

# The Public Intellectual in Critical Marxism: From the Organic Intellectual to the General Intellect\*

## El intelectual público en el marxismo crítico: del intelectual orgánico al intelecto general

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### Abstract

The key issue of this essay is to look at Antonio Gramsci's writings as centered on the theme of public intellectual within the Communist experience in the years 1920s and 1930s. The essay also deals with the present significance of what Gramsci said about the organic intellectual regarding the existence of the general intellect in the current capitalist relations of production and reproduction of society.

It is important to bear in mind that Marx is the first one to write about the general intellect in the *Grundrisse*. Later on, the extra parliamentary movement Autonomia theorized on the mass intellectuality in Italy during the 1960s and 1970s. Today Antonio Negri, Paolo Virno and Maurizio Lazzarato are the main authors who are working the theory of the general intellect and

### Resumen

El asunto clave de este artículo es examinar los escritos de Antonio Gramsci como centrados en el tema del intelectual público, de acuerdo con la experiencia comunista de los años 20 y 30 del siglo XX. El artículo también trata la significación presente de aquello que Gramsci dijo acerca del intelectual orgánico, considerando la existencia del intelecto general en las presentes relaciones de producción y reproducción capitalista.

Es importante tener en cuenta que Marx, en los *Grundrisse*, fue el primero en escribir acerca del intelecto general. Más tarde, el movimiento extraparlamentario de la Autonomía en Italia teorizó acerca de la intelectualidad de masa durante los años 60 y 70. Hoy Antonio Negri, Paolo Virno y Maurizio Lazzarato son los principales autores que están trabajando sobre el intelecto

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immaterial labor in the dynamics of the society of information and global capitalism.

### **Key words author**

Public intellectual, organic intellectual, general intellect, immaterial labor, information society, global capitalism.

### **Key words plus**

Gramsci, Antonio, 1891-1937 - Criticism and interpretation, Information society, Capitalism, Communism and intellectuals.

general y el trabajo inmaterial en la dinámica propia de la sociedad de la información y el capitalismo global.

### **Palabras clave autor**

Intelectual orgánico, intelectual público, intelecto general, trabajo inmaterial, sociedad de la información, capitalismo global.

### **Palabras clave descriptor**

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## Presentation

This essay emphasizes the political nature of the public intellectual supported by Gramsci's definition of intellectual, that is, who does perform organizational and directive functions that are constitutive parts of the civil society and political society. Gramsci also insisted on the mission of public intellectuals as agents of a moral and intellectual reform developed from a class perspective. In this last perspective, intellectuals could be acting in favor or against the powers of capital.

The public intellectual is a kind of organic intellectual who accomplishes the function of connecting the mass of population to the leadership of the state through a web of social relationships. The function of public persuasion is what Gramsci termed the hegemony of a particular historical bloc. This bloc constitutes the synthesis of the relationships of might and consent between the governing and the governed classes and groups in a determinate social formation.

The material life of a national social formation is made of the articulation of diverse modes of production that objectively defines the infrastructure of society. The infrastructure is a historical product that results from a relative equilibrium of a certain arrangement of social and political forces. The latter are not only the bearers but also the actors of uninterrupted class struggles.

From a dynamic perspective, the historical bloc is the point of articulation and confluence between the structural long waves of socioeconomic development and the conjuncture's short waves that come from the complex superstructures. The interplay between structural and conjuncture levels conditions the daily life of the classes and groups who antagonize around three critical social nuclei: private property, political domination and ideological submission. At the same time, from a spatial perspective, a historical bloc organizes the social fabric in two basic correlated orders: the public, the private spheres, and its mixed arrangements through which a national formation produces and reproduces the social and political class divide.

## A fundamental historical divide

Why did we win over Trotsky and others? It is well known that, after Lenin, Trotsky was the most popular in our land...But we had the support of the middle cadres, and they explained our grasp of the situation of the masses...Trotsky did not pay attention to these cadres. (Iosif V. Stalin, November 7, 1937, cited in Zizek, 2004, p. 192).

During the period 1917-1926, Antonio Gramsci analyzes the role of public intellectuals and the modern prince (the Communist party) from the perspective of socialist

revolution. Gramsci reflects on the triumph of the socialist revolution in Russia, and examines the possibilities to spread it in Italy and around the globe. Afterwards, when the reactionary forces stopped the revolutionary wave, he devotes his intellectual energies and political knowledge to explain 'für ewig' the reasons for this defeat in Italy and the rest of Europe.

In the prison years, Gramsci focused his work on the political meaning of intellectual civic life in Italy and Soviet Union. In doing so, he revisited the experiences of the groups and individual intellectuals who were part of the counter hegemonic struggles fought by the Socialist Party, and the Communist Party, and the Third International against the dominant blocs in Italy and Russia. In Italy, Gramsci as a secretary of the Communist party participated in the unsuccessful construction of a contra hegemonic bloc within civil society.

Despite of the defeat, it was possible for Gramsci and the Socialists to produce a break in the mass of intellectuals: a break of an organic kind getting intellectuals to be part of the modern prince and fight for the socialist revolution. They were unable to dismantle the dominant bloc led by the native bourgeoisie, the big landowners and the Vatican who were in control of the life of the subaltern classes and groups.

This essay retakes the thought of Gramsci to shed light on the present role-played by the public intellectuals in the local and global spaces of power and counter power. The study will first examine the chronological trajectory of organic and traditional intellectuals following Gramsci's conception that the proletarian revolution takes the form of a theory of the new public intellectuals.

The last part of the study looks into the changes produced by the intervention of science and technology as main forces of capitalism bringing into existence the general intellect, a new category of intellectuals revealed by Marx in the *Grundrisse*. This part of the analysis relates the categories of organic intellectual and general intellect as forms of being public intellectuals. These types of intellectual life come about through successive transformations experienced by capitalism during two centuries.

After 30 years of Gramsci's death, science and technology become embedded components of the social worker, a new figure of labor that Mario Tronti studies in his book *Operai e capitale* (2001). The latter differs from the mass worker who was dedicated to material production during the first stages of capitalism. Instead of material labor, the social worker is dedicated to intellectual production, to immaterial labor as a constituent part of the society of knowledge in the information age.

This social worker is also part of a new kind of political subjectivity: the multitude that not only overcomes the old subjects of people and nation, but also simultaneously rearticulates a political plurality made of all the categories of workers. The multitude is a class subject decentered from the classical paradigm of the industrial proletariat. The former is the main anticapitalist force challenging global capitalism.

## From traditional elite intellectuals to revolutionary organic intellectuals

The proletariat, as a class, is poor in organizing elements. It does not have its own stratum of intellectuals, and can only create one very slowly, very painfully, after the winning of state power. However, it is important and useful for a break to occur in the mass of intellectuals: a break of an organic kind, historically characterized. It is a mass formation, a left tendency, in the modern sense of the word: i.e. one oriented towards the revolutionary proletariat (Gramsci, 1978, p. 460).

The status of the traditional elite intellectual has changed due to the development of modern capitalist societies in Western Europe. In the past, the traditional intellectual was the social category that performed a leading cultural and moral role in premodern communities. We trace the end of latter intellectual leadership caused by the confluence of many factors. The old intellectual leadership collapses in the social and human catastrophe of the First World War, the experience of a new world born from the triumph of the socialist revolution in an underdeveloped society, and the effects of imperialist domination over peoples and nations around the world. We also register the replacement of the traditional public intellectual substituted by a new specialized category: the organic intellectual of the bourgeoisie.

Later on, the new cycle of class struggles shows a counter hegemonic response to the specialized intellectual, the organic intellectual of the proletariat collectively organized into a new Prince. The latter makes possible the triumph of the socialist revolution led by Lenin and the Bolsheviks against the Russian autocracy.

In the aftermath of World War I, Gramsci analyses the role played by Lenin and the Bolsheviks leading a triumphant revolution in Russia, and how does its expansion fail in the rest of the world. Gramsci himself was an active International cadre in Russia and Austria. He participated in this clandestine organization dedicated to display an offensive (war of maneuver) and defensive (war of position) strategy of labor against capital throughout the ascending revolutionary period that went from 1917 to 1924.

After Fascism defeated Gramsci and the Communist Party in Italy, he elaborates being a jail a critical theory of the public intellectuals and the organization of culture. He to ground a socialist politics directed toward an auto regulated civil society. He used the tools of historical materialism Gramsci to explain the role of the traditional intellectual elite regarding the absolute state in European culture:

Since the State is the concrete form of a productive world and since the intellectuals are the social element from which the governing personnel is drawn, the intellectual who is not

firmly anchored to a strong economic group will tend to present the State as an absolute; in this way the function of the intellectuals is itself conceived of as absolute and pre-eminent, and their historical existence and dignity are abstractly rationalized.

Here the traditional intellectual appears as the functionary of the state, and the way modern philosophical idealism expresses it in the works of Hegel and Kant. This intellectual category serves the economic principles of *laissez faire* and *laissez-passer*. However, with the transition to the stage of imperialism, this category of intellectual went into crisis. It was not possible for these intellectual groups connected with the mode of formation of the modern states of continental Europe” to conceive of themselves as absolute and pre-eminent elites.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was a growth of mass production and increasing state intervention. Capitalism looks for a standardization of the intellectuals. Marx observes that capital starts to subsume science. Giuseppe Vacca points out that “Bourgeois culture...developed a theory which allowed for the separation between nature and history, science and philosophy, economics and politics, knowledge and values. The figure of the intellectual was transformed into an ‘expert’ and only as such relocated in the functions of the ruling classes”.

### **From the public spirit to the hegemony on civil society**

If it is true that all types of State must pass through a phase of economic-corporative primitivism, it may be deduced from this that the content of the political hegemony of the new social group which founded the new type of State must be predominantly of an economic order: the problem is that of the reorganization of the structure and real relations between men and the economic world or world of production (Gramsci, Q. 1.053).

Gramsci contributes to build a Marxist theory of the intellectuals presenting them as the public leaders and organizers of a counter hegemonic communist tendency within bourgeois civil society. That happens during the war of position led by the Italian communists resisting Fascism in the internal front, and during the defense of the revolution in the Soviet Union afflicted by the factional struggles of the Bolsheviks, the Moscow trials, and affected in the external front by the bloody purges in several communist parties affiliated with the International.

Gramsci also thinks that a communist perspective leads toward the withering away of the state. The latter produces the liberation of the governed workers from the chains of

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<sup>1</sup> See Gramsci (1971, p. 117).

exploitation and political domination. The disappearance of the state is the only way to reach permanent autonomy and the practice of self-government, that is, the most radical reform intellectual and moral. The Italian intellectuals pursuing that fundamental objective, Gramsci and the Socialist group search for “any working-class institution in Italy that can be compared to the Soviet (...) Something that would allow us to say: the Soviet is a universal form, not a Russian, and only a Russian institution (...) the Soviet is the form of self-government of the working masses. Is there any germ, a vague hope or hint of such Soviet-style government in Italy, in Turin?” (1977, p. 291)

The main questions for this bloc of intellectuals are what is the role of radical communist intellectuals in this revolutionary conjuncture, and how they could be part of an international strategy to extent successfully socialism in the rest of the world, because the ultimate goal is to reach proletarian autonomy and self-government.

Gramsci innovates in theory pursuing the liberation of the governed workers and the whole society from the chains of the state. For him, the Soviet State is not only an instrument of a concrete class, the proletariat or the bourgeoisie, but the state is also the public instrument through which the proletarian revolution creates its own stratum of organic intellectuals.

Firstly, this new breed of public intellectuals establishes new links within the socialist space connecting the revolutionary leadership and the rest of the classes and groups. The proletarian revolution implies a monumental political task: an intellectual and moral reform of the masses directed to transform the complex superstructures producing a new equilibrium between material and intellectual labor in the infrastructure of the socialist formation.

Thinking on the public intellectuals Gramsci addresses the unity of theory and practice, that is, the kernel of the Philosophy of Praxis that demands the contact between intellectual and the mass of simple to build an intellectual and moral bloc as part of the historical process of the class struggle in Italy. In the case of the Soviet Union that intellectual and moral bloc is the only way out of the economic-corporative limit of the workers' state when there is the time of the war of position.

## **The time of defeat and the collective intellectual**

The soviet is the form in which the working class manifests this determination to emancipate itself; the Soviet is the form of self-government of the working masses  
(Gramsci, 1977, p. 291).

The question of the intellectuals is part of 10 Prison Notebooks that Gramsci wrote in prison from 1929 to 1935. There one can find that Gramsci starts his project

conceiving a plan of 4 points in 1929. The first point is a research about the formation of the public spirit in Italy during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Valentino Gerratana says that, in 1931 Gramsci reviews the theme of his political enquiry focused on the Intellectual Question under the title “Scattered Notes and Comments for a History of the Italian Intellectuals”. Gramsci chooses this way to look for plausible explanations for the Communist defeat in Italy.

The content of the Eight Notebook is the centerpiece for the interpretation of Gramsci legacy as led by the Intellectual Question. There Gramsci puts together his thoughts about the intellectuals, and he begins to work out the theory of the organic intellectuals and the proletarian revolution. He is responding to the general reorganization of capitalism in Italy controlled by the Fascist state party. The triumph of Fascism is a passive revolution that shows that the working class and its vanguards did not succeed in developing an alternative to the crisis of the intellectual-functionary.

If we see more closely, the polemic on Revisionism in the Communist movement had to do with the unsolved question of the intellectuals. There were two main responses: On one side, George Sorel and the anti-intellectual position coming from the new anarcho-sindicalist currents, on the other side, Bernstein and the neo-Kantians’ response prone to bourgeois intelligentsia. Despite these two tendencies, Kautsky expressed the official position in the European workers’ movement: the proletarianization of intellectuals.

Nevertheless, Max Adler, an Austro-Marxist who debated with Bernstein, was a distinctive voice within this crucial debate on the Intellectual Question. He called for the ethical-political dimension of socialism though inspired by the neo-Kantian wave. Lenin only appears after 1905 revolution in Russia.

Afterwards the inhuman episodes of WWI and the October Revolution threw many cadres of bourgeois intelligentsia into disarray. Max Weber’s lecture on ‘Science as a Vocation’ was the alternative to separate politics from science, research free from ideology. In Italy, a Liberal organic intellectual, Benedetto Croce took this stance confronted with the presence of the masses led by socialists and anarchists.

In the same period, Antonio Gramsci develops an opposite strategy and inspires a group of socialist intellectuals gathered around *Ordine Nuovo*, a magazine participant in the proletarian struggles in Turin. They begin reviewing the international contributions to the debate around the ethical-political dimension of socialism. In that line of thought, Gramsci, Togliatti, Tasca, Terracini set themselves the problem of the state to solve the crisis in Italian society.

They fix the ethical-political question around the institution of the Soviet as universal, and so to be applied in Italy: “is there any working-class institution in Italy that can be compared with the soviet that shares some of its characteristics?” (Gramsci, 1977, p. 291). The Socialist group acting as public intellectual should rebuild the public sphere

working out the creativity of the proletariat as being the fundamental revolutionary class within the capitalist society.

They identify a particular institution in Turin, the workers internal commissions operating in the factories comparable with the Soviet. This find marked the fundamental turn: to put the question of the intellectuals in relation to the working class. The Ordiovistas took an opposite direction to what Max Weber, a Liberal organic intellectual, recommended to the European traditional intelligentsia to rebuild the bourgeois public sphere in post WWI.

In the first place, the *Ordine Nuovo* poses the urban proletariat as a protagonist of the public space in modern Italy. Gramsci and the Ordiovistas creatively apply the thoughts of Marx and Lenin, and the latter serve as intermediaries between the proletariat and certain strata of left intellectuals. Piero Gobetti, an antifascist liberal, was a proof of their success. Gobetti regularly wrote a column for the magazine, and understood the relevance of the Italian proletariat in the cause of democracy during the postwar period.

### **Counter-hegemony and the political leadership of the ruled**

A human mass does not distinguish itself, does not become independent without, in the widest sense, organizing itself; and there is no organization without intellectuals, that is without organizers and leaders (...) without the theoretical aspect of the theory-practice nexus being distinguished concretely by the existence of a stratum of people 'specialized' in the conceptual and philosophical elaboration of ideas.

(SPN, 1971, pp. 334-5)

The essay *Some aspects of the southern question* (1926), written by Gramsci before his arrest by Fascist forces, is exemplar on the question of public intellectuals and the modern state. His thought resulted from an internal evaluation of how the socialists participated during a revolutionary decade (1917-1926). Gramsci himself was clear about the centrality of the intellectuals to create a stable alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry to resolve the core of the Italian Southern Question.

Gramsci states the intellectual question as central issue to get the nexus between a new type of state and the proletarian revolution saying: "The proletariat as a class is poor in organizing elements. It does not have its own strata of intellectuals, and can only create one very slowly, very painfully, after the winning of state power" (Gramsci, 1978, p. 260).

The quest for a new type of public intellectuals, more precisely, an organic collective intellectual (a new party) comes from the actuality of the revolution to overcome this

non-favorable situation for the proletariat. For Gramsci, the main politico- intellectual goal is to construct a proletarian hegemony taking advantage of the new strategic phase of the war of position in Italy and worldwide. The Communist intellectuals have to derive lessons from the restoration of capitalism in Western Europe. At the same time, the organic intellectuals organized in the Communist party (the new Prince) should solve the question of a viable political order after the historical break in Russia represented by the triumph of the October Revolution.

In Italy, the task to conform a left tendency within the stratum of bourgeois intellectuals was a poignant question too. In the 1920s, the initial proletarian response was to fight the war of maneuver, but the revolution was defeated. Then there was an arduous transit to a new communist strategy: the war of position to build in the short run the civil society in the Soviet Union; and in the long run dispute the hegemony over civil society in Western Europe. The time for frontal attacks of the revolutionary forces was gone. Gramsci expresses this new radical turn in the class struggle worldwide saying:

The war of position demands enormous sacrifices by infinite masses of people. So an unprecedented concentration of hegemony is necessary, and hence a more 'interventionist' government, which will take the offensive more openly against the oppositionists and organize permanently the 'impossibility of internal disintegration –with controls of every kind, political, administrative, etc., reinforcement of the hegemonic "positions" of the dominant group, etc. (1971, pp. 238-239).

The public intellectual closes ranks and files behind the *Dictatorship of the Proletariat*. In the terrain of the war of position Gramsci criticizes Trotsky insistence on a 'permanent revolution' - understood as a continuation of the war of movements, because there is no more room for immediate victory but only new defeats. The Russian Revolution has been a singular historical case in which civil society was gelatinous, extremely weak because of the long dominion of an autocratic regime. The revolutionary confrontation was frontal without significant mediations coming from the civil society. The autocratic state was not an integral state and the limited private life of the population was under the grip of the Orthodox Church.

Antonio Gramsci well defines the October Revolution as the last episode of the war of movement in the political field. From now on, the war of position becomes the most important question of political theory from a proletarian perspective. The war of position is an entirely different strategy. It makes possible Gramsci's critique of Trotsky and his acceptance of Stalin from above revolution. This situation occurs in the Soviet Union during the forced industrialization and the repression of million of peasants in the early thirties

For Gramsci, the war of position is also a culminating phase in the political-historical situation, since in politics the 'war of position', once won, is decisive definitely (1971, p. 239). The latter implies the moment of hegemony over civil society. For the cause of socialism in Western Europe that is the only way that the collective organic intellectual could build a successful transition. A quotation from Gramsci illustrates the obstacles to supersede looking at the differences between the public life in the East and the West in 1918:

In Russia the state (*stricto sensu*) was everything, civil society was primitive and gelatinous; in the West, there was a proper relation between state and civil society, and when the state trembles a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed. The state was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks: more or less numerous from one state to the next (1971, p. 238).

The scope and praxis of the communist public intellectuals require a national look to fight the war of position. They should recognize the local terrain and identify the elements of trench and fortress represented by the private organisms of civil society and its internal networks. All these activities converge into the function of hegemony to get the historical unity of the ruling classes and its allies. This unity is possible through the organic relations between the state (political society) and civil society expressed within a historical bloc.

### **The new organic intellectual: State and revolution**

Every State is ethical in as much as one of its most important functions is to raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level, a level which corresponds to the needs of the productive forces for development, and hence to the interests of the ruling classes (Gramsci, 1971, p. 258).

During the period of communist militancy, Gramsci investigates the role of the modern public intellectual as an organic social function that links the space of civil society with the political society, the state *stricto sensu*. For him, the state is not only an instrument of domination of the classes in power over the subaltern classes and groups. According to Gramsci, the state is also an organizer of the whole society. The state requires the active role of intellectual as individual and collective organizer of private life. They perform the complex function of bringing about the consent active or passive of the population to meet the needs of production on daily basis. In sum, the new category of organic intellectual replaces the traditional elite intellectual that was the controller of public life in premodern times (Gramsci, 1971).

The *Integral State (IS)* that intervenes in society has replaced the Liberal State (LS). The latter had required a different intellectual life. The LS had specialized diverse social strata of intellectuals to perform the economic functions, prevent the periodical crises of the capitalist market, and discipline society via the political society, that is, the governing structure. In that respect, the LS demanded a particular kind of organic intellectual, the intellectual separated from the masses who controls and administers the social knowledge that guarantees the capitalist command.

In the meantime, there was within the Liberal order an increasing antagonism unfolding between the two fundamental classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The modern intellectual vanguards clashed as the goalkeepers of capitalist society, on one side; and the promoters of socialism after the revolutionary triumph of Socialism in Russia, on the opposite side. These antagonisms were the seeds and the ground for the existence of the Integral State as the political formula to channel and tame the national and international crisis of capitalism unleashed in the late 20s.

The crisis of the Liberal state marks the last stage of Gramsci contra-hegemonic thinking. Gramsci directs all the efforts to fight in the ideological realm the strategic war of position against the intellectual-functionary proclaimed by Max Weber. That ideological combat is also directed against the 'Iron Law of the Oligarchy' theorized by Robert Michels as an insurmountable feature of all political organizations.

The intellectual function is essential to every modern society because it defines the fabric of hegemony. That is the practical discovery made by Lenin and the October Revolution that Gramsci theorizes later on. Here is how the latter defines an organic intellectual:

By intellectual must be meant not only those strata commonly understood by this denomination, but in general the whole social stratum that exercises organizational functions in the broad sense, both in the field of production, and in the cultural one, and in the politico-administrative one (Gramsci, 1971, p. 97).

Gramsci is mainly interested in analyzing the socio-political function of the new intellectuals when they exercise hegemonic functions within capitalist society. He says that "it is necessary to recall and examine their psychological attitude towards the fundamental classes which they put into contact in the various fields. Have they a 'paternalistic' attitude towards the instrumental classes? Or do they believe that they are their organic expression?" (1971, p. 97).

Gramsci introduces the class perspective to judge the character of this new kind of intellectual function that questions the neutrality of the intellectual-functionary. He challenges the idea that intellectuals are an autonomous and independent social group.

On the contrary, he poses that every social fundamental group has its own particular specialized category of intellectuals. They give it “homogeneity and awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields”.<sup>2</sup>

In that respect, Giuseppe Vacca, author of the influential essay, *Intellectuals and the Marxist theory of the State* (1977), affirms that Gramsci opened up the way for a differentiated analysis of the intellectual groups linked to the analysis of classes. In effect, Gramsci links up the specific intellectual skills to the diverse functions which the fundamental classes in modern society perform in the infrastructural and superstructural levels. The organic nature of the intellectual refers to the function of the bourgeoisie and proletariat in the world of capitalist production.

Gramsci gives the example of the organic intellectuals created by the bourgeoisie: “the capitalist entrepreneur creates alongside himself the industrial technician, the specialist in political economy, the organizers of a new culture, of a new legal system, etc” (1971, p. 16).

The other fundamental class, the proletariat needs its own organic intellectuals in order to be the ruling class and overcome capitalist society. Gramsci chooses this way to explain the meaning and projection of hegemony after the success of the October Revolution. In this respect, the teachings of Lenin and the Bolsheviks are a promissory point of departure. The Bolsheviks succeeded during the war of movements, when they performed the radical function of public intellectuals who believed that they were the organic expression of Russian proletariat. However, after the initial revolutionary triumph, the Russian proletariat needs to create several strata of intellectuals in the economic, social and political fields in pursuing its path towards Communism.

In general, to be an intellectual organic to a fundamental class means to embody technical skills and perform directive functions with regard to a specific mode of production. An organic intellectual is a kind of public intellectual that derives a precise sense from the totality described by the socio-economic formation. Each social formation is made of the articulation of several modes and forms of production based on determinate relations of dominance. Then the concept of an organic public intellectual presupposes that the forms of direction and social subordination are necessarily linked to the social division of labor. The concept of organic public intellectual concretely joints the social division of labor and the forms of the state within a specific socio-economic formation.

## The workers as public intellectuals

In the formation of leaders, one premise is fundamental: is it the intention that there should always be rulers and ruled, or is it the objective to create the conditions in which this

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<sup>2</sup> See from Gramsci: “Comments and scattered notes for a group of *seáis* on the history of intellectuals” (1971, p. 9).

division is no longer necessary? In other words, is the initial premise the perpetual division of the human race, or the belief that this division is only an historical fact, corresponding to certain conditions? (Gramsci, 1971, p. 144).

Under the conditions of capitalism, the labor force in order to reach autonomy needs to develop its own political leaders, its own organizers, who make possible its political constitution as a class. However, the working classes need a new type of Jacobinism to get this goal, that is, an strong intellectual leadership tied to a democratic mission. Gramsci comes up with these thoughts from his contemporary interpretation of Machiavelli's Prince.

The new Prince is a kind of Sorelian myth, the creation of a concrete fantasy, which acts on a dispersed and atomized multitude to arouse and organize its collective will. The former is not possible anymore through the person of an individual *condottiere*. There is the need of a Modern Prince to challenge the era of bourgeois hegemony, a collective public intellectual, which "cannot be a real person, a concrete individual. It can only be an organism, a complex element of society in which a collective will, which has been partially recognized and affirmed in action, already begins to take shape (...) and it is the political party –the first cell in which the germs of a collective will tending to become universal and total are gathered together" (Gramsci, 1949, pp. 5-6).

Like Lenin before him, Gramsci shares the idea that the proletariat gets historical materialism from outside. The new Prince resulted to be the necessary mediating force, which enables the masses to transcend their alienated condition. However, these common thoughts in Lenin and Gramsci versions of Marxism represent a departure from Marx, because the latter never developed a clear doctrine of the party. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx affirms that Communists "do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement" (Feuer, 1959, p. 20).

Marx did not view the emergence of revolutionary consciousness as primarily a process of education from above, but as the byproduct of irreconcilable economic antagonisms. For Gramsci this unstructured view of the party is inadequate. An ordinary worker left to its spontaneity, still has disparate elements, and contradictory values and desires. Gramsci believes that pure spontaneity is a fiction, an anarchist delusion. He attacks Sorel faith in spontaneity, a determinism that "leaves the collective will in the primitive and elementary phase of its initial formation" (Gramsci, 1949, p. 5).

The party as a collective public intellectual solves the problem to unify theory and practice, to render explicit that which is still implicit. If the party succeeds in its task, the proletariat will effect the passage from a corporate role of limited opposition to a hegemonic role of conscious action towards revolutionary goals. The party provides the working classes a conceptual framework to create its integral autonomy and self-government.

Gramsci defines the new Prince tasks as being a public intellectual at national level: “The Modern Prince must be and cannot but be the proclaimer and organizer of an intellectual and moral reform, which also means creating the grounds for a subsequent development of the of the national-popular collective will towards the accomplishment of superior and total form of modern civilization” (Gramsci, 1949, p. 8).

The elaboration of organic intellectuals, for whatever class or social group, implies the formation of a new historical bloc made of a new mode of production and state. The creation of public intellectuals by the working class is only possible in connection with the transition to socialism. There is the creation not the substitution of one stratum of public intellectuals for another. It has to be the establishment of specific conditions to allow a new social organization of intellectual and manual labor. In principle, that happened in the experience of the factory councils and the early Council theory developed by Gramsci and the socialist staff of the Ordine Nuovo.

The Council theory rested on the notion of revolution from below, a molecular, spontaneous process occurring in the socio-economic infrastructure. The factory councils were a spread phenomenon in Europe and the United States too after 1916. Gramsci and the Ordinovistas applied this theoretical and practical experience to Italy using the concept of hegemony originated by Lenin combined with the writings of the Caribbean intellectual, Daniel de Leon, the theorist of the American Wobblies, and the reports from the British shop stewards’ movement.

This new kind of knowledge comes directly from the world of production and new relationships within the producers. The working class public intellectuals are the subjects in command of the critical re-elaboration of “the intellectual activity that exists in every one at a certain degree of development, modifying its relationships with the muscular-nervous effort itself” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 9).

The factory councils theorized by the Ordinovistas were inspired by the example of a triumphant Russian revolution, which indicated that soviets could furnish the basis for a socialist state. After that, Gramsci incorporated this experience to the creation of the Communist Party in Livorno. The productive process of capitalism in crisis no generates of itself the ‘inner liberation’ of the industrial workers. The war of movements ends when the occupied factories were returned to the employers via a referendum that Gramsci rejected arguing, “a revolutionary movement can only be founded on the proletarian vanguard and must be conducted without prior consultation, without the apparatus of representative assemblies. A revolution is like a war” (September 24, 1920).

The new time is the war of position, and the party as a collective intellectual should not merely lead the multitudes into battle; it should also endeavor to create and instill in them an all-embracing working-class consciousness. To reach that stage there is the need for the active, direct participation of all members of the movement; a free an open

confrontation of ideas, a constant process of critical research and political invention. The organic intellectual of the working class needs democratic centralism:

a centralism in movement, so to speak; that is, a continual adaptation of the organization to the real movement, a blending of thrust from below with orders from above (...) Democratic centralism is "organic" because it takes account of the movement, of the organic manner in which history reveals itself, and does not rigidify mechanically into bureaucracy; and because at the same time it takes account of that which is relatively stable and permanent (Gramsci, 1949, p. 76).

For Marx, and Gramsci too, revolutionary science was not autonomous, conceived independently of class practice; it was not knowledge of an objectified world, purified of all subjectivity and separated from historical development (Femia, 1987, p. 160). For Gramsci, revolutionary consciousness is not something inherent in proletarian experience, neither is it something that is simply injected into the masses from without. Gramsci asserts that "Mass adhesion or non-adhesion to an ideology is the real critical test of the rationality and historicity of modes of thought...constructions which corresponds to the needs of a complex and organic historical period, always impose themselves and prevail at the end" (Gramsci, 1949, p. 18).

From these theoretical and practical consideration one can conclude that the new public intellectual of the working class is not a mere brain-worker, he is actively involved in practical life, as constructor, organizer, and permanent persuader. That is in correspondence with the Philosophy of Praxis: Marxism is a philosophy which is also politics and politics which is also philosophy (Gramsci, 1949, p. 125).

From the experience of a revolutionary situation to its defeat the organic public intellectual of the working class should be able to act and think not only in the war of movements but above all in the war of position that marks the definitive path towards a radical type of human association, Communism. This line of thought coincides with Alistair Davidson conclusions, that what constitutes Gramsci's novelty is the displacement of the problem of revolution in the West from the party (theory) and the masses (practice) to the relations and links between them (1974, p. 141).

There is a last reflection on the organic public intellectual and the question of communist society inspired by Gramsci. The working class has a revolutionary perspective in the realm of politics. The latter becomes the 'tendential' law of the political overturning of the relations of domination between rulers and ruled, between governing classes and governed classes. That means the knowledge of the relations of forces, and from the analysis of situations how the proletarian public intellectuals can lead most effectively

given the communist ends. In that respect, there is a last thought of Gramsci about the new organic revolutionary intellectuals:

In the formation of the leaders, one premise is fundamental: is it the intention that there should always be rulers and ruled, or is the objective to create the conditions in which this division is not longer necessary? In other words, is the initial premise the perpetual division of the human race, or the belief that this division is only a historical fact, corresponding to certain conditions? (1971, p. 144).

### **From the organic intellectual to the general intellect**

Communication is the form of capitalist production in which capital has succeeded in submitting society entirely and globally to its regime, suppressing all alternative paths. If ever an alternative is to be proposed, it will have to arise from within the society of the real subsumption and demonstrate all the contradictions at the heart of it (Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, p. 347)

The development of fixed capital indicates to what degree general social knowledge has become a direct force of production, and to what degree, hence, the conditions of the process of social life itself have come under the control of a general intellect and have been transformed in accordance with it. (Marx, 1973, p. 706).

In the perspective of critical Marxism, the decade of the 60s represents an international revolutionary wave. It corresponds to the process in which labor challenges capitalist production. Labor appears in the international scene demanding autonomy in the socio-political realm and self-valorization in the terrain of economy. This transition ended with the passage from the economic paradigm in which industry and the manufacture of durable goods occupies the privileged position to a new paradigm in which the tertiary production dominates in capitalist production. Now is the time of services and information, the process of economic post modernization controlled by capital.

This third economic paradigm, the one in which the information of production commands the reproduction of an extended bourgeois society, one can assert, that it has been accompanied by a parallel third structural transformation of the public sphere. This last proposition reminds us the pioneer work of Jürgen Habermas titled *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, originally published in 1962.

For our purposes to enquire about the question of the public intellectual, we could also theorized based on a combination of Gramsci and Habermas ground work on this issue that there are three structural transformations of the public sphere: the first historical

moment happens when the agriculture and the extraction of raw materials was dominant. Here the traditional intellectual has the dominant position in the superstructure.

The second moment corresponds to a shift of economic paradigm ran by the predominance of industry and manufacture of durable goods in which the category of an organic intellectual, a new kind of public intellectual is created to attend the task to construct the realm of the complex structures of civil and political society. These organic intellectuals actively participate in the goal of economic modernization, that is, industrialization.

The third moment is the informatization of capitalist production that brings about a third intellectual category: the general intellect that gains the first stage of the class struggle in the 60s. It represents a new transformation of public space. One emblematic case of this moment is a radical experience named Laboratory Italy that lasted more than a decade, but it also occurs simultaneously in many other places throughout the world.<sup>3</sup>

According to Hardt, this laboratory Italy went through three periods of revolutionary politics. The first period corresponds to the worker militancy of the 60s, the social and cultural experimentation of the 70s, and it ends with the repression of the 80s (Virno & Hardt, 1996, p. 4). Yet he concludes that during the 90s, the experiments of Laboratory Italy are now on the political conditions of a large part of the world, but there remain differences with the original experience in terms of the abolition of the State and the refusal of political representation. At the same time, there are renovated efforts to constitute a community that is democratic and autonomous outside of political representation and hierarchy. These efforts are rooted on the power of labor not only being the source of wealth, but also as the source of sociality itself (Virno & Hardt, 1996, p. 5).

The new laboring practices made possible the existence of a new kind of public intellectual that goes beyond the idea and practice of an organic collective intellectual. This new reality defined as general intellect, immaterial labor, and mass intellectuality corresponds to a new type of subjectivity born from the social movements against capitalist exploitation. It implies a form of self-valorization of labor, that is, the 'refusal of work' and the essay of new forms of life in the realm of nonwork. In other words, there is a line of flight from the institutions of the capitalist State and the relations of waged labor.

The general intellect also corresponds to the moment in which occurs the real subsumption of the process of labor by the capitalist relationship, which means that the seeds of communism and communist society exist in the heart of capitalism. From the latter emerges out a new figure of labor "that not only answers the basic needs of all but

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Hardt uses the term laboratory Italy to introduce a volume devoted to *radical thought in Italy* (Virno & Hardt, 1996, pp. 1-9).

also heightens and intensifies our desires” (Virno & Hardt, 1996, p. 6), the collective pursuit of pleasures.

### The general intellect

When Antonio Gramsci thinks about the intellectuals and the organization of culture, he says that all men are intellectuals but not all in society have the function of intellectuals. In this postmodern moment characterized by the informatization of capitalist production intellectuality is not a phenomenon limited to the individual or the closed circle of the intellectual-functionary or to the more extended circle of the organic collective intellectual, the precedent ways of being public intellectual.

Today intellectuality is a mass phenomenon that has to do with the collective intelligence, and it happens when the technico-scientific knowledge and practices are spreading in society as a whole. In this respect, Paulo Virno asserts that the post-Fordist workforce produces increasingly on the basis of its immaterial labor. The latter concept, according to Maurizio Lazzarato, is the labor that produces the informational, cultural or affective element of the commodity; and much of its value arises from the social activities outside the production process in the sphere of nonwork.

The sphere of nonwork is an integral part of the public sphere defined as “the site where struggles are decided by other means than war”.<sup>4</sup> That implies an additional complexity to the original concept of public sphere developed by J. Habermas in his Habil-Thesis, *The structural transformation of the public sphere* (1962). According to Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt, authors of *Public sphere and experience* (1972), within the public sphere there exist the bourgeois public sphere, the proletarian public sphere, and the new public spheres of production (1993, p. xlvi).

In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, bourgeois society constituted the public sphere and made the attempt to overcome the limits of the capitalist mode of production. The bourgeois public sphere is anchored in the formal characteristics of communication, but if one takes its real substance, the former is the aggregate of individuals spheres abstractly related. From the latter the contradictions emerge that in advanced capitalist societies allow the potential for a counter public sphere (Kluge, 1993, p. xliii).

The counter public sphere is here connected with the idea of a new proletarian public intellectual. The latter also takes from Marx, when in *the Critique of Hegel's philosophy of right* says: “the proletariat announces the dissolution of the existing social order, it only declares the secret of its own existence, for it is the effective dissolution of this order” (Tucker (Ed.), 1972, p. 23).

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<sup>4</sup> See Kluge (1993).

This is the time when social communication and the social relationship that constitutes it become productive uncovering the secret of post-Taylorist production.<sup>5</sup> This reality not only transforms the classical forms of production that also claims for a new way of organizing intellectual life in post-capitalist society as a whole.

The immaterial workers satisfy a demand by the consumer and at the same time establish the demand. They produce subjectivity as well as economic value. Its presence shows us that were broken down all the oppositions among economy, power and knowledge.

In sum the presence of immaterial work, the one that Marx named *general intellect* means that the new capitalist expansion put subjectivity to work which implies that productive cooperation increases including within it the production of affects as well as the cultural contents of commodities.

Bases on what Paolo Virno says, this accomplishment did not get revolution to break capitalist control, but instead it put in place Capital's Communism, which is a sort of passive revolution. That means that the postmodern mass proletariat as a multitude has to overcome the capitalist control over immaterial labor in order to pursue the radical revolution.

Nowadays when capitalism experiences an unprecedented crisis within the realm of immaterial labor, the multitude as a political subject got the opportunity to accomplish *the labor of Dionysus* not only criticizing the State-form but also putting in crisis Empire, the new form of sovereignty. That would be the way to inaugurate a needed period of radical democracy around the world. It is time to change the gears of global productivity and to liberate work from the submission to capital.

If that happens the pass from organic intellectual to general intellect will be reach at last. Meanwhile, the multitude task ahead is monumental. However, the first step has been taken, and according to Hardt and Negri: "The telos of the multitude must live and organize its political space against Empire and yet within the maturity of the times and the ontological conditions that Empire presents" (2000, p. 407). This challenge is part of the way of building a workers' contra-hegemony, to develop a radical democracy's strategy against capital's domination over the groups and subaltern classes in Latin America and the rest of the world.

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<sup>5</sup> See Maurizio Lazzarato (1996, p 139).

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