

The Engagement of Social Theory: The relationship between critical social theory and daily life

Scott Schaffer

Department of Sociology/Anthropology

Millersville University of Pennsylvania, USA

Contact info:

Scott Schaffer

Dept of Sociology/Anthropology

Millersville University

PO Box 1002

Millersville, PA 17551-0302 USA

Office: 717/872.3567

Fax: 717/872.3942

Internet: <http://www.millersville.edu/~schaffer>

Email: scott.schaffer@millersville.edu

© 2002, Scott Schaffer. This paper represents a work in progress. Please do not reproduce or cite without permission from the author.

Abstract: This paper explores the possibilities for the critical engagement of social theory with everyday life and processes of social change.

This paper starts by detailing the presumption that social theory is stuck in some way between two positions vis-à-vis “the real world” – the “politics/science” divide posited by Weber, wherein social scientists and theorists are not supposed to be actively involved in political processes of change; and the “postmodern” position, in which social theory has effectively abandoned processes of change and, put bluntly, ends up screaming at the skies for fear of actually finding real, intentional systems of oppression. Neither position, this paper will argue, is acceptable in a world characterized by the increasing power of global capitalism, the quashing of dissent in any form, and a developing anomie.

Beginning with Schalk’s (1991) concept of *engagement* – the theoretically and practically based participation of social theorists in political affairs – this paper will explore the ways in which current forms of critical social theory can resume this engagement. Three case studies of *engagé* social theorists – Jean-Paul Sartre, Pierre Bourdieu, and Vaclav Havel – are examined in order to find both the social-theoretical dynamic that might allow for engagement and the proper relationship between the social theorist and members of the society with whom they wish to speak and act. Finally, this paper will argue that the proper place of social theory and social theorists is bonded to those who would act for social change; in other words, we should neither speak for nor at people actively working for the improvement of society, but rather speak with and lend our theoretical analyses and tools to those on “the front lines.”

The Engagement of Social Theory: The relationship between critical social theory and daily life

It would appear from looking at the American media that intellectuals have, for the most part, disappeared. A quick scan of the “talking heads” on the major news networks would show that most of the experts that appear on television giving insight into current affairs derive their intellectual legitimacy either from think tanks, generally funded in the US by particular special interest groups, or from the fact of having a talk show of their own. In recent years, and especially since the September attacks in New York and Washington DC, it would seem that the quality of intellectual discourse that appears in the media has declined dramatically, to the point that the most intelligent commentary on public affairs appears on the Comedy Central network news spoof show *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. At the same time, among those who are interested in changing the state of affairs in the US and in international economic organizations directed by the US, there is a relative dearth of American intellectual involvement. When members of anti-globalization and anti-capitalism organizations are given airtime (a rare thing indeed), it is usually the head of one of these movements – generally an advanced undergraduate student who somehow became aware of the problems of the world – who speaks for the movement, leaving the general public with the impression that while there are some people furious about global inequality and the exploitation of workers and resources around the world, they’re usually college students and “they’re supposed to be activists – until they get jobs.”¹

One might ask, then, why it is that left-leaning intellectuals are not involved – or do not appear to be involved – in American public life. Is it because of some inherent conservatism in the corporate media? Is it because the American public does not want to hear any kind of social

¹ There are, to be sure, some occasions when members of the intelligentsia appear in the American media, and there are some intellectuals actively involved in social movements. Magazines such as *Harper's*, *Dissent*, and *Mother Jones* do allow for the publication of left analyses of social life (however limited their readership); and online forums such as *Bad Subjects* (<http://eserver.org/bs>) do represent a more consistent contribution to the American public's understanding of current affairs and historical trends. However, this exaggerated depiction of the state of intellectual engagement in American public life is designed to highlight one fundamental problem – the lack of left intellectuals appearing in the media. The larger project of which this study is a part is designed to examine the ways in which American social thought since 1965 allows (or does not allow) for intellectual engagement; within that project, the relative preponderance of right-wing intellectuals in the American media will be examined by using tools from social movements theory, in particular moral entrepreneurship and resource mobilization.

or political commentary that might be critical of the current administration or of the US in general? Is it because there is an active campaign against anything resembling dissent, as indicated by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (2002) report on “anti-American” speeches by university faculty and students? My argument would be this: Despite all of these current actualities, which would hinder anyone who might want to be engaged in public affairs, there is more at work preventing left intellectuals from being involved in public life, and that much of this has to do with the intellectual work done by these people. In other words, the ways in which left social theory has developed over the last thirty years prevent intellectuals from having a “professional” basis for becoming what the French are fond of calling *l’intellectuel engagé* – the engaged intellectual.

This paper will argue two things, both part of a larger research project that will represent a sociological study of social theory in the US since 1965. First, this paper argues that left intellectuals *should* be engaged in public life in a way that speaks with those on the “front lines” of movements for social justice and social change, rather than speaking for them (in a patriarchal “we know what they’re really doing” kind of way) or at them (as if the theorists are the vanguard rather than the students or equal participants). Second, I argue that in order to begin to understand *how* we might become more engaged in public life, we need to examine the ways in which intellectuals in other societies have become engaged in public life in recent years. In sum, my point is that understanding *what* intellectual engagement would look like requires an examination of how others outside the American context have become engaged and how we can bring these lessons “back home,” and that this step is required before we can become *engagé*.

In order to do this, I will first examine the concept and definitions of intellectual engagement, arguing that looking solely at what intellectuals do or do not do is insufficient, and that understanding the bases for intellectual engagement is just as important for the process at hand. The second step in the development of this argument is to examine three ideal types of the bases for intellectual engagement as indicated by some of the more famous European *intellectuels*

engagés – Jean-Paul Sartre, Pierre Bourdieu, and Václav Havel. Finally, I will indicate particular ways in which I think their experiences of intellectual engagement can inform the development of a new group of engaged intellectuals in the American context, a group that works hand-in-hand with those who are on the “front lines” in the quest for a more just society.

Intellectual engagement and “the last intellectuals”

Schalk’s *War and the Ivory Tower* (1991) represents one of the more paradigmatic examinations of the engagement of intellectuals in recent years. Tracing the concept of *l’intellectuel engagé* back to the Dreyfus Affair in the early 20th century as historical background, Schalk focuses primarily on the political activities of French and American intellectuals during the Algerian Revolution and Vietnam conflict (respectively) in order to explore the possibilities for intellectual engagement today. Schalk’s problem, as is mine, is the apparent retreat of intellectuals to the ivory tower in times of relative peace. As he puts it in the conclusion to his work, it is conceivable that intellectuals could “redefine and reenergize themselves, through a resurgence of activism” (170), but in the current era, it appears that intellectuals have become *échaudé* – burned out. (169)

To Schalk’s mind, intellectual engagement is in some part inherent in the history of “the intellectual class.” The first appearance of *les intellectuels*, during the Dreyfus affair, represented a moment at which intellectuals, generally “defined by their more abstract and distantiated social role,” left that stance vis-à-vis society and moved to make a political statement (1991: 38-40). The symbiotic relationship between the place of the intellectual and the act of engagement Schalk attributes to French intellectuals in the early 1900s relies upon the role of intellectuals as “men and women of ideas who explore and challenge the underlying values of society” and who have “a normative function: to prescribe what ought to be” (Vogelgesang in Schalk 1991: 39), and sees the act of engagement as the actualization of that normative function in the form of “political involvements by members of the intellectual class – however broadly or narrowly defined a

social group that is widely viewed as not normally prone to descend from the ivory tower into the arena.” (Schalk 1991: 40) In this way, intellectual engagement, for Schalk, is a kind of breaching act, one in which individuals whose usual mode of action is in the realm of thought abandons that mode in favor of active critique and political action; and this new mode of action represents a kind of paradoxical situation in which the conflicting roles of “thinker” and “citizen” are unified into a new kind of social actor, one which has a sophisticated theoretical or intellectual background and is willing to act in a realm that, if one follows Tom Wolfe’s critique of American intellectuals in the late 20th century (2000: 82), intellectuals want nothing to do with – the general activities of the “middle class” rabble.

For Schalk, there are three forms of intellectual engagement, ones that represent increasing commitment to the position these people take on and increasing willingness to see the particular position enacted as a matter of public policy. The first of these forms, the pedagogic, involves intellectuals doing what they normally do – thinking, critiquing, writing – but doing it in a more public realm than is usual for them, such as in newspapers, periodicals, and other media. The pedagogic form of engagement manifests itself as “calm, rational, frequently scholarly writings...in an effort to educate the public and persuade the leaders of the governments in question of the errors of their ways.” (Schalk 1991: 48) It is, in sum, an effort to teach, to instruct the public of what will happen should current political and social policies continue to be followed and in some cases, to provide an alternate path that the writer sees as more beneficial for a society. With regard to the particular conflicts Schalk is concerned with (and his examination is limited to intellectuals who were explicitly against the wars in Algeria and Vietnam), this mode of engagement occurred through 1955 in France and through 1965 in the US. (Loc. cit.)

The second form of engagement Schalk identifies is the moral form, a kind of “ethically based protest and a growing sense of outrage and shame.” (Schalk 1991: 49) Appearing in France around 1956 and the US in 1966, moral engagement continued to involve pedagogical attempts at

convincing the public and political leadership of the error of their ways, while at the same time extending into more protest-based activities, such as marches, teach-ins, and other activities that made clear the kind of outrage and dissent required by the situation. Often, moral engagements were motivated, according to Schalk, by an aggrieved sense of patriotism, the claim that the path that the country was on was “not France” or “not America,” and that in order to reclaim French or American values, a new social and political policy had to be pursued (in these cases, the granting of independence by France to Algeria and the withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam).²

Finally, the third stage of intellectual engagement, what Schalk calls the “counter-legal,” sees intellectuals engaging in actions deemed by their governments to be illegal (ranging from the signing of petitions, which in 1950s France could place scholars in danger of harassment or imprisonment, to participation in protest marches, facilities occupations, other forms of civil disobedience, and the like in the US). (Schalk 1991: 50-52) While this type of engagement would obviously have fewer participants due to the significant risk involved to person and/or professional position, there were significant numbers of intellectuals who pursued counter-legal strategies of engagement. (52) The danger at this level, according to Schalk, is of making the crossover from engagement to what he calls *embrigadement* – the abandonment of critical engagement for the sake of the “unquestioning support of a political cause” (loc. cit.); however, Schalk argues that the majority of intellectuals who became engaged and reached the moral and counter-legal stages of engagement avoided this danger while at the same time seeing that *something* had to be done about the violence, considered illegal, enacted by these governments. (53) After the end of the political conflict that required the engagement, of course, Schalk argues that intellectuals retreated from political involvement to the “ivory tower.”

² One can see the parallels between this kind of engagement and the anti-war actions during the Gulf War, the bombing of Yugoslavia, and the current American “war on terror.” See, for example, Ali (ed.), *Masters of the Universe*, Zizek’s *NATO as the Left Hand of God?*, and the comments listed in the American Council of Trustees and Alumni report mentioned above.

In sum, Schalk utilizes a continuum of political participation that parallels the kinds of engagement pursued by critics in the general public to understand the stand that intellectuals took with regard to the political regimes of their time. While not exactly the same as that we could use to understand why the non-intellectual public might become involved in the anti-globalization movement, for example, it combines the particular skills that intellectuals possess by virtue of their education and the particular resources they have as a result of their institutional position and cultural prestige with the kinds of anti-status quo activity that members of the general public might pursue when they disagree with their political leadership. The important note that Schalk gives us, though, is that the kind of political engagement pursued by intellectuals is never coerced; rather, “the intellectual or intellectuals in question are not pushed down the stairs of the ivory tower and out into the streets. True engagement cannot be coerced but is derived from reflection on the external political and social situation and reasonably free decision to become involved.” (Schalk 1991: 41) To put it another way, the peculiarities of the institutional position of intellectuals – the tradition of academic freedom, the requirement for the critical evaluation of the world around them, and the theoretical resources to develop alternative understandings of social and political policies – allows them the latitude to decide on their degree of involvement and provides them with a set of resources often unavailable to the general public.

Given this, why is it then that we do not see more frequent engagements of interventions on the part of intellectuals in the US?³ There are many entirely valid, and familiar, reasons why

³ This question presumes that the frequent interventions in global politics and even the internal affairs of sovereign nations on the part of the US government are worthy, in a manner parallel to the anti-war movements analyzed by Schalk, of intellectual engagement. Just in the last fifteen years, going back to 1987, there are at least eight relatively large-scale American military interventions in the world: the invasion of Panama to capture General Manuel Noriega; the Gulf War to “liberate” Kuwait and the continuing enforcement of the “no-fly zone”; the humanitarian interventions in Somalia and Haiti; the NATO bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in response to the FRY’s attacks on Kosovo; the continuing “war on drugs” and the Colombia plan involving \$1b of military aid and personnel; the support of anti-terrorist actions in the Philippines; and the invasion of Afghanistan as the opening move in the American “war on terror.” Adding in the various problems that continue to plague American society – economic inequality, racial profiling of African-Americans and Arab Americans, the economic policies of international monetary organizations, the fundamentalist orientation of the current Bush Administration, the withdrawal of civil

academics have not left the ivory tower in recent years, many of them relating precisely to the same kinds of institutional arrangements that make intellectual engagement possible. In particular, changes in the ways that university faculty are hired, granted tenure and promotion, and asked to work would seem to give pause to anyone wishing to take a dissenting role in the American public and political scene.

Jacoby's *The Last Intellectuals* (2000) recognizes the drastic absence of what he calls “public intellectuals,” those intellectuals who deign to address or elicit some kind of response from the general public. Arguing that an entire generation of potential public intellectuals has disappeared, leaving no one to replace “the last intellectuals” (people like Noam Chomsky, Susan Sontag, and others of the “sixties intellectuals”), Jacoby identifies in particular the ways in which intellectual life has been recast in the last half of the twentieth century. The American transition from urban to suburban living, which eliminates the possibility of “bohemian” intellectual scenes and leaves most people commuting to a home that, once in, they are reticent to leave; the demise of smaller literary magazines in favor of scholarly journals; the “managerial revolution”; and the rise of the power of television and its particular mode of discourse – all of these factors play a part in Jacoby's tragic tale of intellectual decline. But more importantly for Jacoby, it is the changes in how the university operates that implicitly dictate that “thou shalt not become engaged in public affairs” to intellectuals.

As Jacoby puts it, the entire mode of existence for intellectuals has been changed in recent years:

...the habitat, manners, and idiom of intellectuals have been transformed within the past fifty years. Younger intellectuals no longer need or want a larger public; they are almost exclusively professors. Campuses are their homes; colleagues their audience; monographs and specialized journals their media. Unlike past intellectuals they situate themselves within fields and disciplines – for good reason. Their jobs, advancement, and salaries depend on the evaluation of specialists, and this dependence affects the issues broached and the language employed. (Jacoby 2000: 6-7)

liberties in the face of the 9/11 attacks, and many others – and it would appear that there are many opportunities for intellectual engagement in public affairs.

In particular, Jacoby identifies three key tendencies in the university itself that contributes to the disappearance of the public intellectual. The first is the “publish or perish” requirement in larger research-oriented universities, in which tenure decisions are made predominantly on the amount of scholarly publishing done by junior faculty (and, in some cases, the particular forums in which one publishes, leaving those left scholars with few options to pursue research based on their particular political positions). This evaluation of one’s merit as an intellectual in terms of labor productivity results in a shift of the language with which one writes from a public discourse to the jargon of a kind of “secret society,” and results in entire fields of research being oriented to a cabal of specialists, something akin to the phrase “preaching to the choir.” (153-159) The second tendency is the professionalization of most critical forms of inquiry: as Jacoby notes, those scholars whose politics might be most critical and most useful for a general public (in particular Marxists) seem most likely to abandon that public for the sake of job security and “institutional clout and prestige” (185), leading to a switch from “the theory of fetishism, which Marx sets forth...[to] the fetishism of theory.” (173) The third pattern is a general “distaste, even contempt, for critical thinking,” (203) both in the university and the general public. Even in research universities, the tendency has frequently been to rely on student evaluations for renewal and promotion decisions, resulting in the perceived need by faculty to not be *too* critical, to provide students with “immediately applicable knowledge,” and to prioritize preparing students for careers over preparing them for membership in a larger society. All of these impact negatively on those who would be public intellectuals; there is no perceived reward beyond the fuzzy feeling of being a “good citizen” for engaging in political affairs, and there are frequently disincentives for doing so, so why bother?

A further trend, one not identified by Jacoby, is what Soley calls “the leasing of the ivory tower.” Following the decline of funding to American public universities that started in the mid-1980s, universities were forced to seek additional funding from corporations who would endow chairs and establish research institutions intended to further corporate interests within the

university ⁴ (1995: 9) As Soley writes, “The story about universities in the 1980s and 1990s is that they will turn a trick for anybody with money to invest; and the only ones with money are corporations, millionaires, and foundations. These investments in universities have dramatically changed the mission of higher education; they have led universities to attend to the interests of their well-heeled patrons, rather than those of students.” (5) Even when corporations do not directly establish research institutes or endow chairs, their presence can be felt: decreased governmental funding for universities also meant decreased public funding for research grants, a gap picked up by corporations; and in addition to the number of publications of faculty members, part of tenure and promotion decisions often includes the amount of extramural grant funding received by scholars. This frequently results in scholars changing their research focus “from socially significant issues – such as the causes of poverty – for which there is little monetary reward, to issues of interest to business – such as how to motivate workers to be more productive. Doing such business-related research can lead to lucrative consulting contracts and even high-paid professorial appointments.” (79) And since tenure-track positions in American universities have been on the decline, replaced by adjunct positions due to decreased funding and the relatively higher number of students that can be serviced by more adjunct faculty, those who are lucky enough to gain tenure-stream positions are most likely not going to do anything to jeopardize them, including speaking their mind on public matters.

We can see, then, that there are structural factors at work preventing the creation of a new generation of public intellectuals. The quest for tenure; the requirements for publishing and grant-earning; the need for the professionalization (and subsequent jargonization) of intellectual writing; and public and student pressures on faculty for immediately applicable knowledge – all these issues face young scholars who would like nothing more than to have a beneficial impact

⁴ Two examples might suffice to support this contention: the rumored acceptance by Jean-François Lyotard, famous postmodern theorist, of a chair at Emory University endowed by the Coca-Cola corporation; and the establishment of an endowed chair in English at University of Nebraska by the founder of Cliff Notes, the company best known for providing English students a way of getting out of reading assigned texts. Also, this issue became a strike matter at York University in Toronto, Canada, after rumors of the governing board allowing particular courses to be “sponsored by” major corporations.

on the world around them. But, there have always been structural factors at work in the university and against public intellectual work, in the US and elsewhere; Tom Wolfe’s lambasting of scholars interested in eliminating the various “-isms” in American society through deconstructive and critical analyses, as well as Jacoby’s quite correct notice that describing someone as “a ‘man of letters’ ... is almost derogatory, hinting of village poets or family historians” (2000: 195), both go to show that there is something outside the institutional prerogatives of the university that hinders public intellectualism.⁵

In the cases that Schalk examines to develop his typology of intellectual engagement, too, there were institutional and structural issues that seemed to prevent the development of public intellectuals – yet, they appeared, they took chances, and in some small measure, their efforts had some kind of efficacy. And while Schalk’s typology explains *what* engaged intellectuals did in France during the Algerian Revolution and the US during the Vietnam conflict, it has a harder time attempting to explain *why* these intellectuals fought against the institutional pull to simply conform and do their jobs, reconciling itself to a kind of “moral outrage” that motivated these people. Yet to my mind, I believe there are more compelling reasons for intellectual workers making the decision to engage themselves in public affairs, reasons that need more detailed examination. There are, of course, cultural and psychological issues that could be brought to bear on this problem; however, I believe it more useful to explore the engagement of three intellectuals from outside the US to understand the kinds of motive forces at work in their engagement.

These models are, of course, ideal types in the Weberian sense, meaning that they represent purified and insulated from one another; and certainly, once the cases of Jean-Paul Sartre, Pierre Bourdieu, and Václav Havel are detailed below, the purification will be evident. I

⁵ It should be noted, though, that Florida Atlantic University has established a PhD program in Comparative Studies, which is designed to produce public intellectuals who are “theoretically confident and knowledgeable about the world they hope to understand...and change.” (web site) This development could be understood in one of two ways – either an admirable attempt to redress the issue I have raised here, or an effort that is already admired in the professionalization of academic work.

believe, however, that it is necessary to distill these three ideal types of motive forces for two reasons: first, to provide a kind of “role model” of the engaged intellectual, one that my readers can translate into their own experience and particular social and institutional context; and second, to highlight the important role played in intellectual engagement not just by moral outrage, which I am sure many of us share about certain aspects of the world, but also by the particular theoretical stances we choose, the particular situations in which we pursue our research, and the relationship we choose to have with the general public as a whole. To my mind, these factors have just as much to do with the presence or absence of public intellectuals as do the structural and institutional factors discussed above.

Model 1 – Sartre: Engagement by philosophy

Jean-Paul Sartre, by far one of the best-known *intellectuels engagés*, exemplifies to my mind the first model of intellectual engagement – engagement based upon the philosophical and theoretical stance taken by the intellectual. The kinds of engagement Sartre undertook – mostly along the line of Schalk’s pedagogic and moral forms of engagement, including public writings and lectures, public forums on the Algerian and Vietnam conflicts, and the refusal of the Nobel Prize for literature and an invitation to lecture at Cornell University in 1965 – seem quite clearly to be bound to his philosophical stance. Drawing from Sartre’s existentialist philosophy, the development of his notion of a “literature of commitment” in the time of *Les Temps modernes*, and his conversion to a more Marxist-inflected existentialism, Sartre’s basis of commitment is fundamentally theoretical – it lies in his own philosophical and social-theoretical understanding of the world, and in the way in which he tried to convey this understanding to the world at large.

Most people who know of Sartre’s philosophical work think first and foremost of his work in *L’Être et néant*. This seminal work of existential philosophy, which posits that the individual is eminently free to create the world around them, and thereby solely responsible for the world they wish to see in existence, provides one element required by a philosophical

engagement with the world – namely, a conception of responsibility.⁶ For the early Sartre, the issues of freedom and responsibility were existential absolutes; regardless of whether or not one chose to realize themselves as being existentially free and responsible for the acts predicated on that freedom – in other words, whether or not one acted authentically with regard to their freedom or in “bad faith,” denying their freedom and responsibility – one had to deal with the brute facticity of existing in the world. (Sartre 1963: part I, chapter 2, *passim*) Later, in a corollary to the famous phrase “existence precedes essence,” Sartre claims that

A man is involved in life, leaves his impress on it, and outside of that there is nothing. To be sure, this may seem a harsh thought to someone whose life hasn't been a success. But, on the other hand, it prompts people to understand that reality is what counts, that dreams, expectations, and hopes warrant no more than to define him negatively and not positively. However, when we say, ‘You are nothing else than your life,’ that does not imply that the artist will be judged solely on the basis of his works of art; a thousand other things will contribute toward summing him up. What we mean is that a man is nothing else than a series of undertakings, that he is the sum, the organization, the ensemble of the relationships which make up these undertakings. (Sartre 1993b: 48-49)

Following this argument, we can see that the absolute freedom Sartre claims inheres in us by virtue of our mere existence, leading to an absolute responsibility in which “what happens to me happens through me... Moreover everything which happens to me is *mine*” (Sartre 1993a: 64), would result in a clear basis for engagement in the world around us. If we are authentic beings, then we take responsibility for our actions, and would want to commit ourselves to acting in the best manner possible.

There is a problem here, however. At this point in Sartre's intellectual development, “Hell is other people” – that is, Sartre cannot yet deal with the presence of others in the world except as facts to be dealt with, unknown and unknowable variables to be grappled with on a case-by-case basis, and generally to be struggled against in the furtherance of one's own existential project. It is not until Merleau-Ponty's rejoinder to Sartre's radically individualistic existentialism (Merleau-Ponty 1973: 127) that Sartre begins to deal more beneficially with social

⁶ I have dealt elsewhere with the issues of responsibility and ethics in Sartre's work and their sociological import. See Schaffer 2000.

relations and sociological phenomena. In *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1985), Sartre begins to explore the ways in which social groups form out of – and impact on – individual freedom. Moving from the series, in which individuals are related solely by virtue of their non-identity with others, to actual groups that form as a result of the volition of the individuals making them up, Sartre’s new sociologically informed philosophy allows for a deeper understanding of the ways in which individual freedom is limited by the particular sociohistorical situation in which it finds itself, the responsibility that one has for the maintenance or transformation of that situation, and the necessity of involving oneself in that situation. The sense of responsibility Sartre developed in his earlier work carries over here, but it becomes more complex – now, we not only have responsibility for the kind of world in which we want to live, but also for the impact of our actions upon ourselves and others. Sartre’s lambasting of Albert Camus for the latter’s refusal to support the FLN (*Front de la libération nationale*, the Algerian revolutionary movement) stems from this new layer of existential responsibility:

Suppose one were to reply to you, like Marx: ‘History does nothing... It is man, real and living man who does everything. History is only the activity of man pursuing his own ends.’ If this is true, he who believes himself to be moving away from history will cease to share the ends of his contemporaries and will only be sensitive to the absurdity of human agitations. But if he declaims against them, he will nevertheless return, and against his will, into the historical cycle, because he will unwillingly provide those of both camps who remain on the ideological defensive (that is, those whom the culture abuses) with the necessary arguments to discourage the other. (Sartre 1965: 76-77)

The charge here that Camus has “moved away from history” in his refusal to take sides in the Algerian liberation movement derives from this sense of responsibility; in essence, Sartre accuses Camus of allowing a situation of brutal oppression to continue to exist because he refuses to see that he is capable of acting against that oppression. (Cf. Sartre 1985: 716-734)⁷

⁷ In particular:

Thus inert violence, as frequentative and as the dated connection between colonialists and colonised, is recognised as sovereignty inside repressive practice; and the latter, legitimated by the need to defend the Others, gives violence-process its first statute of operation. But, to conclude, if violence becomes a praxis of oppression, this is because it always was one. ... The only possible way out was to confront total negation with total negation, violence with equal violence; to negate dispersal and atomisation by an initially negative unity whose content would be defined in

However, the simple development of a philosophy of responsibility would not appear to be sufficient to justify holding Sartre out as a model of intellectual engagement. Sartre’s *Qu’est-ce que la littérature?* (1948) identifies a new “literature of commitment,” one in which the author’s relationship to their reader is highlighted as a primary element of the text, and one in which “art for art’s sake” is an antiquated notion, replaced by the conferral of a particular meaning and perspective, intended by the author. What kind of perspective? To quote from de Beauvoir’s reportage, “the true perspective is that of the most disinherited; the hangman can remain ignorant of what he does; the victim experiences his suffering and his death irrecusably; the truth of oppression is the oppressed.” (de Beauvoir, in Boschetti 1988: 107) By conveying the perspective of those who bore the brunt of the world on their shoulders, not just in philosophical existence but in their daily lives, Sartre felt that authors could convince their readers to rise to action against the situations of unfreedom in the world. Put another way, Sartre’s literature of commitment represents a form of action, the kind of action for which intellectuals are uniquely qualified, and this action is not just necessary but also sufficient for inspiring change in the world. (Boschetti 1988: 109)

Sartre’s overall goal in his works, according to Boschetti (1988: 108), was the bridging of the gap between *praxis* and ethics – in other words, between some conception of “the good life” and how it should be lived and the kinds of actions required in order to achieve a concrete state of affairs in which that good life could come into existence. In searching for the balance between ethics and *praxis*, Sartre saw himself as hope-filled, a “fellow traveler” with those who actively agitated for social change. (Sartre and Lévy 1996: 58, 63) While never actively picking up arms, either during the resistance to Nazi occupation of France during World War II or in any of the other liberation movements Sartre supported, Sartre continuously argued that a literature and

struggle: the Algerian nation. Thus the Algerian rebellion, through being desperate violence, was simply an adoption of the despair in which the colonialists maintained the natives; its violence was simply a negation of the impossible, and the impossibility of life was the immediate result of oppression. ... The violence of the rebel was the violence of the colonialist; there was never any other. (733)

philosophy of commitment was a form of freedom-oriented action, one that he felt could serve the forces of social change and freedom:

BL: How is it that some intellectuals needed something to cling to – needed to find a prop, a basis, in that trash?

JPS: Because it was a question of finding a future for society. Society had to stop being the shitty mess it is everywhere today. I didn't think I could change the world all by myself and on the strength of my own ideas, but I did discern social forces that were trying to move forward, and I believed my place was among them. (Sartre and Lévy 1996: 64-65)

In developing a conception of intellectual work and writing that was consistent with his philosophical stance regarding human freedom, responsibility, and the necessity of action to ensure the development of a situation of human freedom, Sartre's engagement by philosophy proved at the very least to detail the ideas of an intellectual committed to hope and to develop a continual critique of the ills of the world and our place in reproducing them.

Model 2 – Bourdieu: Engagement by experience

After his death in January 2002, Pierre Bourdieu's peers throughout the world praised his commitment to acts of social justice. The majority of them who knew him well attributed much of his passion and engagement to one of the core elements of his experience as a social scientist – the fieldwork Bourdieu pursued in Algeria just at the start of the Algerian Revolution. As Smain Laacher, one of his colleagues at the L'École des hautes études en sciences sociales, noted that “L'Algérie lui a collé au corps et aux morts” (Algeria stuck with him in his body and until death). (Bernard 2002: para. 1) Starting with his *Sociologie de l'Algérie* (1958), and continuing through his later works on cultural spaces in French society, television, the position of the academic in French society, and ultimately his *Contre-Feux* books (translated into English as *Acts of Resistance* [1998]), Bourdieu's work contained two key elements for understanding his work as an engagement by experience, the second model of intellectual engagement discussed here – a clear theoretical model for analyzing contemporary society and its structures, and a clear sense of the role that the intellectual analyst played in highlighting those structures and the problems created by them.

Bourdieu’s key theoretical concept, the habitus – the set of “structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures” (1977: 70) – highlights one of the essential elements that Sartre’s more sociological work in *Critique of Dialectical Reason* leaves fallow, namely how it is that individuals learn to produce and reproduce a social world in the ways they do and the extent to which those individuals can act in line with this “practical mastery, and in particular as an *ars inveniendi*,” or an “inventive arts.” (Bourdieu 1992: 122) The habitus appears as the site at which the individual can be seen as “social, collective” and taken for granted, as if a “fish in water” (126-27); it is that mechanism by which “social agents are determined only to the extent that they determine themselves” (136), or, put another way, by which individuals as products of history act in relation to definite situations in the world. The habitus, though, is not fully deterministic; instead, it allows individuals to see opportunities, possibilities, and potential meanings in the world for them and to act in field-appropriate ways upon those chances. As Bourdieu puts it:

Habitus is not the fate that some people read into it. Being the product of history, it is an *open system of dispositions* that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures. It is durable but not eternal! Having said this, I must immediately add that there is a probability, inscribed in the social destiny associated with definite social conditions, that experiences will confirm habitus, because most people are statistically bound to encounter circumstances that tend to agree with those that originally fashioned their habitus. (Bourdieu 1992: 133)

By analyzing the ways in which individuals and groups of individuals respond to social structures, instead of the structures themselves, Bourdieu was able to exclude “the ‘subjects’...dear to the tradition of philosophies of consciousness without annihilating agents to the benefit of a hypostatized structure” (140), reflecting a concern for how people live, deal with the social structures within which they find themselves, and develop the potential for radically transforming those structures.

In large part, I would argue that this concern reflects an overarching concern on Bourdieu’s part for understanding the ways in which people respond to conditions of inequality

and oppression. Going back to his *Sociologie de l'Algérie*, we find that concern reflected even in his definition of colonialism:

La société coloniale est un système dont il importe de saisir la logique et la nécessité internes du fait qu'il constitue le contexte en référence auquel prennent sens tous les comportements et en particulier les rapports entre les deux communautés ethniques. Aux transformations résultant inévitablement du contact entre deux civilisations profondément différentes tant dans le domaine économique que dans le domaine social, la colonisation ajoute les bouleversements sciemment et méthodiquement provoqués pour assurer l'autorité de la puissance dominante et les intérêts économiques de ses ressortissants. (Bourdieu 1958 : 106)⁸

Even in this definition, it is the actions of individuals within the system that are privileged in recognizing that they refer to, and ultimately reproduce, the system itself. These behaviors and social relations, rather than being social-scientifically deduced, can be observed in practice, resulting in a quite different depiction of the colonial situation than the one provided by Sartre (see p. 13, note 7); namely, Bourdieu's analysis of the colonial situation, and ultimately of the habitus and in other contexts, is one that recognizes the general functioning of our manner of existence in the world and the way that we orient to our particular social situations (and here, I think of the kinds of interpersonal and inter-field relations discussed in *Distinction* and *The Weight of the World*).

By emphasizing the generality of the way that the habitus functions, and by maintaining a concern with actors as opposed to structures, Bourdieu is able to transport his theoretical framework into multiple contexts. It also allows him to understand the particular relationship between the social scientist and the people under study. As Wacquant (1992a: 44-45) recognizes, “it was nearly impossible under the horrendous circumstances by the methodical efforts of the French military to suppress Algerian nationalism, not to be constantly interpellated about the

⁸ “The colonial society is a system that requires knowing the logic and the internal necessity of the fact that it constitutes the context to which all behaviors, and in particular the relations between the two ethnic communities, refer. To the transformations inevitably resulting from contact between two civilizations as profoundly different in the economic domain as in the social domain, colonization knowingly and methodically adds the upheavals to assure the authority of the dominant power and the economic interests of its nationals.” (My translation)

peculiar privilege of the academic who withdraws from the world in order to observe it and who claims detachment from the subjects he studies.” Bourdieu’s analytic position vis-à-vis his research subjects – and ultimately, his engagement – is thereby one that recognizes the particular position of the scholar and one that enables the scholar to remove themselves from the usual position of “an expert, that is, an intellectual at the service of the dominant”. (Wacquant 1992: 53) Instead, the kind of reflexivity required by Bourdieuan sociology ensures that “social science cannot be neutral, detached, apolitical...[P]roof is the constant encounters it has with forms of resistance and surveillance (internal no less than external) that threaten to chip away at its autonomy and are largely unknown in the most advanced sectors of biology or physics” (Wacquant 1992b: 51), since the sociologist or social theorist is always placed in simultaneously dominant and dominated sectors within the larger field of power. (Cf. Bourdieu 1990b: 146) Furthermore, since sociology is ultimately a *political* science, one in which the cultural good produced by the discipline contains within it a political stance (even the dispassionate sociology of American positivism is a political position, one that abrogates any pretense of being engaged with the subject of study), the social theorist or social scientist, by imposing their own interpretation, “has the last word in a political struggle.” (Bourdieu 1990a: 96) As such, Bourdieu’s model of social science, as well as the conceptual framework by which he evaluates the subject of study, be it peasants in Kabylia, university professors in the classroom, or economists in the larger public sphere, is one that essentially mandates an awareness of where one stands with regard to their subject of study.

It is this mandatory awareness that allows Bourdieu to become critically engaged in public affairs and develop what has been called “*la tradition ‘d’ouvrir sa gueule’*”. (Bourdieu and Grass 1999: para. 1) In this tradition of “opening one’s mouth,” the intellectual, by virtue of their knowledge and the position they have taken vis-à-vis their research subject, is able to speak out on current public affairs. Wacquant (1992b: 54) characterizes Bourdieu’s engagement as “parsimonious, restive, and relatively low-key ... best typified by the somewhat uneasy

combination of intense commitment with a rational distrust of organizational attachments....”

Bourdieu himself claims that “I do not have much inclination for prophetic interventions and I have always been wary of occasions in which the situation or a sense of solidarity could lead me to overstep the limits of my competence. So I would not have engaged in public position-taking if I had not, each time, had the – perhaps illusory – sense of being forced into it by a kind of legitimate rage, something close to something like a sense of duty.” (1998a: vii) And his own concern was that intellectuals fulfill their “immense historical responsibility,” and pursue actions invested with both moral authority *and* intellectual competence, something Bourdieu was not entirely sure of himself. (Bourdieu 1998b: 9; Bourdieu 2002: para. 4) Yet, Bourdieu was frequently engaged; the obituary section of *Le Monde* on Jan 26/2002 includes praiseworthy comments from the president and prime minister of France, the Socialist, Communist, and Green parties of France, ATTAC (Association for the Taxation of financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens), and other unions and organizations. As well, Bourdieu’s books on the university system (*Academic Discourse*), small-scale and apparently invisible forms of suffering (*The Weight of the World*, described in a *Le Monde* editorial as “*son manifeste plus eloquent*”), and his collected writings on the rise of neo-liberal globalizing economic systems and their impacts on the French people (*Acts of Resistance*, *Contre-Feux*, *Contre-Feux II*), all go to highlight the degree to which Bourdieu was willing to open his mouth.

In sum, Bourdieu’s engagement, as well as his entire social-theoretical framework, appear to be rooted in his particular social-scientific experience, “*depuis l’Algérie en guerre et l’enseignement en mutation des années 1960, jusqu’à la mise à nu de toutes les misères du monde, celles de la société néolibérale, celles du monde mondialisé des années 1990...*” (Charle and Roche 2002: para. 12) The encounter between Bourdieu and Hobsbawm in 2001, it appears, made clear what Bourdieu saw his career as being about: no science without engagement, no engagement without science. (Ibid: para. 13)

Model 3 – Havel: Engagement by cultural conscience

The third model of intellectual engagement, which I call engagement by cultural conscience, is one that relies primarily on the perception of the place of intellectuals in a society. It is, by far, most probably the one that is furthest from American intellectuals' experience (or at least the perception that most American intellectuals have of how they are valued by the wider society); after all, as even de Tocqueville pointed out nearly two hundred years ago, the American democratic and egalitarian culture would suggest that no person's viewpoint or ideas should be placed ahead of another's, encouraging the absence of an intelligentsia. (de Tocqueville n.d.: para. 7-9) Yet in other societies, as we have seen, there is a peculiar demand placed on intellectuals – to serve as a kind of social conscience, one who can “smell a rat...and make others smell it too” (Schalk 1991: 170), and who can hold a mirror up to a society and show its members what they have become and the potential direction forward. In our time, one of the most prominent individuals who served this function is Václav Havel.

Havel, who is known the world over for his dissenting activities in Czechoslovakia before and during the Prague Spring of 1968, as well as his leadership of the Velvet Revolution that ended Communist Party rule in 1989, originally began as an absurdist playwright, one whose plays were generally regarded as some of the best in Czech theatre. In 1967, his participation in the rebellious Fourth Writers' Congress, which vehemently protested the official censorship imposed on the press, the suppression of individual liberties guaranteed by the Czechoslovak constitution, and the arbitrary actions of the police (Maxa 1970: 26), began the process of Havel's increasing involvement in Czech politics. Havel's directorship of the literary magazine *Tvár* implicated him in the reform-minded Writer's Union, which struggled with the Novotny régime to gain some kind of liberalization of Czechoslovak society and to earn from the Soviet Union the latitude to forge their own form of socialism, one faithful to the principles of the Warsaw Pact yet not beholden to the Stalinist or neo-Stalinist leadership of Moscow. (Havel 1998: 95; Kusin 1972: 69, 82; Kusin 1971: 99) Later, Havel became involved with Charter 77, the 1970s

reform movement (which earned him multiple years in prison for subversion), and in 1989, helped to found the Civic Forum, the human rights group that ultimately toppled the Soviet-backed regime. In 1990, Havel was elected to the first of two consecutive terms as president, and was elected again in 1998. Throughout this thirty-year career that straddled “being a writer” and “being in politics,” Havel constantly and consistently criticized the development of mass political parties, the involvement of individuals in political positions they held no real interest in doing anything with, and never thought of himself as politically minded (Havel 1998: 97; Havel 1990: 8); yet as his official biographer noted, “For years he criticized the practice of politics as a pragmatic battle for power, whose goal was to gain power by any means; he promoted ‘apolitical,’ moral politics, politics based on conscience and truth. Then destiny played him a dirty trick, it invited him to show what *he* could do as a politician. Power dropped into the hands of the man who had written the celebrated essay, ‘The Power of the Powerless.’” (Kriseová 1993: 271)

One question we could ask based on this all-too-cursory examination of Havel’s political life is a simple one: What drove Havel to violate his public statements regarding politics and his place in it (which he once likened to a literary critic being called upon to write a novel; Kriseová 1993: 271)? Two better questions, though, manifest themselves if we look beyond the biographical elements of this description. First, could the Czechoslovakian reform movement come as far as it did if Václav Havel had been replaced by, for example, Dusan Hamsik, Milan Kundera, Ivan Klíma, or Ludvík Vaculík, four other writers involved in the reform movements of the 1960s and on? Or, to put this question in a second and more incisive way: Was the position of the intellectual *that* important for the Czechoslovakian reform movement, and if so, *then* why Havel?

I would argue, following better scholars of Czechoslovak history than I, that the position of the intellectual – in both a leadership or articulation role for already-existing dissatisfaction and dissent, and in a leadership role for the reform movement – was critical for the reform movement’s success. The intelligentsia – including not just scholars and writers, but also what American sociologists would identify as “professionals” – took the position, traditional in

Czechoslovak society, of engaging actively with the political leadership in both Prague and Moscow and synthesizing the larger discontent in the society in order to effect social change beneficial for the population at large.

On at least four separate occasions during the last two centuries – Czechoslovak national resistance to the Austro-Hungarian empire, resistance to the Nazi occupation during World War II, the Prague Spring, and the Velvet Revolution (Kusin 1971: 137) – intellectuals have taken up the position of being the “conscience” of Czechoslovak society. (Kusin 1972: 167) As Kusin writes, the definition of “conscience” is one that is particularly unique to Czechoslovak society:

When Jaroslav Seifert, the poet, appeared to those assembled at the Second Writers’ Congress (22-29 April 1956) to be ‘the conscience’ of their nation, he was not exhorting them to establish a political watchdog organization to keep an eye on the government. In fact, the writers never constituted themselves as a political organization. Seifert meant something more sophisticated: the concept of ‘conscience,’ something intellectual and spiritual which rouses men to be human, humane and genuine, stood opposed to the Stalinist theorem (proclaimed at the Soviet Writers’ Congress in 1934 and surviving until the present day) of the literati as ‘engineers of human souls,’ a mission seen by many to signify the approach of a mechanical manipulator and maintenance man. (Kusin 1972: 67)

The place of conscience, then, is a culturally defined and specific place, one that serves, as opposed to Stalinist attempts to construct the ‘new socialist man,’ to remind both the general public and the political leadership of their humanity and to cease serving as “mere instruments” of Communist Party policy. (Kusin 1972: 81) In part, the resistance of the intelligentsia against the Party represented a power struggle between two particular segments of Czechoslovak society, and the struggle against censorship, in part led by Havel, represents a significant attempt to wrest control over the entirety of society from the Party by transforming culture, seen by Stalinism and neo-Stalinism as “an instrument of politics” (Kusin 1972: 82), into an authentic expression of human existence, the kind of realist writing done by Havel, Klíma, and Kundera, among others.

Yet to represent this solely as a power struggle over who would have the capacity for defining “reality” for the majority of society would seem to indicate that the intelligentsia had their own personal interests at the heart of their concern. Yet all available evidence indicates that

this is precisely *not* the case: time and time again through the available research, it is made clear that the precise reason for the writers’ rebellion was not their own professional interests, but rather the fact that no one in an ostensibly socialist society had the capacity to define their own reality. From an eyewitness account to the Fourth Writers’ Congress of 1967:

The only bone of contention was the system of censorship as a cardinal element in the theory and practice of ruling and as a means of stopping criticism of Stalinist, bureaucratic socialism. It was censorship which was making it impossible to talk about or to understand the plight and prospects of the country’s economy, the effective elimination of the working class from political decision-making, its material abasement and deprivation of civic rights. It was censorship which forbade discussion or comprehension of the way in which institutions set up to serve the public had been turned into instruments of control over the public on behalf of the omnipotent authorities. It was censorship which concealed the process by which the functioning of a bureaucratic police state fostered boorishness and bullying, shielded mediocrity, stifled initiative, drove people into apathy and prevented them from discovering the basic truth that injustice and happiness are incompatible. Censorship made it impermissible even to ask the question, Is the system we are moving towards a socialist system at all? (Hamsik 1971: 106-07)

Hamsik further informs us that “It is a feature of public life in Czechoslovakia that the nation’s thoughts, feelings, and endeavours are put better by writers than by politicians.” (161) Even in more sociological studies of the Prague Spring, it becomes clear that the intelligentsia, and in particular the writers, “felt the worst ‘under Novotny.’ ... [and] was traditionally inclined to resist this peculiar combination of arbitrariness and stupidity. ... The intellectual became the aristocrat of spirit....” (Kusin 1971: 136) And in tiring of the “combination of arbitrariness and stupidity,” the intellectuals were able to utilize their particular skills – writing, thinking, clarifying, synthesizing – to channel the dissatisfaction of the larger Czechoslovak society into a clear form of resistance against the neo-Stalinist regime.

Other sectors of the intelligentsia, including social theorists, became more *engagé* in furthering a democratic socialist reform movement. Mlynár developed the argument against what Sartre would call “the Terror” – the absolute co-optation of the members of a social grouping for the sake of pursuing that group’s goal, rendering them without freedom (Sartre 1985: 449-450, 577, 582) - considering “society, not the state, to be subject of historical development, and

the ‘masses of the working people,’ not the state, to be the makers of social relations” and that “man as citizen represents a lower level of emancipation than the man who is a member of an unpolitical society, but he is certainly symptomatic of a higher level of development than the earlier man as a subject, a passive target of subjectivist political and state powers.” (Kusin 1971: 107-08) Other social scientists, such as Kaláb and Kratochvíl, began to link social science with an understanding that science, not the absolute power of the state, needed to dictate the direction of social development. (Ibid: 101-106) Furthermore, the majority of reformers involved in the Prague Spring were members of the Communist Party, and their theories “were not born *because* their originators were members of the Party, but because – as intellectuals – they felt themselves to have closer ties with Czechoslovak society and the Czech and Slovak nations as basically a unit of European civilization, than with their party.” (Ibid: 119; Kusin 1972: 85-89) As such, because of their position in Czechoslovak society as articulators (rather than creators) of the public will, intellectuals were able to serve as “the truly *engagé*” (Hamsik 1971: 12) and at the forefront of the attempts at reform.

This is the bulk of the reason why I believe that if Havel had not been at the forefront of the Prague Spring and Velvet Revolution, someone else would have been; in Czechoslovak society, intellectuals are, by virtue of this culturally defined position as the conscience of their society, engaged in public life (almost to the point of it being a burden on writers⁹). It is in this sense that the *position* of the intellectual in a society may very well be more important than the particular intellectual. Given the responsibility Havel sees as inherent in the professional role taken on, intellectuals are able to serve as commentator, critic, and reflection on public affairs at

⁹ “I would say that in Czechoslovakia the problem is just the opposite: here so many demands are placed on the writer that they become a burden. Traditionally in our circumstances, more is expected of writers than merely writing readable books. The idea that a writer is the conscience of his nation has its own logic and its own tradition here. For years, writers have stood in for politicians: they were renewers of the national community, maintainers of the national language, awakers of the national conscience, interpreters of the national will. This tradition has continued under totalitarian conditions, where it gains its own special coloring: the written word seems to have acquired a kind of heightened radioactivity – otherwise they wouldn’t lock us up for it!” (Havel 1990: 72)

large. And this is the kind of engagement that Havel, since his first presidential election in 1990, has argued that other intellectuals in other contexts should take on:

And where else could that something happen but in the sphere of the spirit, of human consciousness and self-knowledge, of man’s relationship to himself and to the world? What else must be changed but the way modern man looks at himself? Where but in politics should such a change begin if it is to bear fruit? ...

... That is why I wonder whether genuine intellectuals, philosophers, and poets are not virtually duty-bound to stop fearing and loathing politics and to take upon themselves all the risks and requirements that go with it, even though they find them rather strange. Is it not time for intellectuals to try to give politics a new and, as it were, postmodern face?

Who, for that matter, is better equipped to perceive the global context in which political actions take place, to assume a share of responsibility for the state of the world, and to restore to political prominence values such as conscience, love for one’s fellow humans, and respect for nature, for the order of Being, and for the pluralism of cultures? (Havel 1998: 100)

And:

Let us admit that most of us writers feel an essential aversion to politics. We see going into politics as a betrayal of our independence, and we reject it on the grounds that the job of the writer is simply to write. By taking such a position, however, we accept the perverted principle of specialization, according to which some are paid to write about the horrors of the world and about human responsibility, and others to deal with those horrors and bear the responsibility for them. It is the principle of a rather doubtful division of labor: some are here to understand the world and morality, without having to intervene in that world and turn morality into action; others are here to intervene in the world and behave morally, without bound in any way to understand any of it. (Havel 1998: 185-86)

For Havel, then, it would appear that the key task for intellectuals is to, in essence, claim for themselves in a valid and legitimate manner the same kind of role in their own countries that Czechoslovakian society gave them by virtue of tradition, a role in which intellectuals serve as the conscience and reflection of their society, turning diffused disgruntlements and concerns into clear agendas for future social development.

Closure: The future of intellectual work

If there were ever a time for intellectual engagement, this would seem to be it. The American war on terror and crackdown, whether explicit or tacit, on dissent; the increasing polarization of societies on the basis of racial and ethnic identity, economic status, and belief

system; the induced “clash of civilizations” as a result of the appearance of the “us versus them” mentality (Huntington 1998; Said 2002); the increasing sense of disenfranchisement, whether political or economic – all of these situations would seem to indicate a need for some kind of thoughtful, reflective intervention by those of us qualified to do so.

The three models of intellectual engagement here suggest particular ways of pursuing that kind of intervention. It is, of course, easy enough to express something that offends our individual conscience and sensibilities; many of us have written to political representatives or signed petitions to protest something we disagreed with or to support a policy or program we would like to see. There are, of course, intellectuals whose public interventions are sparked by this motivation, Noam Chomsky and Stanley Fish being only two of the most immediately recognizable. However, to base an intervention on our particular philosophical or social-theoretical position or on particular research we have pursued is an entirely different matter, especially if we live in a culture that would seem to repudiate the notion that intellectuals could serve as a society’s conscience. The above discussion on the pressures emanating from the general public and the academy against intellectual engagement only serve to complicate matters, leaving us with two issues to struggle against – the sociological issues pertaining to our particular position in the social structure and the cultural issues militating against our more active engagement; and the fact that quite frequently, both in response to and independently, our intellectual work does not frequently allow for our intervention in public affairs.

To most, social theory appears to be dramatically divorced from practical social and political action; it seems as if it is merely philosophy about the social world, and is often treated, including in American graduate schools, as something to know but not be specialized in. In part, the former might be true, since social theory is intended to understand general trends and patterns in societies. However, there is nothing in that mandate that prevents social theory from directly addressing manners for public intellectual engagement – in fact, as Kusin’s analysis of intellectual work published before the Prague Spring (1971) shows, there was much social-

theoretical work done that could be translated directly into plans for individual and collective action, including the reorganization of the Czechoslovak political and economic orders in order to create “socialism with a human face.” There is also nothing in this mandate to understand general trends in the social world that requires that we write in a way that is inaccessible to not only members of the general public who might be concerned with social change and social justice, but very often, especially in recent years with the move toward more “post-modernist” social theory, to scholars of social theory as well. Social theory does tend to be written in a more philosophical, and thereby jargon-laden, manner than other types of writing; however, as social theorists who have taught undergraduates can attest, there are ways of translating that into a form of the “immediately applicable” knowledge and understanding that people tend to want, ways that can induce people to pursue that knowledge in a deeper manner. And in general, there is a tendency for scholars to pursue research for research’s sake (following the Weberian “politics/science” divide), instead of intending that research to serve some kind of beneficial purpose for the larger social whole.

To my mind, there is a reciprocal action between social theorists (and, more generally, social science scholars) and the general public. The general public tends to distrust intellectuals, in part because they don’t understand what we’ve written or what the relevance of those writings might be to their lives. Intellectuals perceive this distrust as anti-intellectualism, and end up writing in ways that are accessible to specialists (and even those who write for a more general public, such as Chomsky or Fish, tend to write in ways that could be called relatively obfuscatory; see Fish 2002 for an example). This reinforces the perception on the part of the general public that we are unconcerned with their lives, and so on.¹⁰ Of course, neither side is particularly correct in these perceptions – but neither is incorrect either, and more needs to be

¹⁰ There are, of course, forums in which more publicly oriented intellectual writing appears. *Harper’s*, *The New Yorker*, and other like magazines are well-known; *Bad Subjects*, *Journal of Mundane Behavior* (<http://mundanebehavior.org>), and *Contests*, the new magazine published by the American Sociological Association, all attempt to address their work to the general reader while maintaining the same degree of intellectual rigor.

done to break this cycle in order to augment the capacity for additional reflection and thoughtfulness among members of the reading public. (Schaffer 2002)

It is my contention here that a combination of the three models of intellectual engagement here will allow for this kind of change. While it would certainly be difficult to automatically and arbitrarily change how the general public views social theorists, it is certainly possible over time to affect this view and to enable people to see the relevance of our potential contributions. It is in writing that we do this best; we are able through our writing to, as Havel puts it, deliver “a sharp light thrown on the misery of the contemporary soul” (1998: 185). However, the mode of writing we tend to pursue, one that would seem to eschew clarity and cogency in favor of appearing most erudite, is not necessarily most suitable for addressing the general public (and even Fish’s comments in the July 2002 *Harper’s*, for example, seem designed more to befuddle those he argues against than to clearly pursue his argument, which is relegated to a short paragraph at the end¹¹). It is entirely possible – and both Bourdieu and Sartre were able to do this in their own manners (Bourdieu in media addresses, Sartre through his literary and dramatic works and his contributions to *Les temps modernes*). Given the complexity and depth of each author’s thought, for them to be able to make those ideas clearly comprehensible and directly relevant to the general public and those who struggle for social change should show that we too should be able to pursue the creation of publicly accessible and relevant social theory.

If we begin to write for a broader audience – not just the particular people who specialize in our particular subfield of an already-specialized area, but all the people who might be interested in our work – then it is entirely conceivable that people would begin to see our work as more relevant and would grant us a greater degree of perceived relevance. Following from the reciprocal support of the “anti-intellectualism”/“anti-public” tendency we note today, the parallel could easily occur improving our relationship with the public. This would, of course,

¹¹ Fish, however, does make a parallel claim to mine, namely that scholars need to pay more attention to the clarity with which we speak; see Fish 2002a.

require that we take the initiative in showing a larger readership that we are serious and committed to making ourselves comprehensible; however, this does *not* mean that we necessarily need to decrease the intellectual rigor of our work, but would rather require that we perceive clarity of argument as clarity instead of simplicity or “lack of depth.” It is, however, incumbent upon us to work our way out of the ivory tower and back into the public eye, and working to integrate these models for intellectual engagement into our professional activity will enable us to achieve this and make a more clearly beneficial contribution to the improvement of the social world. Failing to do this cannot but contribute to the furtherance of the instrumentality of the university; and as Jacoby puts it, “Ultimately, it is not only the larger public that loses when intellectuals turn inward to fetishize their profundity, but intellectuals themselves. Their work turns arid, their arguments thin, their souls parched. In the life of the mind, as in life itself, vitality requires resisting the lure of the familiar and the safe.” (Jacoby 2000: xxi)

Works Cited

- Ali, Tariq (ed.) 2000. *Masters of the Universe: NATO's Balkan Crusade*. New York and London: Verso.
- American Council of Trustees and Alumni. 2002. *Defending Civilization: How Our Universities Are Failing America and What Can Be Done About It* (report). Washington DC.
- Bernard, Philippe. 2002 (Jan 26). “Bourdieu, raisons et passions.” *Le Monde*, online archives.
- Boschetti, Anna. 1988. *The Intellectual Enterprise: Sartre and Les Temps Modernes*. Trans. Richard C. McCleary. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1958. *Sociologie de l'Algérie*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1987. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Trans. Richard Nice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990. *In Other Words: Essays Toward a Reflexive Sociology*. Trans. Matthew Adamson. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990a. “Reading, readers, the literate, literature.” In Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Toward a Reflexive Sociology*.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990b. “The intellectual field: a world apart.” In Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Toward a Reflexive Sociology*.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1992. “Interest, Habitus, Rationality.” In Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1996. *Contre-Feux: propos pour servir à la résistance contre l’invasion néo-libérale*. Paris : Éditions Liber.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1998. *Acts of Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market*. Trans. Richard Nice. New York: The New Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1998a. “To the Reader.” In Bourdieu, *Acts of Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market*.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1998b. “The Left Hand and the Right Hand of the State.” In Bourdieu, *Acts of Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market*.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1999. *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Societies*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 2001. *Contre-Feux 2*. Paris: Raisons d’Agir.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 2002 (Jan 24). “Pessimisme sociologique contre fausse science.” *Le Monde*, online archives.

Bourdieu, Pierre and Günter Grass. 1999 (Dec 2). “La tradition ‘d’ouvrir sa gueule.’” *Le Monde*, online archives.

Bourdieu, Pierre, Jean-Claude Passeron and Monique St. Martin. 1996. *Academic Discourse: Linguistic Misunderstanding and Professorial Power*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre and Loïc J. D. Wacquant. 1992. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Charle, Christophe and Daniel Roche. 2002 (Jan 26). “Pierre Bourdieu et l’histoire.” *Le Monde*, online archives.

De Tocqueville, Alexis. N.d. *Democracy in America*, volume II, section I. Online version: http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/ch1_01.htm.

Fish, Stanley. 2002a (21 Jun). “Say It Ain’t So.” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, online edition. <http://chronicle.com/jobs/2002/06/2002062101c.htm>.

Fish, Stanley. 2002b (Jul). “Postmodern Warfare: The ignorance of our warrior intellectuals.” *Harper’s*, 305: 1826, pp. 33-40.

Florida Atlantic University. 2002. “Ph.D. in Comparative Studies.” Web site: <http://www.publicintellectuals.fau.edu/main2.htm>.

Hamsik, Dusan. 1971. *Writers Against Rulers*. Trans. D. Orpington. New York: Random House.

Havel, Václav. 1990. *Disturbing the Peace: A Conversation with Karel Hvízdala*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Havel, Václav. 1998. *The Art of the Impossible: Politics as Morality in Practice; Speeches and Writings, 1990-1996*. Trans. Paul Wilson. New York: Fromm International.

Huntington, Samuel. 1998. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*. New York: Touchstone Books.

Jacoby, Russell. 2000. *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe*. New York: Basic Books.

Kriseová, Eda. 1993. *Václav Havel: The Authorized Biography*. Trans. Caleb Crain. New York: St Martin's Press.

Kusin, Vladimír. 1971. *The Intellectual Origins of the Prague Spring: The Development of Reformist Ideas in Czechoslovakia, 1956-1967*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kusin, Vladimír. 1972. *Political Grouping in the Czechoslovak Reform Movement*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Maxa, Josef (Journalist M). 1970. *A Year is Eight Months*. Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1973. “Sartre and Ultrabolshevism.” In *Adventures of the Dialectic*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Said, Edward. 2002 (July). “Impossible Histories: Why the many Islams cannot be simplified.” *Harper's*, 305: 1826, pp. 69-74.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1948. *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* Paris: French and European Publications.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1963 [1939]. *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*. Trans. Hazel Barnes. New York: Washington Square Press.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1965. “Reply to Albert Camus.” In *Situations*. Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Crest Books.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1985 [1960]. *Critique of Dialectical Reason, vol. 1: Theory of Practical Ensembles*. London and New York: Verso.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1993a. “Freedom and Responsibility.” In Basking, Wade (ed.), *Essays in Existentialism*. New York: Citadel Press.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1993b. “The Humanism of Existentialism.” In Basking, Wade (ed.), *Essays in Existentialism*. New York: Citadel Press.

Sartre, Jean-Paul and Benny Lévy. 1996. *Hope Now: The 1980 Interviews*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Schaffer, Scott. 2000. *Resisting Ethics*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Social and Political Thought, York University, Toronto, Canada.

Schaffer, Scott. 2002. “Introduction: The Mirror Stage.” *Journal of Mundane Behavior* 3: 2. <http://mundanebehavior.org/issues/v3n2/schaffer3-2.htm>.

Schalk, David. 1991. *War and the Ivory Tower: Algeria and Vietnam*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Soley, Lawrence C. 1995. *Leasing the Ivory Tower: The Corporate Takeover of Academia*. Boston: South End Press.

Wacquant, Loïc J. D. 1992a. “Epistemic Reflexivity.” In Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wacquant, Loïc J. D. 1992b. “Toward a Social Praxeology: The Structure and Logic of Bourdieu’s Sociology.” In Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*.

Wolfe, Tom. 2000. “In the Land of Rococo Marxists: Why is no one celebrating the Second American Century?” *Harper’s*. June 2000: 73-82.

Zizek, Slavoj. 1999. *NATO as the Left Hand of God?* Zagreb: Arkzin.