

**Representing (Romanian) Intellectuals. Case study: Monica Lovinescu's *Diary*,
1985-1988 (I)**

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Abstract

This paper attempts at identifying the intellectual profiles and attitudes that are characteristic for the last period of Romanian communist society, as they are represented by the literary critic and essayist Monica Lovinescu in her *Diary*, 1985-1988 (Humanitas, Bucharest, 2002). In the first part we shall be reviewing the theoretical aspects of the intellectual issue in recent researches, tracing the main characteristics that define it, as well as the attempts to draw a typology, to classify the functions and to reveal the contemporary status of the intellectual. The second part will concentrate upon the positions that were occupied by the intellectuals living in Romania or in diaspora in the structure of the intellectual field from the end of the 80s, upon the current debates in that period, and also the role played by Monica Lovinescu in maintaining the civic and democratic conscience of Romanian intellectuals. The methodological starting point of our paper is represented by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's theory on the intellectual field (see, among other works, *Homo Academicus*, 1984, and *Les Règles de l'Art*, 1992). The conclusions will try to establish a comparison between the Romanian 'version' of the intellectual during the communist epoch, and the Western theories on this professional and social instance, as well as an overall look upon the postcommunist developments of the representations of the Romanian intellectual.

I. The intellectual – a portrait en miettes

The researches on the subject of the intellectual have aroused a large amount of interest over the past two decades. They have attracted specialists in the humanities that have used many different approaches: the history of ideas and mentalities, sociology,

political science, philosophy, critical theory. Thus a new territory has been charted for investigation. This trend was announced by Julien Benda's influential essay, *La Trahison des clercs* (1927), to be followed by Jacques Le Goff's *Les Intellectuels au Moyen Age* (1957) or Louis Bodin's *Les Intellectuels* (1962). But it was not until the 80s that the intellectual was legitimized, from a historical as well as a theoretical perspective, as the stake for an autonomous scientific field, located at the crossroads between several disciplinary discourses. Let us follow some of the themes that were debated by this (relatively) new discourse on a subject that has enjoyed a long career.

What exactly defines an intellectual? French writer Émile Zola is generally regarded as the responsible for 'inventing' the intellectuals by means of his liberal standpoints concerning the Dreyfus affair, the pamphlet "J'Accuse!" (1898) in particular. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu describes the appearance of this new type and its paradoxical condition in these words: "The intellectuals constitute themselves as such by intervening with the political field *in the name of their autonomy* and of the specific values of a field of cultural production that has reached a high degree of independence from different authorities. (...) The intellectuals set themselves up, against the particular rules of politics (...), as the defenders of some universal principles that are nothing else but the product of raising to the universal level the principles that are appropriate for their particular universe" (*Les Règles de l'Art*, Romanian edition, p. 183). Bourdieu and his school emphasize the intellectual's trait of a creator or mediator of symbolical goods, while other researchers, such as French cultural historians Pascal Ory and Jean-François Sirinelli, put forward a 'political' definition in 1986: "l'intellectuel sera donc un homme du culturel, créateur ou médiateur, mis en situation d'homme du politique, producteur ou consommateur d'idéologie. Ni une simple catégorie socio-professionnelle, ni un simple personnage, irréductible. Il s'agira d'un statut, comme dans la définition sociologique, mais transcendé par une volonté individuelle, comme dans la définition éthique, et tourné vers un usage collectif" ("Introduction", in Brunet and Lanthier, 2000, p. 14). So the intellectual acts as such precisely when he/she surpasses the limitations of his/her professional interest and specialty by involving into (or even 'engaging in', as Sartre or Gramsci would put it) the public life of the community/ people.

Another angle from which the issue of the intellectual's nature can be considered is the minimalist one, proposed by Gerald Popiel and Raj P. Mohan ("Intellectuals and Powers: S.M. Lipset, Julien Benda, and Karl Mannheim", in Mohan, ed., 1987), who regard the intellectuals as "free men of ideas freely competing" (p. 33). This working definition that discloses a liberal-humanist attitude over the matter in discussion, nevertheless raises a set of problems: the existence of the intellectual is not possible except when freedom is granted? Is this freedom an inner state, or does it have to be constantly negotiated with structures of power (any nature they might be of)? We must further ask what meaning can be attached to the autonomy of the intellectual field before the XXth century, during a time when intellectuals did exist.

The definitions taking into account the historic factor (for instance, Bourdieu's definition and the one belonging to Popiel and Mohan, who undertake Karl Mannheim's hypothesis on the common origins of the intellectual class and the bourgeoisie), still have a major flaw: they relate the intellectual figure with a certain moment in time, thus limiting it to specific social conditions. The supporters of a broader perspective, as are J. Benda (1927), J. Le Goff (1957), and more recently Don Martindale ("The Sociology of Intellectual Creativity", in Mohan, ed., 1987) or M'hammed Sabour ("Between Patronage and Autonomy: The Position of Intellectuals in Modern Society", in Lawrence & Döbler, eds., 1996) trace a portrait of the intellectual in the spirit of the 'family resemblance' that can be noticed beyond ethnic, cultural or historic peculiarities. In this train of thought, J. Benda includes in the category of the 'clerics' those people that "take on an activity which is alien, by its very essence, from any practical goal" (Benda 1927, Romanian edition 1993, p. 61). Those men and women grant their energies to arts, sciences or philosophy, for the last two thousand years on. Le Goff considered the medieval university professor to be the intellectual type possessing the deepest self- conscience till the modern times ("Introduction", Le Goff 1957). Don Martindale in the mentioned essay traces the history of the intellectuals back to Antiquity, at the same time delineating the different roles that were attributed to them over time. For M'hammed Sabour, the actual state of autonomy that this class has attained is merely a stage – spectacular as it may be – from an evolutionary process that had started much earlier.

The two points of view on the definition of the intellectual, the historic and the typological one, are not incompatible. One might argue that the intellectuals as a social group represent rather a modern asset, whereas the intellectual as an individual has existed since the antique ages. If we agree that the birth of the intellectual has taken place during the Dreyfus affair (which has indeed played an important role in establishing the contemporary image of this social type), all this history would be lost, a history that is very relevant for the understanding of the intellectual's part in past societies and of the modern consequences of those standpoints. As Michel Trebitsch would note (“Devons-nous définir l'intellectuel?”, in Brunet and Lanthier, 2000), “il ne faut pas être victime de cet a priori initial que l'intellectuel commence en 1897 et qu'il doit être en train de mourir ces temps-ci”¹ (p. 39).

Leaving apart the conflict of the definitions, one has to ask oneself whether it is more rewarding from a theoretical point of view to speak about members of a class rather than about distinct individuals. For historian Christophe Charle, author of a seminal work on *Les Intellectuels en Europe au XIX^e siècle* (1996), the intellectuals undoubtedly form a social category whose force in civic and political action resides (also) in the capacity to organize itself and in the solidarity of its members. In modern times the social roles available for the intellectuals have expanded, to the point that one can distinguish many sub-groups bearing their particular interests. An interesting example that can be used to attest the relatively homogenous social origins of such a group is provided by the *intelligentsia*: in the XIXth century the term designated a middle social stratum in Poland and Russia, a group of educated people but with no property (cf. Aleksander Gella, “A Structural Definition of the Intelligentsia Against the Background of Three Historical Periods”, in Mohan, ed., 1987). Subsequently the term was employed on an international level even if that social stratum ceased to exist after the communist regimes gained power in Russia then in Poland. The new *intelligentsia* has lost its national vocation, defining itself in exchange by its tendency towards political and social reform. In Eastern Europe this category brought together the intellectual dissidents.

¹ The observation is an ironic innuendo to Michel Foucault's theory on the *origin and death of man* as a Western knowledge figure, in *The Order of Things* (1966).

According to Pierre Bourdieu, the distinguishing features of the intellectuals that belong to the academic field², which he takes on to study in *Homo academicus* (1984), are: the *esprit de corps*, interested in reproducing the structure of that particular field, *illusio*, and the conscious involvement in playing the ‘game’. Yet this investment in the field may be disturbed in some circumstances: Bourdieu refers to the period following May 1968, when occurs the transition to a ‘new order’ in the universities – a period that generated a lot of frustration due to the unpredictable evolution of careers in the academic field. (A similar situation took place in Romania during the 80s, when the natural course of the young intellectuals’ social evolution had been blocked by the aggressive interference of the political factor.)

The suitable environment for the intellectuals’ functions to be accomplished is provided by the *institution*, defined in antagonism with the *organization*. While an institution prioritizes goals, an organization is oriented towards the means to achieve those goals and towards practical success (cf. Freitag 1995). In a sociological context, the institution stands for “un ensemble de normes s’appliquant à un domaine d’activités particulier et définissant une légitimité qui s’exprime dans une charte ou un code” (Jacques Dubois, *L’institution de la littérature. Introduction à une sociologie*, 1986, p. 31). Except that, in the case of the intellectual institution, the behavioral code is seldom stated as such, and legitimacy has to be constantly appropriated. Turning again to J. Le Goff’s viewpoint, it is remarkable that the historian interpreted the term ‘intellectual’ as signifying the priority of men over institutions (in his “Preface” to *Les Intellectuels au Moyen Age*, Romanian edition, 1994). Even though he identifies and studies several defining features of the medieval academic mentality (such as the tendency to reason, the anti-clerical spirit, the fellowship outlook, and the inclination towards argument³; see Le Goff 1957, Rom. ed., p. 11), Le Goff is likely to regard the individual forms of expression as more visible than the aspects pertaining to the class behavior.

Another hindrance that influences (sometimes even determines) the public stance of the intellectual is ethnicity. It reveals its importance especially in critical circumstances, including the exile situation. For instance, Romanian intellectuals in the communist

² P. BOURDIEU shows that in the context of the French society circulates a clear distinction between *academics* and *intellectuals* (see Bourdieu 1984, Chapitre 2. „Le conflit des facultés”).

³ It is to be further discussed which of these characteristics are still valid today.

period experience the feeling of a particular standpoint due to the historical conditions (being a Romanian becomes as noteworthy as being an intellectual) so that they embody the complete range of feasible positions – starting from the conscience of their mission as depositaries of national cultural values, continuing with self-victimization or compromise of all types. Nevertheless in the framework of a humanistic perspective of the intellectual, a perspective that largely survives during the second half of the XXth century, the trans-national, *universal* character of intellectual identity is being underlined. This is the way theorist Edward W. Said interprets these issues (in his *Representations of the Intellectual*, 1994). Said explicitly adopts Julien Benda's manner of constructing the intellectual class as “a tiny band of super-gifted and morally endowed philosopher-kings who constitute the conscience of mankind” (quoted in Said 1994, p. 4). In the same quasi-utopic line of thinking, Said asks the intellectual to overcome his/ her ethnic condition, as his/ her task is “explicitly to universalize the crisis, to give greater human scope to what a particular race or nation suffered” (p. 33). Said himself succeeded in coming closer to this intellectual ideal type as a ‘citizen of the world’ (as did Noam Chomsky and Pierre Bourdieu, among others), a type that regrettably is on the verge of extinction lately⁴.

Let us ponder for a while the attempts to build a typology of the intellectual. Robert K. Merton (*Social Theory and Social Structure*, 1968) distinguished two main categories: ‘the bureaucratic’ (where the academics fall into, as they are paid by the state) and ‘the unattached’. On the same coordinates – involvement vs. independence – is drawn M’hammed Sabour’s typology of contemporary intellectuals (in Lawrence & Döbler, 1996): a) writers, literati; b) academics, ‘intellocrats’ (the intellectual ‘bureaucracy’ of which Merton spoke); c) propagandists, popularizers (the so-called ‘media intellectuals’ – the journalists –, who are looked down upon by most theorists). Applying the criterion of the value type in the name of which the intellectual expresses his/ her views in the public sphere, Marcel Fournier (“L’intellectuel, le militant et l’expert”, in Brunet and Lanthier, 2000) differentiates *the intellectual* as such, the ‘classical’ type (who makes use of universal values such as good, truth, justice a.s.o.), *the militant* (inspired by ideological beliefs) and *the expert* (possessing a technical, specialized competence). The author of

⁴ Cf. M’hammed SABOUR (1996) and POPIEL & MOHAN (in Mohan, ed., 1987), who make the French tradition responsible for the creation of a universal intellectual, whereas German ideology produced a type of intellectual more nationally-oriented, in the footsteps of Romanticism.

this article admits that these categories have a rather theoretical validity, since in practice we are frequently witnessing various combinations of the respective types. Bourdieu for his part noted in his manifesto for a “Universal Corporatism” (Post—scriptum to *Les Règles de l’Art/ Regulile artei*) that the intellectual type is unstable by its very nature: at any time it might ‘relapse’ to any of the extremes, either to the role of ‘pure’ intellectual, or to that of a politician, journalist, or expert. This is because the targets from the sphere of power and authority are constantly changing and renewing themselves⁵. Consequently, different and creative strategies of action are required. In the Romanian communist society, the intellectual was primarily ‘chosen’ from the writers or the members of the literary institutions (editors for a publishing house or a literary/ cultural journal, etc.).

The functions ascribed to the intellectuals are a result of their positions in the social field, as holders of symbolic capital and leaders of opinion. Traditionally it is their *critic role*⁶ that is emphasized, targeting the *statu quo* (or the ‘establishment’). This function can display two aspects or lines of development: a social and/ or a political one. The intellectual fills in the part of a public conscience for the other social classes; s/he occupies a position (often self-assigned) of social representation which requires his/ her critic attitude concerning the state of things in society. Largely debated was also the issue of the political engagement of the intellectual; in some opinions that would be a defining feature for the social role of the intellectual, in the footsteps of Sartre’s model of a ‘total intellectual’. On the contrary, Julien Benda had favored an attitude of disinterest from ‘political passions’. In the history of Romanian intellectuals in the XXth century, the tendency towards involvement in the policy of one party or another (visible in the thirties and the forties, then at the beginning of the 60s and immediately after 1989) alternated with the opposite penchant of retreat on the outsider’s position, thus becoming able to judge the social and historical evolutions with detachment.

The current status of the intellectuals is under intense controversy, especially by the intellectuals themselves. The contemporary intellectual faces hidden perils which he/she needs to carefully consider: the excessive specialization that leads to loss of authority to express their opinions on matters of public interest; the political compromise (there has

⁵ In this view, see also Virgil NEMOIANU, *A Theory of the Secondary. Literature, Progress and Reaction* (1989), Chapter 1, in particular.

⁶ Cf. BENDA, SAID, BRUNET and LANTHIER etc.

been much talk on the military agenda involved in financing academic research, not to mention the aspects of this compromise in Eastern Europe countries under the socialist rule!); the absence of universal values (although it gets more and more difficult to tell what we now understand by the term ‘universal’) which the intellectual was thought to embody, in an era of multiculturalism and relativism, as it is ours⁷. No wonder that the theory of ‘the death of the intellectual’⁸ attracts more and more followers. The social prestige of the intellectual is suffering a dramatic loss in comparison with a former era when the vocation of this instance was regarded as sacred – this being also the sense in which J. Benda employed the term ‘clercs’. French theorists connect this drop with the exhaustion of the ‘great narratives’ (*les grands récits*, as Jean-François Lyotard called them in *La Condition postmoderne*, 1979). Ironically, the intellectuals themselves created and circulated these narratives. They are also criticized for their elitism⁹ and, on the other hand, for amateurism in the political field in which they feel compelled to intervene.

Yet more optimist voices can be heard: Michel Trebitsch, in the above-mentioned essay, points to the notion of ‘les nouvelles Lumières’, a label more and more often used by sociologists and historians such as Pierre Bourdieu, Roger Chartier, Robert Darnton, Wolf Lepenies... In the same train of thought, M’hammed Sabour believed that “thanks to the universalization of education, the democratization of culture, the valorization of knowledge, and the spread of mass communications, intellectuals have attained the most influential and eminent position they have ever held in the modern society” (in Lawrence & Döbler, eds., 1996, p. 18).

It is very probable that a decision in favor of one or the other of these two opposite viewpoints would now be meaningless, since we are witnessing a process in evolution. What we intended to achieve throughout this theoretical introduction was to call to mind the problems related to the figure of the intellectual. This is necessary in order to better understand the conditions of existence of the intellectual life in Romania during the last

⁷ See SAID, 1994, and the essays published in BRUNET and LANTHIER, 2000, Septième partie: „L’intellectuel est-il mort?”.

⁸ Russel JACOBY (*The Last Intellectuals*, 1987) thinks that the independent left has disappeared in the USA, the intellectuals ‘surviving’ only in the universities (quoted by SAID).

⁹ Needless to remind of the climate of anti-intellectualism in Romania at the beginning of the 90s, a climate to be noticed in other societies as well (United Kingdom, USA), certainly for different reasons; see Lena DOMINELLI and Ankie HOOGVELT, “The Taylorization of Intellectual Labour”, in LAWRENCE and DÖBLER, eds., 1996.

years of communist dictatorship. In the second part of this paper we shall deal with this phenomenon, in the version offered by a *Diary* written by one of the most important actors of the Romanian intellectual field (despite the strictly geographic distance provided by exile): Monica Lovinescu.

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