

## **Intellectuals and New Technologies**

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Critical intellectuals were traditionally those who utilized their skills of speaking and writing to denounce injustices and abuses of power, and to fight for truth, justice, progress, and other positive values. In the words of Jean-Paul Sartre (1974: 285), "the duty of the intellectual is to denounce injustice wherever it occurs." The modern critical intellectual's field of action was what Habermas (1989) called the public sphere of democratic debate, political dialogue, and the writing and discussion of newspapers, journals, pamphlets, and books. Of course, not all intellectuals were critical or by any means progressive. With the rise of modern societies, there was a division between physical and mental labor, and intellectuals became those who specialized in mental labor, producing and distributing ideas and culture, with some opposing and some legitimating the established forms of society.

Thus, intellectuals were split into those critical and oppositional individuals who opposed injustice and oppression, as contrasted to those producers of ideology who legitimated the forms of class, race, and gender domination and inequality in modern societies. In the following reflections, I want to discuss some challenges from postmodern theory to the classical conceptions of the critical intellectual and some of the ways that new technologies and new public spheres offer new possibilities for democratic discussion and intervention, which call for a redefinition of the intellectual. Consequently, I will discuss some changes in the concept of the public sphere and how new technologies and new spheres of public debate and conflict suggest some new possibilities for redefining intellectuals in the present era.

### The Public Sphere and the Intellectual

Jurgen Habermas's concept of the public sphere described a space of institutions and practices between the private interests of those in civil society and the realm of state power. The public sphere thus mediates between the domains of the family and the workplace -- where private interests prevail -- and the state which often exerts arbitrary forms of power and domination. What Habermas (1989) called the "bourgeois public sphere" consisted of the realm of public assemblies, pubs and coffee houses, literary salons, and meeting halls where individuals gathered to discuss their common public affairs and to organize against arbitrary and oppressive forms of social and public power. The public sphere was nurtured by newspapers, journals, pamphlets, and books which were read and discussed in social sites like pubs and coffee houses. The bourgeois public sphere was thus the locale -- alongside universities -- in which intellectuals were produced and functioned. Emerging forms of democracy required forms of public discussion and debate of the issues of the day and intellectuals came to specialize in writing, speaking about, and debating those issues of common concern and importance.

Bourgeois societies split, of course, across class lines and different class factions produced different political parties, organizations, and ideologies with each party attracting specialists in words and writing known as intellectuals. Oppressed groups also developed their own insurgent intellectuals, ranging from representatives of working class organizations, to women like Mary

Wollstonecraft fighting for women's rights, to leaders of oppressed groups of color, ethnicity, sexual preference, and so on. Insurgent intellectuals attacked oppression and promoted action that would address the causes of oppression, linking thought to action, theory to practice.

Whereas the intellectuals who defended and legitimated the existing society produced affirmative discourses, celebrating modern societies, critical and insurgent intellectuals were specialists in critique and negation, who produced critical and oppositional discourses and in some case attempted to link discourse to political action. Yet many critical intellectuals were independent of all political organization and limited their range to activity to perpetual criticism, to putting into question, limiting their activity to debate and discussion. These specialists in ideas and debate, these critical intellectuals, were nonetheless often denounced by those in power as merely negative, as ineffectual dreamers, -- or as subversive underminers of the existing order.

This pejorative sense of the intellectual was earlier anticipated in Napoleon's denunciation of "ideologues" who are in his view mainly ineffectual although dangerous theoreticians who repose in the realm of ideas and are not grounded in practical affairs or of use to the general public (Barth 1976). Another negative concept of intellectuals as ideologues for the ruling classes shaped a pejorative concept of ideology which Marx himself took up to develop with Engels (1975) in *The German Ideology*. Marx and Engels denounced intellectuals who served the ruling powers, specializing in legitimation and defense of the existing bourgeois order. And yet Marx, Engels, and most of the spokespeople for the emergent socialist movement were themselves intellectuals, specialists in ideas and criticism who studied, wrote, and spoke.

Intellectuals in modern societies were thus conflicted beings with contradictory social functions. The classical critical intellectual -- represented by figures like the French Enlightenment ideologues, Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, and later figures like Heine, Marx, Hugo, Dreyfus, Du Bois, Sartre, and Marcuse -- was to speak out against injustice and oppression and to fight for justice, equality, and the other values of the Enlightenment. Indeed, the Enlightenment itself represents one of the most successful discourses of the critical individual, a discourse and movement which assigns intellectuals key social functions. And yet conservative intellectuals attacked the Enlightenment and its prodigy the French Revolution and produced discourses that legitimated every conceivable form of oppression from class to race, gender, and ethnic domination.

### Sartre, the Public Intellectual, and the Postmodern Challenge

Perhaps it is Jean-Paul Sartre who provides the most consequent and probing conceptualizing of the tensions of the classical modern critical intellectual. For Sartre, the domain of the critical intellectual is to write and speak within the public sphere, denouncing oppression and fighting for justice, human rights, and other values. On this model, a critical intellectual's task is to bear witness, analyze, expose, and criticize a wide range of social evils. The sphere and arena of this intellectual is the word and his or her function is critical and negative: to describe and denounce injustice wherever it may occur. For instance, Sartre himself denounced French torture in Algeria in the 1960s, leading to the bombing of his house; he attacked US policy in Vietnam, joining the Bertrand Russell Peace tribunal and other national and international bodies against the US intervention; indeed, he canceled a lucrative lecture tour to the US in the 1960s and rejected a

Nobel Peace prize to dramatize his opposition to the war.

Moreover, Sartre was a model of a public intellectual who wrote, spoke, and intervened in the public sphere. He founded and edited a journal, *Les temps modernes*, which involved itself in all the political and social issues of the day, and in the 1960s and 1970s Sartre helped found and support a series of radical newspapers like *La cause du peuple* and *J'Accuse*, which he sold in the streets, and *Liberation*, the first independent leftist daily newspaper in France. Sartre also frequently gave interviews to newspapers, journals, and the radio, and late in his life participated in television programs and even made movies to publicize his political positions. For the most part, however, for Sartre his pen was his sword and his privileged activity was writing -- essays, novels, plays, filmscripts, and philosophical treatises to promote his ideas and his politics.

For Sartre, "the true labor of the committed writer... is to show, demonstrate, demystify, and dissolve myths and fetishes in a little bath of critical acid" (1974: 375) and his own critical acid became more corrosive and burning than ever during his last decade of activity in the 1970s. For Sartre, the committed intellectual engages on the side of freedom and fights for expanding the realm of freedom to all.

Against Sartre and this notion of the committed intellectual, Foucault complained that Sartre represented an ideal of the universal intellectual who fought for universal values such as truth and freedom, and assumed the task of speaking for humanity (1977). Against such an exalted and in his view exaggerated conception, Foucault militated for a conception of the specific intellectual who intervened on the side of the oppressed in specific issues, not claiming to speak for the oppressed, but to intervene as an intellectual in specific issues and debates. Out of this conception of the specific intellectual -- and a turn toward new social movements as the domain of contemporary politics (Laclau and Mouffe 1985), replacing the state and the national realm of party politics, -- there has emerged a new conception of postmodern politics.

For a postmodern politics, power is diffuse and local and not merely to be found in macroinstitutions like the workplace, the state, or patriarchy. Macropolitics that goes after big institutions like the state is to be replaced by micropolitics, with specific intellectuals intervening in spheres like the university, the prison, the hospital, or for the rights of specific oppressed groups like sexual or ethnic minorities. Global and national politics and theories are rejected in favor of more local, micro theories and politics, and the discourse and function of the intellectuals is seen as more specific, provisional, and modest than in modern theory and politics, subordinate to local struggles rather than more ambitious projects of emancipation and social transformation.

In my view, such a binary distinction between macro and micro theory and politics is problematical, as are absolutist commitments to either modern or postmodern theory tout court (Best and Kellner 1991). Using the example of the events of 1989 that saw the collapse of communism, for instance, it is clear that the popular offensives against oppressive communist power combined micro and macropolitics, moving from local and specific struggles rooted in union halls, universities, churches, and small groups to mass demonstrations forcing democratic reforms and even classically revolutionary change and mass insurrection, as in Romania. In these struggles, intellectuals played a variety of roles and deployed a diversity of discourses, ranging

from the local and specific to the national and general.

Thus, whereas I would argue that postmodern theory contains important criticism of some of the illusions and ideologies of the traditional modern intellectual, it goes too far in rejecting the classical role of the critical intellectual and that some of the modern conception of the critical and oppositional intellectual remains useful. I would, in fact, reject the particular/universal intellectual dichotomy in favor of developing a normative concept of the public intellectual. The public intellectual -- on this conception -- intervenes in the public sphere, fights against lies, oppression, and injustice and fights for rights, freedom, and democracy ^ la Sartre's committed intellectual. But a democratic public intellectual does not speak for others, does not abrogate or monopolize the function of speaking the truth, but simply participates in discussion and debate, defending specific ideas, values, or norms or principle that may be particular or universal. But if universal, like human rights, they are contextual, provisional, normative and general and not valid for all time. Indeed, rights are products of social struggles and are thus social constructs and not innate or natural entities -- as the classical natural rights theorists would have it. But rights can be generalized, extended, and can take universal forms -- as with, for instance, a UN charter of human rights that holds that certain rights are valid for all individuals -- at least in this world at this point in time.

Consequently, one does not need all of the baggage of the universal intellectual to maintain a conception of a public or democratic intellectual in the present era. Intellectuals may well seek to occupy a higher ground than particularistic interests, a common ground seeking public interests and goods. But intellectuals should not abrogate the right to speak for all and should be aware that they are speaking from a determinate position with its own biases and limitations. Moreover, intellectuals should learn to get out of their particular frame of reference for more general ones, to take the position of the other, to empathize with more marginal and oppressed groups, to learn from them, and to support their struggles. To perpetually criticize oneself, to develop the capacity for self-reflection and critique -- as well as self-expression -- is thus part of the duty of the democratic intellectual.

In the following section, I will suggest that it is Sartre and not Foucault or postmodern theory who provides both the most impressive articulation of the role of the intellectual in modern societies and who best criticizes the limitations of traditional intellectuals. Then in the final sections, I argue, building on Sartre's conception, for an expansion of the role of the intellectual in our time.

### Sartre on the Intellectual

It has not been generally noted that the problematic of defining the nature and function of the intellectual was a major theme of Sartre's philosophy, or that he reformulated his concept of the committed intellectual in the 1970s, during his last decade of political and intellectual activity. In 1966, Sartre gave a series of lectures in Japan where he significantly developed his conception of an intellectual. Collected as an essay, "A Plea for Intellectuals," Sartre begins by posing the question "What is an intellectual?" (1975: 229ff). He notes that intellectuals waver between serving a conservative and a critical function. On one hand, intellectuals have traditionally been assigned the task of preserving and transmitting culture -- thus often legitimating and fortifying

the dominant ideologies and serving the interests of maintaining the existing society. In present day society, Sartre claims, intellectuals are increasingly "technicians of practical knowledge" who serve the technocratic function of devising efficient means to secure society's ends. In this sense, intellectuals serve an instrumental role of providing means, ideas, technologies, and so on that will strengthen and streamline the established society.

But although intellectuals serve these crucial social functions they are often looked upon with distrust by the authorities. Intellectuals are often taken to be critical and negative types who ceaselessly make things difficult for the authorities by spreading the seeds of criticism, dissent, possibly subversion. Thus, the intellectual is reproached as "someone who meddles in what is not his business and claims to question both received truths and the accepted behavior inspired by them" (1975: 230).

The substantive noun "intellectual" in this quasi-pejorative sense, Sartre suggests, derives from the Dreyfus affair. On June 14, 1898, the "manifeste des intellectuels" was published in the French newspaper *L'Aurore* and the term "intellectual" was henceforth given a critical, negative connotation in France where it was associated with the Left. The Dreyfusards who challenged the French military tribunal's accusations against Dreyfus and insisted on his innocence were said to be meddling and interfering with "a domain that was outside their competence" (1975: 230). Intellectuals were thus seen as those pesky meddlers who interfered with matters beyond their proficiencies and that were an impediment to the construction of a stable and orderly society.

Sartre sees a certain irony in the charge that intellectuals "mislead the people," since once the intellectuals depart from cultural conservatism and serving the system, they are intrinsically weak in that they are putting themselves outside of and against the established society, often without a power base of their own and in many cases without popular support. This social-political powerlessness of the critical intellectual accounts, Sartre suggests, for the intellectual's traditional moralism and idealism (1975: 229).

In a genealogy of the modern intellectual, Sartre describes the ascendancy of what we now see as intellectuals, first, in the clerical hierarchy in the Middle Ages and, then, he links the rise of the bourgeois intelligentsia with the triumph of capitalism and the bourgeoisie (1975: 232-237). Every society needs ideologies to legitimate their social relations and forms of domination, and thus spawn intellectuals who will produce, defend, and fortify that ideology. The division of labor in modern society creates new functions and roles for intellectuals and gives rise to "specialists of practical knowledge" (1975: 237), the intellectuals as a specific social grouping.

Intellectuals in contemporary society, Sartre claims, have a curious subordinate and ambiguous status in the social hierarchy. The ruling elites define society's priorities, allocating specific sums of money for education, law, health, the military, and various construction and public programs, thus delineating the number of jobs and sorts of positions that will be distributed to the intellectuals. Thus both the intellectual's position and salary are dependent on ruling elites. In capitalist societies, "The ruling class determines the number of technicians of practical knowledge in accordance with the dictates of profit, which is its supreme end" (1975: 237). Today, for instance, the culture industries require growing numbers of applied psychologists, copy-writers, statisticians, computer operators, managers, and so on. The increased specialization

and technological imperatives of contemporary capitalism require increased numbers of technicians, scientists, and publicists, and less philosophers, historians, and workers in the humanities. The intellectuals, like everyone and everything else, are thus subject to the laws of capitalist accumulation, although they are often the last to see this, thinking that they operate in a realm above economics and material interests. Intellectuals are thus often the dupes and servants of capital, even though they are not actually serving it by choice.

Intellectuals are formed and educated by a selective and competitive system that tries to get them to accept its values and ideologies so that they in turn will propagate them. They are taught to be specialists in research and custodians of tradition. They are hence entrusted with the role of transmitting traditional values and attacking subversive ones: "At this level they are agents of an ideological particularization which is sometimes openly admitted (the aggressive nationalism of the Nazi theoreticians) and sometimes concealed (liberal humanism with its false universality)" (1975: 238).

At this point, a contradiction emerges. Intellectuals are in theory "technicians of practical knowledge" who develop techniques that can be applied by all for the good of all; i.e. medicine, law, physics, philosophy, art and so on are to serve all the people; they are universal goods and values. But in a class society, knowledge and techniques are not used for the good of all. Only wealthy people in a certain class can afford adequate medical care, the best lawyers, exciting travel, and so on. Only those with a certain level of education can read philosophy and appreciate modern art; only those with a certain amount of leisure can enjoy culture. Thus, certain groups and individuals monopolize the knowledge and techniques of the intellectual: they use the intellectual's production to increase and enhance ruling class domination and privileges.

Consequently, a contradiction emerges between the universality of intellectual labor (the search for universal truth and the good of all) and the particularity of the interests served. The intellectual who becomes aware of this contradiction sees itself as a tool of the ruling class (and indirectly an oppressor of the working class). Divorced from the working classes, serving the ruling classes, the intellectual "is a middle man, a middling man, a middle class man. The general ends toward which his activities lead are not his ends" (1975: 239). The intellectual thus is haunted by a series of contradictions that society and its education thrust upon them. Let us more closely examine these contradictions.

The intellectual receives a humanist education which asserts that all people are equal and that freedom, justice, and human rights are the province of all human beings. But the intellectual is living proof that all individuals are not equal. They are superior to the subordinate classes who have not received adequate education and possess certain intellectual skills which give them a relatively privileged status. Yet intellectuals are inferior to the ruling classes whose monopoly of wealth and power reduce the intellectuals to subordinate and instrumental functions. The intellectual is thus in a good position to see the real inequalities of the society, as well as the contradictions a class society thrusts upon its subordinates and underlinings. In this way, the intellectual suffers a contradiction between a humanist-egalitarian ideology and the inhumanism of an inegalitarian society.

Moreover, the intellectual is a universalist by profession and training. Their science and

knowledge is universal in its form and is geared, in theory, toward universal and human ends. Yet the intellectual often discovers that their knowledge and techniques are surreptitiously particularist: subservient to the ends of the state, ruling elites, corporations, and other social forces. They may see that their ideas and research are used by the government, corporations, or military for purposes that are foreign to their humanist ends and values: "At that moment in their very research, they discover alienation: they become aware that they are the instruments of ends which remain foreign to them and which they are forbidden to question" (Sartre 1975: 240). Take, for example, the medical researcher who discovers a cure for cancer and finds it cannot be marketed because of special medical-pharmaceutical interests which oppose it and block its use. Or the researcher in atomic physics may discover that his research is used to commit genocide in bombing campaigns. Or the psychologist whose research in human motivation may be used by advertisers or politicians to manipulate the public. Or the sociologist may discover that his work is used as a means of social control. The intellectual is thus forced to suffer the contradiction between their humanist values and the anti-human ends of the society which employs them.

A further contradiction results from the fact that intellectuals are by training independent beings who put a high value on freedom, autonomy, unfettered research, and the search for truth -- qualities necessary for their education and work. But in late capitalist society intellectuals are increasingly dependent on the state and private enterprise for their livelihood in a society controlled by profit, scarcity, and competition. Thus the contradiction develops between the free, independent spirit of research which is necessary for intellectual and social progress contrasted to the intellectual's material dependence and control by the ruling powers.

Wrenched by all these contradictions and the alienation and oppression which they contain, the intellectual often becomes restive, critical, even rebellious. For the authorities, this unstable being, the intellectual, is therefore suspect (Sartre 1975: 243). The authorities must up to a point humor their intellectuals who serve an indispensable social function, but they must keep a close watch on them and try to control their research and discourse. They try to impose an ideology of universality, liberty, affluence, and progress on their intellectuals to give them the impression that their work is serving universal and beneficent ends. They try also to blind their intellectuals to class-conflict, poverty, oppression and the inequalities which their society perpetuates (1975: 241). If the intellectuals see through this mystification, they are subject to discipline, punishment, loss of salary and job, and perhaps worse. "Thus the researcher is simultaneously indispensable and yet suspect in the eyes of the dominant class. He cannot fail to experience and interiorize this suspicion, and to become suspect from the outset in his own eyes" (1975: 244).

The intellectuals -- these "beings-in-contradiction" -- can respond to their contradictory situation in two ways. They can conform, submit to the authorities, accept the dominant ideology; they can practice self-censorship, adapt, become apolitical -- in a word, they can capitulate: "In this case, his rulers typically say with satisfaction of a man, 'he is no intellectual'" (Sartre 1975: 244). However, if the technician of practical knowledge becomes aware of the contradictions between the particularism of the dominant ideology and the interests it serves contrasted with their humanist ideology and its universal ends, if the intellectual refuses to be an agent of the ruling class, if s/he finds the ends and rulers s/he serves intolerable, if intellectuals become aware of their lack of real independence, then the intellectual becomes a "monster" who "attends to what concerns him" and whom others refer to as someone who "interferes in what does not concern

him" (1975: 244).

For Sartre, the intellectual is thus potentially a being who sees into its own contradictions and those of its society, who has interiorized these contradictions, and who seeks to resolve them. This means that the genuine intellectual will be oppositional, critical, and negative. The critical intellectual opposes the ruling ideology in the spirit of the search for theoretical and practical truth; they oppose society's inhumanities, inequalities, and unfreedom in the name of humanity, equality, freedom, and other positive values. They reveal the untruth of the dominant ideology in the name of truth, which means for Sartre that they unmask "the fundamental contradictions of the society: that is to say, the struggle between classes and within the dominant class itself, the organic conflict between the truth the latter needs for its own purposes and the myths, values, and traditions with which it seeks to infect other classes in order to ensure its hegemony" (Sartre 1975: 246).

In Sartre's terms, the intellectual's quest for knowledge and the universal discloses that universality and humanity do not exist, that a free, egalitarian society and non-alienated human being remain to be achieved, that a fully human being and a human society remain a task to be performed. The genuine intellectual thus chooses to overcome the contradictions and alienations of its society in order to engender a more human state of affairs. In Sartre's terms, the intellectual strives "to realize the practical {i.e. free and sovereign} subject and to discover the principles of a society capable of engendering such a subject" (1975: 250).

In the 1960s, Sartre became dissatisfied with this conception of the critical intellectual and began developing concepts of the revolutionary who was a partisan of revolution and eventually proposed dissolving intellectuals in the masses (see Sartre 1970, 1971, and 1974, discussed in Kellner 1974-75). In retrospect, Sartre's ultraleftism appears quaint and utopian after a couple of decades of conservative rule in most so-called capitalist democracies. I wish thus to work with Sartre's concept of the critical intellectual as developed in his 1966 article "A Plea for Intellectuals" in the remainder of this article and will make my own case for a new type of intellectual who intervenes in new public spheres and who makes use of new technologies in the rapidly mutating media and computer societies of the present moment.

### New Technologies, New Public Spheres, and New Intellectuals

In Sartre's view, the vocation of the intellectual was criticism and negation. The critical project required concern with values and ends and capacity for vision, seeing oppression and injustice and ways to fight it. In the following discussion, I will argue that although the public intellectual should assume new functions and activities today, the critical capacities and vision of the classical critical intellectual are still relevant, thus I suggest building on models of the past, rather than simply throwing them over, as in some types of postmodern theory.

In a certain sense, there was no important connection between the classical intellectual and technology. To be sure, intellectuals -- especially scientific scholars like Leonardo de Vinci, Galileo, or Darwin -- deployed technologies and entire groups like the British Royal Society were concerned with technologies and were indeed often inventors themselves. Some intellectuals used printing presses and were themselves printers and many, though not all, of the

major intellectuals of the 20th century probably used a typewriter, though I personally know of no major studies of the relationship between the typewriter and intellectuals. Yet a classical intellectual did not have to intrinsically deploy any specific technology and there was thus no intimate connection between intellectuals and technology.

I now want to argue that in the contemporary high tech societies there is emerging a significant expansion and redefinition of the public sphere and that these developments, connected primarily with media and computer technologies, require a reformulation and expansion of the concept of critical or committed intellectual. Earlier in the century, Brecht and Benjamin saw the revolutionary potential of new technologies like film and radio and urged radical intellectuals to seize these new forces of production, to "refunction" them, and to turn them into instruments to democratize and revolutionize society. Sartre too worked on radio and television series and insisted that "committed writers must get into these relay station arts of the movies and radio" (1974: 177; for discussion of his *Les temps modernes* radio series, see 177-180).

Previously, radio, television, and the other electronic media of communication tended to be closed to critical and oppositional voices both in systems controlled by the state and in private corporations. Public access and low power television and community and guerilla radio, however, open these technologies to intervention and use by critical intellectuals. For some years now, I have been urging progressives to make use of new communications broadcast media (Kellner 1979; 1985; 1990) and have in fact been involved in a public access television program in Austin, Texas since 1978. My argument was that radio, television, and other electronic modes of communication were creating new public spheres of debate, discussion, and information and that progressives who wanted to be where the people were at, who wanted to communicate with the general public, and who thus wanted to intervene in the public affairs of their society should make use of these technologies and develop new communication politics and new media projects.

In fact, one can argue that the victory of Reagan and the Right in the United States in 1980 was related to the Right's effective use of television, radio, fax and computer communication, direct mailings, telephones, and other sophisticated political uses of new technologies. Furthermore, one could argue that Clinton's victory over Bush in 1992, and the surprising success of the Perot campaign, were related to effective uses of communication technologies. And more recently in the US, the Republican and rightwing success in the 1994 elections can be related to their use of talk radio, computer bulletin boards, and other technologies.

Consequently, I would argue that effective use of technology is essential in contemporary politics and that intellectuals who wish to intervene in the new public spheres need to deploy new communications media to participate in democratic debate and to shape the future of contemporary societies and culture. My argument is that first broadcast media like radio and television, and now computers have produced new public spheres and spaces for information, debate, and participation that contain both the potential to invigorate democracy and to increase the dissemination of critical and progressive ideas -- as well as new possibilities for manipulation and social control. But participation in these new public spheres -- computer bulletin boards and discussion groups, talk radio and television, and the emerging sphere of what I call cyberspace democracy require intellectuals to gain new technical skills and to master new technologies.

I am thus suggesting that intellectuals in the present moment must master new technologies and that there is thus a more intimate relationship between intellectuals and technology than in previous social configurations. To be an intellectual today involves use of the most advanced forces of production to develop and circulate ideas, to do research and involve oneself in political debate and discussion, and to intervene in the new public spheres produced by broadcasting and computing technologies. New public intellectuals should attempt to develop strategies that will use these technologies to attack domination and to promote education, democracy, and political struggle -- or whatever goals are normatively posited as desirable to attain. There is thus an intrinsic connection in this argument between the fate of intellectuals and the forces of production which, as always, can be used for conservative or progressive ends.

For some decades now, critical intellectuals have been involved in the use of broadcast technologies to develop alternative forms of culture and information and today in particular younger intellectuals are involved in the design and use of computers as new sources of information, expression, and discussion. In a sense, computer technologies are at least potentially more democratic and empowering than previous communication technologies that were more centralized, often inaccessible to public intervention, and involved in more one-way and top-down communication. Computer technology, to the extent that it is spread throughout the public, is more decentralized, accessible to participation, and thus both empowering and potentially capable of promoting democratic debate and discussion.

Thus, the critical public intellectual who wants to intervene in the new public spheres of the emerging high tech society has to master the use of new technologies to be an effective intellectual who participates in some of the key debates and discussions currently going on. The public intellectual of the present must thus learn how to use computers, video equipment, and other technologies in order to communicate with a broad public and to assume the role of critical intellectual in promoting democracy and progressive social change. This requires modifying our conception of what an intellectual is and seeing closer connections between intellectuals and the mastery of communication technology that was previously the case.

Of course, traditional humanist intellectuals who are intrinsically hostile to technology will not accept such arguments and many of those who identify themselves as progressives will dismiss such an argument as elitist or utopian. But I would maintain that the argument that most individuals do not have computers or participate in computer-mediated discussion could soon become outdated as computers become central to schooling and part of the "standard package" of consumer items in the home along with televisions, radios, refrigerators, telephones, and the like. More houses in the US, for instance, have television sets than indoor toilets and to the 99%+ penetration by television, I have seen statistics that video-recorders are currently available in over 80% of US homes and will be universal by the end of the century.

It is conceivable that the situation will be similar with computers. I have been giving workshops around the United States to grade school and high school teachers the past several years and have observed the rapid penetration of computer technologies in the school on all levels and have noted that US corporations donate their older computer models to poorer school districts for tax write-offs so that computers are becoming a standard tool of education in all class and regional

segments. Even the Republican party in the US is suggesting that each family in the country should be given a laptop computer for access to the information "super highway" and recent studies of job prospects suggest that without computer skills young people will not be able to enter the labor force and that therefore computer education is an essential part of future schooling.

Computer technologies thus may become more and more central to the home, workplace, and schooling and thus intellectuals will, if I am correct, be forced to master these technologies. Moreover, CD-Roms are becoming more wide-spread in public schools in the United States and elsewhere, suggesting that they and other computer generated texts may massively supplement books, requiring that intellectuals who want to intervene in their country's politics and culture will have to learn to produce CD-Roms, or at least use computer technologies in their research, writing, and dissemination. Indeed, with the proliferation of electronic technologies through major publishing companies, such things as books and journals may become obsolete, replaced by on-line electronic journals and information data bases.

In fact, the major research for two of my recent books (Kellner 1992 and 1995) was done from computer data bases and I find that I am spending much more time in data bases than in libraries for a variety of research projects. Bulletin-board computer discussions often involve the most up-to-date and lively discussion of issues concerning communications theory and public policy and I also participate in lively discussions on popular culture, film, rock music, and other bulletin-boards, as well as theoretical ones on Marx, postmodern theory, Baudrillard, and other topics. Such bulletin-boards -- which also have their limitations as those who have observed flame wars and outright stupidity can attest -- allow instant communication of one's ideas without the mediation of gate keepers or watchdogs, as well as breaking down the hierarchies between professors and students, tenured and untenured, and so on that structure standard academic communication. Increasingly, various discussion and information groups are establishing archives that allow one to peruse in-depth texts and discussions and to download on their own computer recent material in areas that interest them.

Indeed, there are more specialized archives in Shakespeare, Marx, postmodern theory and other topics, as well as newspapers and journals, that allow instant access to tremendous amounts of material, so far free of charge, for those with University or government affiliations. One can also visit museum exhibits, specialized libraries, government archives, and many other sites via the Internet and other computer sites and routes. Indeed, as I suggest below, fighting for continued and expanded free access to computer data bases and information and communication services is an important political issue for the future.

Being an intellectual in the emerging high tech societies thus requires new skills, the mastery of new technologies, and intervention in new public spheres. This process requires expansion of the roles and functions of the intellectual, new terrains and sites of interventions, and new challenges and possibilities -- as well no doubt of new traps and illusions. I want to suggest some of these new possibilities in the succeeding sections. But first I want to affirm allegiance to the traditional functions of reading, writing, speaking, teaching, and interacting in face to face sites. The new technologies and public sphere will probably not replace but rather supplement the previous sites and modes of intellectual intervention, and I am personally still committed to traditional roles of

reading and writing books, articles, and the like, as well as face to face teaching and lecturing -- which I have been doing more of in recent years rather than less. But even our roles as teachers and writers and activists in the traditional sense can be enhanced by new technologies which should be seen as essential supplements to our activities which involve new challenges and possibilities.

### New Tasks for the Public Intellectual

Building on Sartre, I am thus proposing expansion and redefinition of the role of the critical, oppositional, and public intellectual who intervenes in the crucial issues and debates of the day. Indeed, a democratic intellectual, an intellectual who wishes to promote democracy, should participate in the potentially empowering and participatory spheres of public access and talk television and radio, computer bulletin-boards, and the other spaces of an emerging cyberspace democracy. I am aware that these technologies are not yet accessible to all and could be the basis for a new social division between information haves and have nots. But I would argue that we begin thinking of the consequences of the emerging new technologies and how they can be used to empower people, to promote democracy, and progressive social change -- as well as new social problems and divisions.

Reflection on the roles of media and computer technologies in contemporary politics calls attention to the urgency of impending tasks for critical intellectuals that have been often been neglected or overlooked in the tumult and confusion of the present. On the positive side, we are living in exciting times in which new media and computer technologies are producing new possibilities for communication, cultural expression, and ways of living everyday life -- at least for privileged individuals and those using the new technologies. We should not forget, however, the misery of the vast majority and should struggle so that they can attain the same opportunities as those more fortunate (Kellner 1995). Moreover, we need to consciously come to terms with our new technologies and culture, and devise ways to use them to enhance our lives and to make them available to all. This requires reflection on media and technology and the challenges and problems of living in a new media/technological society. With these concerns in mind, I would suggest that media and cultural studies need to address several topics that require reflection on expanded activity for critical intellectuals in the present era.

### Insurgent Intellectuals and New Technologies

I also want to stress that a variety of insurgent intellectuals are already making use of these new technologies and public spheres in their political struggles. The peasants and guerilla armies struggling in Chiapis, Mexico from the beginning used computer data bases, guerrilla radio, and other forms of media to circulate their struggles and ideas. Every manifesto, text, and bulletin written in Chiapis was immediately circulated through the world via computer networks. As I revise this paper in January 1995, the Mexican government is moving against the insurgent movement and computer networks are being used to inform and mobilize individuals and groups throughout the world to support their struggles against repressive Mexican government action.

Earlier, audiotapes were used to promote the revolution in Iran and to promote alternative information by political movements throughout the world. The Tianenaman Square democracy

movement in China and various groups struggling against the remnants of Stalinism in the former communist bloc and Soviet Union used computer bulletin boards, as well as a variety of forms of communications, to circulate their struggles. Thus, using new technologies to link theory and practice, to circulate struggles, is neither extraneous to political struggle nor merely utopian.

Indeed, a series of struggles around gender and race are also mediated by new communications technologies. After the 1991 Clarence Thomas Hearings in the United States on his fitness to be Supreme Court Justice, Thomas's assault on claims of sexual harassment by Anita Hill and others, and the failure of the almost all male US Senate to disqualify the obviously unqualified Thomas, prompted women to use computer and other technologies to attack male privilege in the political system in the United States and to rally women to support women candidates. The result in the 1992 election was the election of more women candidates than in any previous election and a general rejection of conservative rule (I have already suggested that the turn to the right in the 1994 election was largely due to more effective conservative use of media and computer technologies).

Likewise, African-American insurgent intellectuals have made use of broadcast and computer technologies to circulate their struggles. John Fiske (1994) has described some African-American radio projects in the "techostruggles" of the present age and the central role of the media in recent struggles around race and gender. African-American "knowledge warriors" are using radio, computer bulletin-boards, and other media to circulate their ideas and counter-knowledge on a variety of issues, contesting the mainstream and offering alternative views and politics. Likewise, activists in communities of color -- like Oakland, Harlem, and Los Angeles -- are setting up community computer and media centers to teach the skills necessary to survive the onslaught of the mediatization of culture and computerization of society to people in their communities.

Consequently, a variety of insurgent intellectuals in the present are using the new technologies to circulate their struggles and information. The technologies of communication are becoming more and more accessible to young people and average citizens and they should be used to promote democratic self-expression and social progress. Thus, technologies that have traditionally blocked the expansion of participatory democracy, by transforming politics into media spectacles and the battle of images, could also be used to help invigorate democratic debate and participation.

### Media and Cultural Activism

Critical media and cultural studies has been especially negligent of developing strategies and practices for media intervention and the production of alternative media. There has been little discussion within cultural studies circles concerning how radio, television, film, and other media could be transformed and used as instruments of social enlightenment and progress. Likewise, the Frankfurt School seemed inherently skeptical of media technologies and viewed them as totally controlled by capitalist corporations. Indeed, when the classical theories of the cultural industries were being formed, this was more or less the case. The failure of media and cultural studies today to engage the issue of alternative media is more puzzling and less excusable since

there are today a variety of venues for alternative film and video production, community radio, computer bulletin boards and discussion forums, and other forms of communications within which progressives can readily intervene.

Thus, critical media theory today should discuss how the media and culture can be transformed into instruments of social enlightenment and progress. This requires more focus on alternative media than has previously been evident and reflections on how media technology can be reconfigured and used to empower individuals. It requires developing activist strategies to intervene in public access television, community radio, computer bulletin-boards, and other domains currently emerging. To genuinely empower individuals requires giving them knowledge of media production and allowing them to produce media that are then disseminated to the public. Increasing media activism could significantly enhance democracy, making possible the proliferation of voices and allowing those voices that have been silenced or marginalized to speak.

New public spheres and technologies thus produce new roles and functions for intellectuals. Media and computer culture is producing new cyberspaces to explore and map, and new terrains of political struggle and intervention. The new cyberintellectuals of the present may not be the organic intellectuals of a class, but we can become technointellectuals of new technologies, cultural experiences, and spaces, charting and navigating through the brave new worlds of media culture and technoculture. These technologies can be used as instruments of domination or liberation, of manipulation or social enlightenment, and it is up to the activist intellectuals of the present and future to determine which way the new technologies will be used and developed and whose interests they serve.

A democratic media politics will accordingly be concerned that the new media and computer technologies will be used to serve the interests of the people and not corporate elites. A democratic media politics will strive to see that media are used to inform and enlighten individuals rather than to manipulate them. A democratic media politics will teach individuals how to use the new technologies, to articulate their own experiences and interests, and to promote democratic debate and diversity, allowing a full range of voices and ideas to become part of the cyberdemocracy of the future.

### Media and Cultural Politics

Now more than ever, media and cultural politics are of utmost importance to the future of democracy. Who will control the media and technologies of the future, and debates over the public's access to media, media accountability and responsibility, media funding and regulation, and what kinds of culture are best for cultivating individual freedom, democracy, and human happiness and well-being will become increasingly important in the future. The proliferation of media culture and technologies focuses attention on the importance of media politics and the need for public intervention in debates over the future of media culture and communications in the information highways and entertainment by- ways of the future.

One of the key issues of the future will concern whether communications and culture are increasingly commodified or are decommodified. Defenders of commercial television in the

United States are always praising "free television," a dubious product, however, only made possible at the expense of allowing advertising to clutter the airwaves and giving advertisers and commercial interests significant power over programming. In the future, however, even individual TV programs may be commodified, owned by corporations which will charge for everything. Likewise, today computer bulletin boards and routes of communication on the Internet are free to those who have University, or government, accounts, whereas all computer communication may be commodified in the future, as is telephone communication. The struggle here is therefore to decommodify computer communication and information, to make the Internet and other information highways of the future open to everyone, free of charge, to expand public access television and community radio, and to develop alternative cultural institutions and practices that are funded by the community or state and made available to the people.

It is possible that failures to address political economy and to adequately develop a media politics within contemporary cultural studies is a main source of the avoidance of public policy concerns that Tony Bennett has been criticizing (1992, in Grossberg et al). Without a sense of how the larger social forces (i.e. the nature of the broadcasting industry, state policy towards communications, etc.) impinge on everyday life, it is impossible to grasp the relevance of public policy and media politics on the nature of the system of communications and culture in a given society. Yet in a context in which new technologies of communications are creating dramatic changes in culture, leisure activity, and everyday life, it is important to perceive the importance of media politics and the ways that the system and framework of communications in a given society helps determine what sort of programming and effects are produced.

But without situating discussions of public policy within the context of social theory and political economy that analyzes existing configurations of power and domination, discussions of public policy are hopelessly abstract and besides the point. In the United States, during the reign of Reagan and Bush (1980- 1992), there really weren't any openings for progressive public policy interventions, on the national level. Instead, the political urgency at the time, on the level of national politics, was defending liberal gains of the past against conservative onslaughts (I would imagine that something like this was also the case in England during the regimes of Thatcher and Major, and in other countries ruled by conservative governments).

On the other hand, the era of conservative rule saw many exciting local interventions, with lively alternative cultures proliferating and intense political struggles, often cultural in focus, taking part on the local level. This experience perhaps influenced the postmodern politics which emphasized local, rather than global, struggles, but it is important to see that both local and national struggles and issues are important. On the local level, one can often more visibly make a difference, though even rearguard defensive operations on the national level are important, as are public policy interventions that advocate genuine reform on any level. The neglect of cultural politics by critical cultural and communications studies that should advocate such a cultural and media politics is distressing and is a sign of the depoliticalization of intellectual life in the present moment.

### The New Critical Intellectual

Thus, critical intellectuals have some important tasks for the future and can become part of a

process of empowerment and enlightenment -- or intellectuals can ignore the new technologies and their impact and possibilities and condemn themselves to irrelevancy and obsolescence. Yet I would also insist that many functions of the classical critical intellectual are still relevant and are indeed more urgent than ever. How the communications of the future are designed, who will gain access, protocols for democratic discussion and debate, and how information is circulated and distributed are key questions concerning the future of our media and computer societies.

The critical and normative functions of intellectuals are therefore still necessary as we move into a society that may well have more and more varied and conflictual communication than previous societies. Questions concerning norms and principles of criticism and discussion, of balancing freedom and rights, of how to promote democracy -- indeed, on what constitutes genuine democracy -- will become even more burning. Indeed, these issues are heatedly and interestingly debated everyday on computer bulletin-boards which in many cases circulate more lively and gripping ideas and information than both print and broadcast media.

Likewise, the need for literacy is as essential as ever and to book and print literacy we should add media and computer literacy. It is indeed not a question of books or computers for education and producing democratic citizens but rather a question of both. The need for traditional skills of reading, writing, expression, and critical thinking is even more essential in an era of information overload in which reading and writing may become even more central to success in education and employment. Distinguishing between valid and invalid arguments, accurate or inaccurate information, truth and propaganda will be as important as ever thus it is not a question of throwing away books and the traditional skills of the intellectual but expanding them into new technologies and public spheres.

Of course, one might choose to defend certain traditional values and activities in the face of their onslaught by new technologies. Some criticisms of email and bulletin-board communication, for instance, are provocative and thought-provoking and can enhance future communication through the preservation and dissemination of traditional skills and standards of literacy. Moreover, new forms of computer-mediated communication might create a new public sphere that is less esoteric, elitist, and inflated than the academic culture of recent decades, though new technologies might also produce new life for obsolete theories and continue to promote esoteric theoretical languages that promote primarily the interests and cultural capital of academic elites.

Indeed, one of the scandals of the past decades is that at the very moment when the economy, polity, society, and culture were undergoing momentous upheavals -- on both the global and local level -- many academic intellectuals took refuge in the most arcane theoretical discourse and specialized academic languages. I myself have been involved in these discourse games and believe that theory can actually be of use in a variety of academic and practical domains, but believe that the search for a common discourse, for publicly accessible language, for clear thought and expression is an urgent necessity of the present moment and that the responsibility of intellectuals today is to speak out in language accessible to ordinary citizens.

Indeed, the technological changes of the present moment are far-reaching and force us to rethink everything -- the role of intellectuals, the nature of democracy, the shape of the good society, and good life. Theory and politics are up for grabs in the current moment and it is up to the public

intellectuals of the future to devise languages and strategies of communication that make use of the new technologies and public spheres of the present age to redefine intellectuals and to struggle toward a better future.

## Notes

. On the variety of, often conflicting, postmodern politics, see the survey in Best and Kellner 1991.

. Sartre formulated a conception of the committed writer and intellectual in his 1947 text *What is Literature* (1962) and developed a model of the committed intellectual as one engaged on the side of freedom and against oppression. In the light of the polemics against Sartre by those associated with structuralist and post-structuralist theory (i.e. Levi-Strauss, Lacan, Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, etc), it has rarely been noted that Sartre had a massive influence on these critics, as well as those more closely associated with his own thought.

. I just completed making a CD-Rom on Emile de Antonio's film *Painters Painting* with Ron Mann for Voyager and am very excited about the potential of this technology. The CD-Rom made possible not only digitization of the film, but also entire transcripts of de Antonio's interviews with painters, his Diary reflections on the film, and his relationships with major painters of the period, reviews of the film, as well as video interview material with the filmmaker, outtakes of the interviews, and other documentary material, thus creating an entire archive on American painting in the post-World War II period.

. The exception here was Walter Benjamin (1969). Baudrillard (1983) is especially contemptuous of alternative media. .

. For more on alternative media, see Kellner 1979, 1985, and 1990.

. On media and communications politics of the present, see Schiller 1989 and Kellner 1990.

. On media literacy, see Giroux 1992 and 1994; McLaren, Hammer, et. al. 1995; and Kellner 1995a.

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