A CALL TO ARMS

AN ESSAY ON THE ROLE OF THE INTELLECTUAL AND THE NEED TO PRODUCE NEW IMAGINARIES

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Abstract

The essay takes a historical reflection on the identity of the intellectual as a starting point, highlighting four key debates that have tried to provide meaning to this identity. These debates concern the intellectual's class position, the intellectual's connection to other classes and social groups, the location of the intellectual and the relationship with the university, and the publicness of the intellectual. These debates then feed into a more engaged reflection on the desirability of intellectuals to intervene in a society characterised by three types of crisis – the crisis of representative democracy, the economic crisis and the crisis of mimesis – investigating how their rethorics can be transformed into counter-hegemonic discourses. Although it is argued that the production of new ideological projects is not straightforward – because of the complex relationship between agency and discursive structures, the evenly difficult relationship between complexity and simplicity, and the ontological issues triggered by the crisis of mimesis – the essay pleads for the establishment of networks of intellectuals, driven by principles of value centrality, modular collaboration and non-essentialism, that allow them to critically rethink our core social structures, in order to establish new horizons to imagine social change.

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What's Left of the Intellectual?

The origins of a concept are always complicated. Because intellectual practices extend so far back into history, many people have been acknowledged as producers of intellectual knowledge. These practices were sometimes situated in specific institutions, but in other cases, like the Republic of Letters in the 17th and 18th centuries, they were transnational and existed only in the minds of their members (Goldgar 1995, 2).

Nonetheless, the concept of the intellectual originates from a discursive field that is of a much later date. As Cahm (1996, 69) argued, although "the campaigns of Voltaire and Victor Hugo" played an important role, the French Dreyfus Affair contributed significantly to the use of the concept of the intellectual. As Ignatief (1997) wrote, "There had been thinkers before – clerics and scholars; it was Voltaire who invented the public intellectual: the scourge of the church, the thorn in the side of princes, the acerbic habitué of beautiful women's salons." At the same time, the intellectual became an individualised phenomenon. A nice illustration can be found in Hugo's reference to *Un homme de genie*, in the poem *Melancholia* (in *Les Contemplations*, 1856) where we find the combination of the commitment to a social cause, the rejection of his message deemed unwelcome and his gendered nature. But we also find the man of genius's individualisation:

> *Un homme de génie apparaît. Il est doux,*
> *Il est fort, il est grand ; il est utile à tous;*
> *Comme l'aube au-dessus de l'océan qui roule,*
> *Il dore d'un rayon tous les fronts de la foule;*
> *Il luit ; le jour qu'il jette est un jour éclatant;*
> *Il apporte une idée au siècle qui l'attend;*
> *Il fait son œuvre; il veut des choses nécessaires,*
> *Agrandir les esprits, amoindrir les misères;*
> *Heureux, dans ses travaux dont les cieux sont témoins,*
> *Si l'on pense un peu plus, si l'on souffre un peu moins!*
> *Il vient. — Certe, on le va couronner! — On le hue!*

(Victor Hugo – 1856 – see appendix for translation)

During the Dreyfus Affair, the use of the concept of the intellectual changed. As Cahm (1996, 69) explains, "The Affair witnessed the birth of the modern idea of the intellectual committed as a member of a group, made up of writers, artists and those living by their intellect, who lend the backing of their reputation to the support of public causes." He continues: "... The committed intellectual is placed – willingly or otherwise – outside the power structures of his society, and he gives his opinion in the name of high ethical principles, without regard to ethical truths, and to the constraints and compromises inherent in action carried on within those structures."

Emile Zola takes on a key role in the re-articulation of the concept of the intellectual when he publishes "J'accuse…!" in L'Aurore on 13 January 1898, in response to the acquittal of Ferdinand Esterhazy two days earlier. At the end of 1894, the French captain Alfred Dreyfus was condemned for treason and convicted to solitary confinement on Devil's Island (French Guiana). Attempts of the Dreyfusards to bring the real perpetrator – Ferdinand Esterhazy – to court and to have him convicted failed in 1898. The Esterhazy acquittal triggered the publication

of Zola's famous article as part of a strategy to provoke a new court case and to maintain the struggle for a retrial of Dreyfus. Before the opening of Zola's court case in February 1898, Georges Clemenceau – one of L'Aurore's editors, and later senator and prime minister of France – popularised[1] the concept of the intellectual by writing (on 23 January 1898, in L'Aurore), "N'est-ce pas un signe, tous ces intellectuels, venus de tous les coins de l'horizon, qui se groupent sur une idée et s'y tiennent inébranlables."

The intellectual was not the only signifier playing a role within this discursive field. Equally important was the concept of the intelligentsia, developed in the Russian empire of the 19th century. Intelligentsia was, for instance, used by the Russian poet, Vasily Zhukovsky; the Polish philosopher, Karol Libelt; and the Russian writer, Pyotr Boborykin (see Stearns 2008, 177; Hamburg 2010, 44). A broader concept than intellectuals, intelligentsia referred to a social class of people that were engaged in intellectual labour and the dissemination of culture. The relevance of the intelligentsia concept not only lies in its emphasis on the collective, but also in efforts mobilised to distinguish it from intellectuals. For instance, Max Weber thematised this distinction, as described by Sadri (1994, 69–70):

> When contrasted to intelligentsia—whom we define as the aggregate of the educated members of one particular stratum or some strata, possessing varying degrees of "status consciousness" – the category of the intellectuals comprises a small group of highly creative (often individualistic) individuals. An often borrowed analogy from economics portrays intellectuals as "producers" of those intellectual goods that are later disseminated and "consumed" in the market-place of ideal and material interests of the intelligentsia and (through their mediation) of other classes and strata.

A Series of Key Debates on the Nature of the Intellectual

These discussions raise a series of issues regarding the nature of intellectuals. First, there is the question of whether intellectuals are a class in and of themselves (see Kurzman and Owens 2002). The Dreyfus Affair demonstrated the possibility of constituting an alliance of intellectuals (in this case using the petition as an instrument); however, this alliance does not necessarily imply that intellectuals also form a social class. Some, including Gouldner (1979), have seen the combined force of intellectuals and intelligentsia as the beginning of a new social class based on a common identity and culture, shaped by educational experiences. However, authors like Bourdieu (see Swartz 1997, 224) have argued against this position, claiming that intellectuals take highly distinct positions as they are located within very different fields. In Marxist theory, notably in Gramsci's (1999a) work, intellectuals serve as mediators between common sense and hegemony rather than forming a separate class.

Gramsci's position takes us to the second debate, that of the connection of intellectuals with social classes and specific struggles. Again, the Dreyfus Affair showed the commitment of (a group of) intellectuals towards a specific struggle: defending an innocent man against the relentless machinery of the state (and the army). Later, with the development of the notion of the organic intellectual in contrast to the traditional intellectual, authors like Gramsci argued the importance of

intellectuals connecting with the people, becoming "intellectuals of these masses." To quote Gramsci (1999b, 331) at length on this point:

> *… one could only have had cultural stability and an organic quality of thought if there had existed the same unity between the intellectuals and the simple as there should be between theory and practice. That is, if the intellectuals had been organically the intellectuals of these masses, and if they had worked out and made coherent the principles and the problems raised by the masses in their practical activity, thus constituting a cultural and social bloc. The question posed here was the one we have already referred to, namely this: is a philosophical movement properly so called when it is devoted to creating a specialized culture among restricted intellectual groups, or rather when, and only when, in the process of elaborating a form of thought superior to 'common sense' and coherent on a scientific plane, it never forgets to remain in contact with the 'simple' and indeed finds in this contact the source of the problems it sets out to study and to resolve? Only by this contact does a philosophy become 'historical,' purify itself of intellectualistic elements of an individual character and become 'life.'*

These levels of intellectual commitment and engagement have not remained without critique. In his *La trahison des clercs* (translated as *The Betrayal [or The Treason] of the Intellectuals*) from 1927, Benda (1981, 89) criticises intellectuals for denouncing "the feeling of universalism, not only for the profit of the nation, but for that of a class." His critique points to a historical change, when he writes that: "[...] at the end of the nineteenth century a fundamental change occurred: the clerks began to play the game of political passions. The men who had acted as a check on the realism of the people began to act as its stimulators" (Benda 1981, 45). Nevertheless, other authors have argued against Benda's approach to intellectuals as "a tiny band of super-gifted and morally endowed philosopher-kings who constitute the conscience of mankind" (Said 1994, 4) without siding with Gramsci's position. For one, Said (1994, 23) sees the intellectual as "neither a pacifier nor a consensus-builder, but someone whose whole being is staked on a critical sense." This statement also implies that there should never be "solidarity before criticism" (Said 1983, 28); the intellectual should always speak truth to power (which is the title of the fifth chapter of Said's (1994) *Representations of the Intellectual*). Said is not the only author to defend this position; Bourdieu gives a similar normative signification to intellectuals, who need to be "critics rather than servants of power" (Swartz 1997, 222). This idea can also be connected to Foucault's discussion on the ancient Greek use of the parrhesia concept, a concept that not only brings in the idea of speaking candidly (and asking forgiveness for speaking so), but also emphasises the risks this way of speaking incorporates. To quote Foucault (1983, 15–16) here:

> *So you see, the parrhesiastes is someone who takes a risk. Of course, this risk is not always a risk of life. When, for example, you see a friend doing something wrong and you risk incurring his anger by telling him he is wrong, you are acting as a parrhesiastes. In such a case, you do not risk your life, but you may hurt him by your remarks, and your friendship may consequently suffer for it. If, in a political debate, an orator risks losing his popularity because his opinions are contrary to the majority's opinion, or his opinions may usher in a political scandal, he uses parrhesia. Parrhesia,*

then, is linked to courage in the face of danger: it demands the courage to speak the truth in spite of some danger. And in its extreme form, telling the truth takes place in the 'game' of life or death.

The third debate is linked to the location of the intellectual. In the days of the Dreyfus Affair, intellectuals came from all walks of life; some were situated at universities, but many others worked as teachers, writers or journalists (or a combination of these professions). The security offered by university tenure meant that intellectuals flocked to the universities, creating certain problems (but also advantages). Of course, this drive to universities does not mean that the bohemian intellectual (as Etzioni (2006) calls him/her) has disappeared. The differences in structural positions remain, between "those who are beholden to an employer and are retained as advocates 'house intellectuals' and those who act as unencumbered critics" and between "those who are academically based and [...] those who are free-standing, making a living as writers, freelance editors, columnists, and so on" (Etzioni 2006, 10).

Focussing on academics, we can use Etzioni's (2006, 10) basic dilemma that many contemporary intellectuals have to face: "becoming too academic and losing their influence with the relevant public and the governing elites, as well as becoming too 'popular,' sacrificing their ability to provide reality testing." Some authors are more critical towards academic intellectuals. Jacoby (1987) argued that academics tend to conform to university norms, aiming to be "mainstream" rather than independent. Other arguments point to the scarcity of resources combined with task accumulation and implementation of a quantitatively-driven audit culture, which increases the disciplining and surveillance of academics' activities. Authors employ these arguments to defend the ethics of slowness, for instance (see Leung, de Kloet and Chow 2010). Brouwer and Squires (2003, 205) take these critiques one step further and argue that "the university is unable to facilitate or sustain publicly relevant work; thus public intellectuals are primarily or exclusively to be found outside academe." In slightly more poetic language, Ignatief (1997) makes a similar point: "For the Enlightenment intellectual, for Samuel Johnson or Denis Diderot, the academy was mental death: the resting place for lethargic pedantry." This line of thinking is only a small step removed from the "declinist" idea, which holds that the intellectual has perished, an idea that appeared not only in Eagleton's (2008) article, but also in Ignatief's (1997) article mentioned earlier:

Where are the independent intellectuals now? Worthy professors, cultural bureaucrats, carnival barkers, and entertainers. The death of the intellectual has left a void in the centre of public life. In place of thought, we have opinion; in place of argument, we have journalism; in place of polemic, we have personality profiles: in place of reputation, we have celebrity.

The final debate builds on the aforementioned notion of the *public* intellectual; it relates to the channels that intellectuals use to have their voices heard in order to enter public spheres. Here, we should bear in mind that many fields of the social function as public spheres, including the cultural field (McGuigan 2005) and the scientific field (Giroux 2002; Encabo and Martín 2007). Moreover, different social fields and their organisations have varying regulatory systems that enable and disable people to gain access to these (and other) public spheres so that they can

have their voices heard. These rules impact the access that intellectuals have to these organisations (to become an insider-member or to enter as an outsider-visitor), the ways they can interact with the organisation's structures, and how much decision-making powers intellectuals have when and if granted access. Moreover, because of their internal logics, different social fields and their organisations offer varying discursive affordances to intellectuals. Though some are more conducive to the presence of intellectuals than others, all spheres pose restrictions. This restrictive environment, for instance, applies to academia as a public sphere, which is part of the above-mentioned debate about the appropriateness of academia in harbouring intellectuals. Although vast in number, academia's own communicative channels pose severe restrictions on reaching a broader readership outside academia, with some exceptions (Thompson 2013, 148). In his critique on academic intellectuals, Jacoby (1987, 6) describes the situation for academic intellectuals as follows: "Campuses are their homes; colleagues their audience; monographs and specialized journals their media. […] Independent intellectuals, who wrote for the educated reader, are dying out …"

However, the main debate about the use of communicative channels by intellectuals focuses on their use of the (mainstream) media, where they – in most cases – remain outsider-visitors that must comply to regulatory systems that are imposed upon them through the (mainstream) media logic. Public intellectuals are expected to use mass communication tools, a situation that Brouwer and Squires (2003, 204) summarise in this manner:

> *Crucial to earning the status of public intellectual is the ability to find or cultivate a broad audience. Here, radio and televisional technologies play a significant role, serving as media through which the scholar disseminates ideas. In some cases, media access is insufficiently public, however, for the intellectual must also successfully translate heady academic idiom into accessible, plain language. Presumably, vernacular languages invites wider audiences, and wider audiences predict greater social or political effectiveness […]*

Nevertheless, there are also critical voices that challenge this expectation, pointing to the cost associated with what some would call the mediatisation or the spectaclisation of academia (Polan 1990). Posner (2009, 63) mentions two types of costs related to media performances: opportunity costs, which are caused by the time investment of participating in media performances and "the risk of making a fool of oneself," as "the public intellectual functions without a safety net." This second cost can be seen as the condensed version of the more structural critique that (mainstream) media have difficulties in providing spaces for intellectual interventions or debate due to their particular production values and practices. Some have argued for a withdrawal from mainstream media – which they see as a populist system (see Corijn 2004; Blommaert 2004). They suggest looking for solutions outside "the established structures, originating from structures that remain outside the view of the [mainstream] media, that generate sufficient complexity and critique to induce alternative scenarios for the future" (Corijn 2004, 59 – my translation). Not surprisingly, others point to the opportunities provided by the internet as an alternative public sphere. Dahlgren (2013) explicitly refers to online public intellectuals and web intellectuals; with some prudence, he argues that it is

"the growing terrain between traditional journalism and newer modes of advocacy that offers the most potential for their [online] activities" (Dahlgren 2013, 98).

The Need for Intervention

Moving into a more essayist style of writing in this third section, I would like to argue that we should not accept the death of the (academic) intellectual thesis – here Baert and Shipman's (2011) transformational argument might be preferable – but we should also not deny the restrictions that intellectuals have to face when speaking truth to power when they are located in academia. I would like to defend the intellectual, even though even the signifier has been discredited in common sense environments, articulated with presumptuousness and vanity. In addition, I would like to argue that the present configuration of accumulated crises has created an even stronger need for intellectuals to speak out. These crises are experienced in many different ways within multiple centres and peripheries, and across genders, ages and classes, where for instance, the middle and upper classes in many places in the (first) world still maintain their high living standards. Given my location in the Western hemisphere, I will unavoidably speak from this position, with the understanding that there are many others.

First of all, in the Western world, there is a crisis of representative democracy (see e.g., Köchler, 1987). The strong emphasis on representation (to the detriment of high(er) levels of participation) has not managed to stimulate continuous popular mobilisations and a strong effective relationship with the state's institutions. Although this lack is sometimes translated as apathy (see Dahlgren 2013, 11, for a critique), it is more likely a symptom of the crises of representative democracy, not a cause. What we can see instead is that the political system, established for conflict management, has shown itself to be structurally inadequate for providing its populations with negotiated and acceptable solutions to a wide variety of problems. Although institutional politics and some citizens still cherish fantasies of control and social makeability (Carpentier 2011), these fantasies become frequently and intensely frustrated, showing the powerlessness of governments to intervene successfully to better citizens' lives. Arguably, democratic legitimacy could be added to the list of fantasies, given the low levels of trust in governments, sometimes moving into the realm of contempt, and the slumbering decrease in popular support for actual (democratic) politics. These frustrations expose democracy to intense dangers, as modernist projects, such as nationalism, become (re-)articulated with democracy, seeding antagonisms in the necessarily welcoming soil of democracy.

A second crisis, overlapping with the first one, is the economic crisis. Arguably, a period of economic instability now has lasted for about 40 years,[2] with the end of the Bretton Woods system and the global stock market crash in the 1970s, with the Asian and Russian financial crises in the 1990s, and with the global financial crisis ("the Great Recession") from the end of the 2000s onwards. At this stage, in the 2010s, the economic crisis has hit Europe hard, especially countries like Greece, Portugal, Cyprus, Iceland and Ireland, but also including Spain, Italy and others. Within neo-liberal logics, austerity measures are still seen as a primary European strategy, despite critiques like Stuckler and Basu's book, *The Body Economic: Why Austerity Kills*. Here, too, we combine myopia with amnesia, ignoring the structural nature of these moments of crises – cruel fluctuations are a necessary component

of the capitalist system, even if corrections have been applied to limit the more problematic consequences. Neo-liberal discourses do provide us with answers, but these answers unfortunately boil down to more neo-liberalism. The ultimate removal of the final economic barrier functions as a key fantasy, beholding the promise of wealth and stability while disguising the necessarily conjunctural nature of capitalism (and the inequalities and human catastrophes it encompasses) behind the ideology of unfettered growth. The cost of this neo-liberal social contract is high and not limited to economic dimensions, also including the structural violence of poverty. The colonising impact of capitalism has reached far beyond the limits of the economic system and tends to rearticulate human relationships, at the individual but also at the institutional level, by reducing them to their economic value or by instrumentalising them for the benefit of the economic system.

A third crisis, situated at the more ontological level, is the crisis of mimesis. Obtaining immediate access to our social realities remains a deeply-rooted desire, frustrated by the incessant workings of diversity and the contingency of the social. At specific historical moments, discourses – for instance produced by religious machineries – have offered reassuring certainties that maintained human beliefs that the world is a stable and homogenous place that could be mimetically accessed. In the contemporary conjuncture, this consolation is not offered to us, as Lyotard's (1984) argument about the end of the grand narratives illustrates. We are still struggling with this multi-directionality of the social, and with the idea that all things are wholly contingent. At the same time, ideological projects that offer the promise of mimesis, of immediate and unmediated understanding, still exist and play a key role. Some, such as neo-liberalism or militarism, have become hegemonic; meanwhile, nation-, ethnicity- and religion-based fundamentalisms (Sim 2004) are making a remarkable return in many parts of the world. We should not underestimate their strength, but more than ever before, these discourses find it difficult to hide their cracks and gaps as well as their impossibilities and vulnerabilities. I would like to propose that this crisis is not the real problem. On the contrary, the crisis of mimesis can be benevolent if we manage to overcome it, but so far, instead of abandoning it, we have embraced it even more. More problematically is that these discourses sometimes exclusively privilege individualism and freedom, nationalism and religious fundamentalism. Unification on the basis of antagonism has been strengthened. In this process, the discourses that foreground equality, solidarity, brother and sisterhood, ethics, cosmopolitanism and pacifism have been weakened, reverting them to secondary positions, or sometimes, even fundamentally rejecting them.

Critical Ideologies – Under Construction

The accumulation, articulation and integration of these three crises create the need for the (intensified) development of critical ideologies that at least offer counterweights to the dominant hegemonies that have maintained their presence over the years, despite these crises. The importance of ideology, as a mobilising and sense-making force, should not be underestimated. Social change requires the re-orientation of a wide variety of social practices, and it cannot work without discourse.[3]

Discourse has the combined capacity of providing frameworks of intelligibility and intervention, guiding thoughts and material actions. It travels through public

and private fields like politics, economics, education, civil society, family and media. Obviously, neo-liberalism is a discourse, a way to structure, understand and organise the world. Simultaneously, it has obtained a particular status, as it is hegemonic, "linking together different identities into a common project" (Howarth 1998, 279). In this sense, neo-liberalism has become a social imaginary, that is, a horizon that "is not one among other objects but an absolute limit which structures a field of intelligibility and is thus the condition of possibility of the emergence of any object" (Laclau 1990, 64). The discourse of neo-liberalism has become omnipresent, infiltrating the ways we think and feel in a wide variety of societal fields. It has been sedimented into a wide variety of practices and structures, which range from local businesses (like the greengrocers around the corner) to global organisations, such as multinationals, the World Bank and the IMF. This phenomenon has transformed neo-liberalism into a global discourse.

Still, hegemony is never total. Within the logics of hegemony, many variations remain possible, as discourses can never capture the social reality in its entirety, and they are not safe from material events in the social world. In *New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time*, Laclau introduced the concept of dislocation to theorise about these limits of discursive structures. Laclau first defined dislocations as more specific processes or events: "dislocation refers to the emergence of an event, or a set of events, that cannot be represented, symbolized, or in other ways disrupted by the discursive structure—which is therefore disrupted" (Torfing, 1999, 148). Obviously, discourses can adjust themselves to these dislocations, re-articulating themselves so that (former) dislocations can become incorporated, providing new meanings to dislocatory events.[4] But in other cases, dislocations can render a specific hegemonic order unsustainable, so that it can (and needs to) be replaced.

Laclau also discussed dislocation in a more general way, claiming that "every identity is dislocated insofar as it depends on an outside which denies that identity and provides its condition of possibility at the same time" (Laclau 1990, 39). Identities and structures cannot be determined and be determining, as they are always faced with dislocations showing that other articulations are possible as well. In other words, dislocations show that the structure before the dislocation is only one of the possible articulatory ensembles (Laclau 1990, 43). In this sense, dislocation is the "very form of possibility" (Laclau 1990, 42). This argument opens the door for counter-hegemonic discourses that aim to weaken and eventually replace a hegemonic order, as Mouffe (2005, 18) formulates it: "Every hegemonic order is susceptible of being challenged by counter-hegemonic practices, i.e., practices which will attempt to disarticulate the existing order so as to install other forms of hegemony."

The political and economic crises indeed have provided structural dislocations of the Western discursive neo-liberal order, where core fantasies become intensely frustrated. At the same time, until now, this hegemonic order has managed to incorporate the multitude of dislocations. In the case of the political crisis of representation, the concept of apathy, for instance, functions as one protective discursive strategy to silence critical voices by placing the blame on citizens and simultaneously immobilising them. Obviously, at the material level, the generation of sufficient wealth has appeased the citizenry by creating a much-to-lose situation. This scenario brings us to the economic crisis, where the neo-liberal hegemony has protected itself with the discursive strategies of austerity and privatisation as solu-

tions, thus reducing government redistribution and increasing the role of market players while articulating increased competition as the way out.

Arguably, these dislocations were relatively easy to incorporate because of the absence of well-developed counter-hegemonies that could provide alternative ways of thinking about these crises and new social horizons for organising the social in a more humane way. This absence unavoidably puts the burden on intellectuals, who are – if apathy has not struck them too deeply – still highly qualified to construct such a renewed ideological project.

There is, of course, a history of intellectual projects where intellectuals have left behind their agoraphobia – that sometimes haunts them – to develop a project that challenges the status-quo. Despite the sometimes raw distinctions that ground its ideas, the Frankfurter Schule is an obvious example where members developed a critical theory in juxtaposition to traditional theory. In the article, "Critical and Traditional Theory," Horkheimer (1937/1972, 197) describes traditional theory as that which "speaks not of what theory means in human life, but only of what it means in the isolated sphere in which for historical reasons it comes into existence." In contrast, critical theory "considers the overall framework which is conditioned by the blind interaction of individual activities (that is, the existent division of labour and the class distinctions) to be a function which originates in human action" (Horkheimer 1937/1972, 207).

The production of new ideological projects by intellectuals is not a straightforward project for a number of reasons. First of all, there is the complex relationship between agency and discursive structures. Specific actors can easily generate rhetorics, but for these rhetorics to be translated into discourse,[5] more is needed. Moreover, there is no guarantee that this translation will work, given the contingency of the social and the possibility of a multitude of interpretations and re-articulations. Discourses are social constructions that emanate from collective processes; individual actors cannot easily create them consciously. There is also a democratic dimension to this phenomenon, as people have to contribute to the uptake of an ideology, and translate rhetorics into discourse through the public spheres. At the same time, we should not forget that particular individuals *have* played key roles in the construction of ideological projects by creating rhetorics that reverberate in/with the social and its public sphere, thus providing intellectual anchorage points to which other rhetorics can connect and relate. Of course, it is a myth that these individuals were creative genii, acting alone. Ideologies are created by communicating and negotiating networks of intellectuals, strengthening each other's ideas without moving (too far) outside the main premises of the ideological project under construction.

The second problem is the difficult relationship between complexity and simplicity. Ideology often is perceived as having a tendency towards simplicity, while intellectual projects tend to celebrate complexity. Without denying the need for ideology to be a straightforward representation of past, present and future, it should be added that ideology's sophistication lies in its apparent simplicity. Such simplicity manages to span and mobilise a variety of auxiliary discourses in order to provide meaning to a multitude of practices, ideas and events while facilitating communicability. Arguably, ideology's complexity lies exactly in its simplicity, and it requires thorough analysis to generate rhetorics that have the in-built structural capacity to be sustainable as ideology.

Finally, we also should face the issues triggered by the crisis of mimesis and develop sense-making models that are both modern and postmodern. Strategic essentialism, defined by Spivak (1987, 205) as "a *strategic* use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest," remains a crucial component of critical projects. It allows discourses to be both self-reflexive and bold, shouting loud about injustices while mumbling consciously about their own limitations.

Which New Ideology?

The two crises – of representative democracy and of the economy – generate the need to structurally rethink the contemporary configuration, which is exactly a project where intellectuals could (and should) play a leading role. But we should also acknowledge that this contemporary configuration is utterly complex, and that present-day hegemonies that contribute to the crises have become deeply embedded within the social. The constructive crisis of mimesis potentially also works against clear ideological projects. This situation has rendered the development of a counter-hegemonic project necessary yet extraordinarily difficult. Arguably, this complexity requires a multi-voiced project, where different intellectuals form networks and work together, positioned in a diversity of fields of expertise. The *homo universalis* has become rare, and we should acknowledge the intellectuals' limits. Nonetheless, these limits can be overcome by networked groups of intellectuals using the strategy of modularity. Inspired by software culture, this strategy consists of sub-networks of intellectuals collaborating within their fields, building ideological modules on the basis of their expertise, in combination with interdisciplinary articulatory practices that connect and integrate these different modules into one counter-hegemonic project.

What I, only half-jokingly, would like to call a new republic of letters should be simultaneously open, allowing for cross-fertilisation and dissent between the members of the network, and focussed, permitting the creation of a common ideological project. Both components are necessary, but have proven difficult in the past to realise. For instance, this ideological project has been prevented by the combination of individualistic and egocentric tendencies with a focus on minute (and not always so relevant) details in developing plans for the future. Here, I would argue that it is necessary to start from a key of shared discourses – sometimes called values – to construct these networks of intellectuals. Obviously, the establishment of several networks leading to different alternative ideologies remains perfectly plausible and even desirable.

Going further down the road of self-positioning, I would here like to propose a number of values that could provide the backbone of this ideological project. The crisis of representative democracy should not cause us to forget the importance of the democratic project itself, and the democratic values of empowerment, participation and human rights. Even if neo-liberalism has captured the signifier freedom, we should not give up on this value, but firmly re-articulate it within a social discourse that propagates solidarity and equality, care and love for the other. Individualism is one of the natural allies of neo-liberalism, and there is a strong need to rethink the position of the subject within the social without giving up on subjectivity.

Apart from agreeing on the core values of a new ideological project to create a new way of thinking about these values (and the social), we also need to rethink

the diversity of social structures. Here the question becomes how to (re)organise the social so that this new philosophy can be translated into social practice. This question brings us to the economic crisis and the need to rethink economic activity so that wellbeing can be generated without equating wellbeing and welfare to wealth, without the contradictory fetishisation of competition as the ultimate model to guarantee social happiness, and without the many paying such a high and reoccurring price for the few. In addition, the role of the media industry and its not-for-profit counterparts (whether they are community radio stations or alternative websites) in the public spheres require further reconsideration, channelling the dispersed opportunities offered by "old" and "new" media technologies into participatory networks that built on earlier models, such as the Indymedia network (Kidd 2003).

One other element of this social structure that I would like to nominate as an area requiring structural rethinking is the role of the state. Both critical and neo-liberal approaches share a focus on the state, albeit attributing different roles to it. In the more critical approaches, the state is seen as a protecting force whose political and economic weight needs to be increased and who needs to be reclaimed. At least, this reclamation was the outcome of the struggle between Marxists and anarchists. The latter saw the state as a threat to freedom, but anarchism failed to put its mark on the critical project. In the neo-liberal approaches, the state is a wasteful and disruptive structure, whose political (and most definitely its economic) weight needs to be minimised. Interestingly enough, all approaches share this focus on the state, whether as something to be abandoned or minimised, or as something to be reclaimed and expanded. There only seems to be a choice between one state or no state, which excludes the idea of simultaneously having different (parallel) states.

The state now has proven itself incapable of solving or reducing the impact of the crisis of representative democracy or of the economic crisis. I, thus, would like to argue that we need to investigate the idea of building states within the state, working in parallel with the hegemonic state, structured in a rhizomatic, and not arbolic, way (see Deleuze and Guattari 1987). We need to align a variety of small initiatives and organisations that are committed to participatory democracy and alternative economies. We also should investigate the already existing initiatives that have put these commitments into practice, but too often remain locked in the local – although translocal initiatives do exist (Appadurai 1995; Carpentier 2007b). I would like to argue that these steps are almost unavoidable for building a new counter-hegemonic ideology.

A Brief Conclusion

This brings me to the last challenge, and that is to use the constructive force of the crisis of mimesis to avoid this new counter-hegemonic ideology becoming a new essentialism. Even when forms of strategic essentialism are deployed, it remains necessary to include the idea of contingency within a counter-hegemonic ideology. Such contingency helps to avoid a future in which this new model (or models) becomes an undeniable truth or a new hegemony. Hubris, and the idea that a select group of critical intellectuals could have privileged access to truth, needs to be countered by ontological modesty. A certain level of ideological auto-deconstruction needs to be embedded in any counter-hegemonic project.

Finally, I would like to emphasise once more that intellectuals are very well-placed to develop this kind of ideological project, and that they, given the nature

and intensities of the crises, have a strong social responsibility to do so. Academics working in the contemporary factories of ideas are not and should not be exonerated from this responsibility. Of course, many different relationships between intellectuals, academics and sciences can exist. Intellectuals can use many different types of rhetorics, and many critical rhetorics have been developed already. However, there is still a need to not only make the invisible visible and show the particularity of universality, but also to imagine the unimaginable. This necessity will require many intellectuals to overcome their agoraphobia, to develop new ideological projects and to communicate them in the variety of public spheres that are available to them or need to be reclaimed.

Notes:

1. Establishing the first use of a term is always difficult. Finkielkraut (2005, 241) attributes it to Saint-Simon in 1821.

2. For a graphic representation, see http://prezi.com/mxyogdntyt6y/perpetual-crisis-a-timeline-of-40-years-of-economic-instability.

3. Discourse here is used in its macrotextual and macrocontextual meaning – see Laclau and Mouffe (1985).

4. For instance, during the 2003 Gulf War when no weapons of mass destruction were found, the legitimisation for "just" war changed and became linked to the protection of the Iraqi people against a dictator (Carpentier 2007a).

5. At least in the definition of discourse used here – see above.

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Appendix: Victor Hugo's *Melancholia*

Un homme de génie apparaît. Il est doux,
Il est fort, il est grand ; il est utile à tous ;
Comme l'aube au-dessus de l'océan qui roule,
Il dore d'un rayon tous les fronts de la foule ;
Il luit ; le jour qu'il jette est un jour éclatant ;
Il apporte une idée au siècle qui l'attend ;
Il fait son œuvre ; il veut des choses nécessaires,
Agrandir les esprits, amoindrir les misères ;
Heureux, dans ses travaux dont les cieux sont témoins,
Si l'on pense un peu plus, si l'on souffre un peu moins !
Il vient. — Certe, on le va couronner ! — On le hue !
Scribes, savants, rhéteurs, les salons, la cohue,
Ceux qui n'ignorent rien, ceux qui doutent de tout,
Ceux qui flattent le roi, ceux qui flattent l'égout,
Tous hurlent à la fois et font un bruit sinistre.
Si c'est un orateur ou si c'est un ministre,
On le siffle. Si c'est un poète, il entend
Ce chœur : « Absurde ! faux ! monstrueux ! révoltant ! »
Lui, cependant, tandis qu'on bave sur sa palme,
Debout, les bras croisés, le front levé, l'œil calme,
Il contemple, serein, l'idéal et le beau ;
Il rêve ; et, par moments, il secoue un flambeau
Qui, sous ses pieds, dans l'ombre, éblouissant la haine,
Éclaire tout à coup le fond de l'âme humaine ;
Ou, ministre, il prodigue et ses nuits et ses jours ;
Orateur, il entasse efforts, travaux, discours ;
Il marche, il lutte ! Hélas ! l'injure ardente et triste,
À chaque pas qu'il fait, se transforme et persiste.
Nul abri. Ce serait un ennemi public,
Un monstre fabuleux, dragon ou basilic,
Qu'il serait moins traqué de toutes les manières,
Moins entouré de gens armés de grosses pierres,
Moins haï ! – Pour eux tous et pour ceux qui viendront,
Il va semant la gloire, il recueille l'affront.
Le progrès est son but, le bien est sa boussole ;
Pilote, sur l'avant du navire il s'isole ;
Tout marin, pour dompter les vents et les courants,
Met tour à tour le cap sur des points différents,
Et, pour mieux arriver, dévie en apparence ;
Il fait de même ; aussi blâme et cris ; l'ignorance
Sait tout, dénonce tout ; il allait vers le nord,
Il avait tort ; il va vers le sud, il a tort ;
Si le temps devient noir, que de rage et de joie !
Cependant, sous le faix sa tête à la fin ploie,
L'âge vient, il couvait un mal profond et lent,
Il meurt. L'envie alors, ce démon vigilant,
Accourt, le reconnaît, lui ferme la paupière,
Prend soin de la clouer de ses mains dans la bière,
Se penche, écoute, épie en cette sombre nuit
S'il est vraiment bien mort, s'il ne fait pas de bruit,
S'il ne peut plus savoir de quel nom on le nomme,
Et, s'essuyant les yeux, dit : « C'était un grand homme ! »

A man of genius appears. He is soft,
He is strong, he is tall; he serves everyone;
Like dawn above the rolling ocean,
He casts a ray of gold on every face in the crowd;
He shines, the light he throws off bursts with brightness;
He brings an idea to a century awaiting it;
He does his work, he seeks those things needed
To grow spirits, lessen misery;
Happy in his works to which the heavens are witness,
That one would think a little more and suffer a little less!
He comes! Surely they'll crown him! They boo!
Scribes, savants, specifiers, salons, the crowd,
Those unaware of nothing, those skeptical of all,
Those who flatter the king, those who flatter the gutter,
All shout at once and it makes a sinister noise.
Be he a minister, be he a poet,
They whistle at him. Be he a poet, he hears
This chorus: "Absurd! fake! monstrous! disgusting!"
He, however, though they spit in his palm,
Stands, arms crossed, head high, eyes calm,
He contemplates, serene, the beautiful and the ideal;
He dreams; and at moments he waves a torch
That, beneath his feet, in the shadows, casts its glow on hatred,
Revealing all at once the depths of the human soul.
As a minister he wastes his days and nights,
Orator, he piles up drafts, works, speeches;
He works, he fights! Alas! the sad, burning wound
Transforms and persists with his every step.
No shelter. He will be a public enemy, would be
A fabled monster, a dragon or basilisk,
Were he less hunted in every way,
Less in danger of being stoned,
Less hated. – For everyone and those to come
He goes forth sowing glory; he harvests affrontment.
Progress is his goal, the good his compass.
Pilot, he is isolated at the front of the boat.
Every sailor, to keep control in the winds and currents,
Changes his heading from point to point,
Steers a crooked course the better to arrive straightaway;
He does the same; result: blame and shouting; ignorance
Knows all, denounces all; he went North,
He was wrong; he goes South, he is wrong again;
If the weather turns foul, what rage and joy!
However, his head at last bows beneath the weight,
Age comes, lays a slow, deep sickness upon him,
He dies. Envy then, that vigilant demon,
Runs in, recognizes him, closes his eyes,
Takes care to nail his hands to the bier,
Leans in, listens, looks in the somber night
To see that he is dead, that he makes no sound,
That he can no longer know the name by which he was called,
And, wiping his eyes, says: "This was a great man!"

Translation Geoffrey Barto, 2003