedagogical mission" (*Die Fackel*, n° 885-887, December 1932, p. 3).

⁴³ After all — writing in 1933! — Kraus did find quite a lot to say in the over three hundred pages following the initial sentence. He namely denounces those who, like Benn and Heidegger, had accepted to become the intellectuals of the new regime, and he provides one of

unpublished. Instead, he published in 1934 — and this is in practice his final pronouncement — a long text explaining “why the *Fackel* is not being published.”⁴⁴ This is a text which, in its defense of Dollfuß and its attack on the leaders and participants in the February 1934 uprising, is often painful to read. The tragedy of the seer⁴⁵ here comes full circle, reminding us of the fallibility and of the all too precarious nature of the artist’s intellectual position. But it would be completely wrong to extrapolate from this end, as some have done, a global rejection of Kraus’s trajectory. In the final line of an important poem where he takes stock “after thirty years”, Kraus had some years before identified himself as “a fighter, an artist, a fool” standing alone against the bourgeois world.⁴⁶ The terms of this formula are inextricably intertwined. The “artist” is awarded the central place in the triad; but, on the other hand, if we choose to read the line as a crescendo, then the emphasis — in the event particularly sustained by the verse accent — lies on the “fool”. This is the Shakespearean fool, the marginal figure that, because it sets himself and is set apart from the current consensus of dominant reason, is the paradoxical site of truth, a truth which he normally can only reveal through the play with language and which, therefore, is only accessible to those who are willing and able to hear.

The fool’s task includes cleaning up the sphere of communication from the “normal” uses of language that are at the service of the established ideologies and simply express the prevalent power relations. As a critic of language, he is at the same time a critic of power. In this sense, the satirist’s

the first detailed and well-documented descriptions of terror in the newly established Nazi concentration camps. His initial sentence points of course to the difficulty of dealing with the “unsayable”, the inadequacy of the language of satire before the phenomenon of Nazism.

⁴⁴ “Warum die Fackel nicht erscheint”, *Die Fackel*, n° 890-905, July 1934.

⁴⁵ I borrow this phrase from Edward Timms, *Karl Kraus. Apocalyptic Satirist. Culture and Catastrophe in Habsburg Vienna*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1986, 388ff.

task is essentially to establish, against the current uses of language, an ethics of communication — his critique of communication builds up ex negativo the prospect of an utopia of communication, one that, while remaining very conscious that the medium is the me(a)ssage, is unable to accept this as being the final word. Thus, with Karl Kraus we witness emerge from the improbable context of Vienna's "merry apocalypse" a different type of "intellectual", one placed somewhere between the "writer" and the Zola-type "intellectual", in that he combines intellectual engagement with an active moral and aesthetic critique of the intellectual field.

One could write about Kraus what Edward Said has to say about the complications of Sartre's career:

Far from disabling or disqualifying him as an intellectual, these complications give texture and tension to what he said, expose him as a fallible human being, not a dreary and moralistic preacher.⁴⁷

A fallible human being, indeed. The all too hasty burial of the intellectual, so it turns out, appears as damaging as his mythologizing as an exceptional, enlightened figure. Perhaps the most important message from the example of Karl Kraus lies in his clinging, against all absolute standards of aesthetic taste or of ideological and political correctness, to the possibility of meaningful, contextual public discourse. Approaching a new turn of the century, we do not seem to have been left with many certainties. Disquietude, once again, seems to be our way of living in a context where so much of what is possible does not seem desirable and much of what is desirable does not seem possible.⁴⁸ An ideology of universal disillusionment would be the wrong answer to our perhaps being poorer in illusions. In his critique of indifferentiation, as an

⁴⁶ "Nach dreißig Jahren. Rückblick der Eitelkeit", op. cit., p. 635.

⁴⁷ Edward Said, op. cit., p. 11.

⁴⁸ See Boaventura de Sousa Santos, "A inquietude utópica", *Público*, 23/5/95.

insubordinator against that *common* sense that prevents the negotiation of a really common *sense*, the “fallible” intellectual has still a role to play. For a while, we shall still be needing him.