

TO OUTWIT MODERNITY:

INTELLECTUALS AND POLITICS IN TRANSITION

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Introduction

Modernity as a concept used by Marx, Weber and many others, is 'broadly about the massive social and cultural changes which took place from the middle of the sixteenth century, and it is consequently and necessarily bound up with the analysis of industrial capitalist society as a revolutionary break with tradition and a social stability founded on a relatively stagnant agrarian civilisation. Modernity was (and is - JM and NC) about conquest - the imperial regulation of land, the discipline of the soul, and the creation of truth' (Turner, 1990:4). Modernity is, we may add, about the conquest of peoples too.

Modernity is thus about the progressive subjugation of nature, ostensibly in the interests ultimately of all the people. It is therefore at root a composite and collective dream of progress, freedom, truth, and 'emancipation from want' (Harvey, 1989:139).

Scepticism has always existed about this or that path to modernity; the marxist critique of the capitalist path is probably the best known and also the most important. It is only recently that scepticism has begun to be expressed about the project of modernity itself; about the very possibility of emancipation and perfectibility under any regime of modernity, capitalist or socialist.

Sociology is a specific mode of analyzing social life that succeeds insofar as it tracks the representations of social actors, and expands their strategic self-understanding about what it is they could do to optimise justice, their freedom, and their quality of life (see in this regard Touraine, 1988; Wexler, 1987; Therborn, 1981). Sociology is also a universalizing form of analysis, or has at least a universalizing tendency within it. This is a result of the universalizing tendency within modernity itself (Heller, 1984) and a consequence too of the activities of that category of actors whose project modernity is, namely the intellectuals. That sociologists are a subset of this category is thus no accident. Hence classical sociology depicted (and sometimes still depicts) the movement of societies from tradition to modernity as an evolutionary, progressive and historical inevitability. There are naturally local and particularist sociologies which track the self-representations of specific sets of actors within society -

the labour movement, the women's movement, etc, together with a variety of phenomenological and ethnographic methodologies. There are also sociologies with pretensions to universalization (ie they take the form of universal generalizations) but which make sense only in terms of the self-representation and form of life of a specific set of actors. Marxists have long accused Parsonian sociology of being a representation of the conservative ideology and self-understanding of the middle class, not of all social actors (Robertson and Turner, 1989); in South Africa, Parsonian sociology as an import found resonance with an even smaller set of social actors, the emergent, urbanising Afrikaner middle class.

Despite strenuous and illuminating attempts, marxist sociology in South Africa has by and large not itself escaped this frame. Insofar as it has tracked a tendential movement of South African society as a whole, it has done it from the point of view of the working class, or of the labour movement (see for example Davies, 1979). The self-representations and projects of other social actor groups in the society are either cast in the role of dominators or dominated, or are largely (and sometimes arrogantly) overlooked as of relatively minor importance.

Both of these particularisms in the end fail as representations of the society since they are unable to provide an overall context for a path which society as a whole might follow for life-improvement for all. Neither the neo-Parsonian vision of South Africa as a society of discrete, stable, family-based households in wage employment, nor the marxist vision of us all as proto-proletarians has much chance of articulating with the experiences and self-representations of vast swathes of social actors emerging especially in the cities - the unemployed, the single-parent families, gay groups, not to mention the continued existence of a large peasantry, nor the pervasive culture of the middle class that permeates the society at every nook and cranny.

South Africa has thus not yet indigenously developed a progressive universalistic sociology. What we have at best is a rich tradition of social history which describes particular communities but abstains from locating them on any path toward the future that might be shared by significantly different groups. There are very many reasons for this, but a major one is certainly that South African sociology has been blocked from developing a scepticism towards, let alone a fully-fledged critique of modernity by that last, unfinished world drama of modernity, the liberation struggle against apartheid. While this remains unachieved - an event which is eagerly awaited by virtually everyone in the world - reservations about the expected cornucopia which liberation might bring is not so much premature as inappropriate, smacking as it does of middle class sour grapes and bourgeois resentment.

The aftermath of the unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) in early 1990 has pricked that bubble in a small way. The liberation movement leadership, in direct proportion to their proximity to rule, has begun to realise the impossibility of reconstructively satisfying all the needs and demands which have impelled their offensive movement against the state. In other words, they begin to have intimations of the fallibility of modernity. The reasons for this curious inversion whereby the movement and party leadership, as incipient rulers, happen upon the limits of modernity in advance of its failure and also before the recipients-to-be (the rank and file) are to be found not only in the strategic imminence of their accession to power. Especially the SACP leadership, after three decades in exile and therefore living in physical and ideological proximity to Eastern Europe, cannot have failed to see the looming disillusionment from below that has fuelled the social revolutions there. Furthermore, liberal intellectuals have for some time - at least since the early 1970s - been articulating a language of feasibility, of not enough money, and of finite resources. From the perspective of an offensive struggle, these could of course always be dismissed as arguments protective of capitalist relations of production and bourgeois rule. They still are. But from a perspective of imminent take-over, the real world restrictions on implementability come to sound much more persuasive.

The argument, and concern, of this paper is to understand the strategic implications that follow from the emergence of a distinction between offensive and reconstructive struggle, and to understand what strategic opportunities and risks follow when the tension between the two begins to prize open civil society, begins to open possibilities for new public spaces. In so doing, we are attempting to outline a sociology appropriate for a new South Africa. In our view, this analysis must develop a firm understanding of the domain of civil society with its contending groups of social actors, and of how this domain and its emergent powers relates to the conventional domain of representative political activity. Our argument will be that the function of intellectuals takes a new direction in this newly prized-open civil society. It is just remotely possible that South African society stands a chance of sidestepping the enervating dialectic from hope-in-modernity (and its classical sociological correlates), to inevitable disillusionment-in-modernity (and its many contemporary forms and responses - post-modern cynicism, melancholy and nostalgia; social movement radicalism that turns its back on all forms of party representation and formal political process; international guerilla action; East European anti-political politics; and a sociological submersion in action research and the particularities of self-enclosed local social phenomena). None of this would be particularly constructive for South Africa.

On the threshold of the present

February 2, 1990 marks the day on which President FW de Klerk, in response to multiple pressure, broke the logjam in South African politics by unbanning a range of political groupings and persons notably the ANC and the SACP as we have said.¹ Emblematically speaking, this act pulled South Africa onto the threshold of a radical present en route to a radical future. There are naturally numerous strands of prehistory which continue to temper this present with traces of historical determination and which consequently persuade unreflectively modernising intellectuals that theirs is the task to create the future out of the certainties of the past; there are now also strands of post history which suggest to others that the future is destined for anarchic, doom-laden chaos and that the only intellectual activity possible is helpless ironic or nostalgic play on the shifting edge of disaster. It is with neither of these two extremes that this paper is concerned. Before February 2, the offensive strategy of the liberation movement, itself a complex product of material conditions, strategy and state repression, had the effect of sharply dichotomising civil society and the state under the rubric of the 'people/state' antagonism (Laclau and Mouffe, 1984:122-134). Opposition formations operating under this rubric were mass movements that represented the radical needs of an oppressed people. In these formations, the distinction between the public and the private was collapsed. The bannings and State of Emergency since 1983 had the effect of underwriting this conflation still further: for example, the civil United Democratic Front (UDF) and the political ANC were widely perceived to be 'the same thing'.²

Under this paratactical division,³ the state represented the simple denial of the needs of the people. The antagonism thus constructed had the effect of justifying absolutely the legitimacy of the struggle for liberation tout court, as well as all means of achieving it. Such an antagonism cannot logically be mediated, and can only be definitively resolved by the absolute obliteration of the state via revolution. The popular utopia thus envisaged was a Rousseauesque republic of public virtue, where all private wills must coincide with the general will (see Levine, 1987; Higonnet, 1989; Koselleck, 1988). 'The people' would rule via structures of direct social control without the intermediation of political structures. Such structures as there had to be would directly represent the will of 'the people'. Popular expectation was that the republic would entail the end of all want, inequality and private difference.

Amongst other things, February 2 denotes a repositioning of the ambiguous antagonism between the civil and the political. By moving towards negotiations, the leaders of mass movements move closer towards the political domain and its criteria of operation and potentially, at least (from within the rubric of the 'people/state' antagonism), further away from the people and their needs.

Another way of putting this is to say that, by moving closer to the political, at least part of the movement must lose some of its character as a mass movement and adopt some of the lineaments of a political movement or party.

Before February 2, progressive social theorists by and large practised critique, which demonstrated the radical impossibility of reforming the present state. That is, they practised on the discursive plane the analogue of activist strategy on the ground. Much progressive intellectual work before February 2 was thus oriented towards theorizing (or describing) the reasons for, or the path towards, the overthrow of the apartheid state. Just like activists on the ground, however, intellectuals were caught within this strategy and constrained by its dichotomous and unmediated nature. The major consequence for the purposes of this paper was that they were completely unpractised in conceiving reconstruction, or policy. Non-state technocrats, such as there were, tended to be liberals in more or less conscious alliance with big capital.

The reaction of progressive intellectuals to this was, by and large, to offer a critique of technicism, and thereby to consign these intellectuals to the camp of the state (see for example Buckland, 1982; Chisholm, 1982). By the mid-80s, some debate had begun as to how progressive sociologists might start to reposition themselves with respect to the reforming state on the one hand, and the liberation movement on the other (see Webster, 1982; Muller & Cloete, 1985a). Where the strategy was not to be one of mere refusal, the debate at the time began to look for ways out of the paratactical division by exploring the Habermasian distinction between analytical interests (said to be proper to the intelligentsia) and strategic interests (said to be proper to intellectuals organic to the movement) (Habermas, 1974). We held at the time to the position that it was absolutely wrong for intellectuals qua intellectuals to take on strategic concerns, to cross over into the domain of the political, and to take over positions of leadership or influence in the movement. Then much imbued by the negative potential of the intelligentsia's will to power (Foucault, 1977; Lyotard, 1984), our analysis at the time consigned intellectuals not so much to critique - we could for instance envisage the spelling out of options or scenarios - as to serving as handmaidens to the movement, however much we attempted to re-theorize this role (Muller and Cloete, 1985a, 1985b).

In retrospect, our position underestimated the extent to which this very distinction continued to parallel the antagonism of 'people/state' which underpinned the oppositional politics of the time. Indeed, it is difficult to see how it could have been otherwise in this hyper-polarised period. As Laclau and Mouffe remark: 'Antagonism does not admit tertium quid' (1984:129). In other words, there was literally no third progressive social space that could have been occupied outside the camps of the 'people' or 'the state'.⁴ The question of being

'with the people' was further sharpened in terms of whether intellectuals were 'aligned' to the movement or not. Since there were no mass community or workplace struggles that directly engaged whites in this period, this often meant membership of small, highly politicised groups. All too frequently the question of intellectual contribution could be raised only after the question of political membership had thus been settled. Many of the best progressive intellectuals, refusing this implicit blackmail, were rendered socially invisible during this time.

Constricting as this was for white intellectuals, for black intellectuals it was quite disastrous. Their allegiance to the people could be legitimately demonstrated only by direct political or professional service (especially law and medicine) and the implicit obligation pulling them away from analytical, let alone reconstructive, work was in nearly every case simply too strong. Some accounts by black intellectuals blame 'white hegemony' in the universities for the general absence of a black intelligentsia in South Africa (Evans, 1989; Vilakazi and Vilakazi, 1985). Of course, the white universities failed miserably to address the issue of developing a black intelligentsia, but by far the majority of those that did emerge were pulled irresistibly away from intellectual work and into professional or political work by the logic of the 'people/state' antagonism which subordinated all other forms of struggle to the attainment of political power. The only other option for progressive black intellectuals was to escape abroad. At the point that the slogan 'Liberation now, education later'⁵ became the strategic guide to education struggle, for example, the impossibility of progressive reconstructive intellectual work was virtually ensured. It could be concluded that the offensive strategy and its paratactical division was at least partly responsible for blocking, however inadvertently, the emergence of an indigenous black intelligentsia.

The period immediately prior to February 2 - roughly between 1985 and 1989 - was one of serious ferment in progressive circles. The labour movement intellectuals who had positioned themselves either within or close to the unions as early as the 1970s, began to be joined by research formations that were explicitly intended to provide policy information to the liberation movement. Most of these were impelled more by the evident need than by any clear idea about how to move into progressive reconstructive policy work. Indeed, the anxiety evoked by the transition from a known critique to an unknown reconstruction, haunted and continues to haunt progressive intellectuals. These intellectuals, beginning to move more purposefully into policy research roles, had many features of a new intellectual stratum, but the 'people/state' antagonism continued to structure their understanding of their role, and the major debate in this period continued to concern the question of alignment: should

intellectuals as individuals or research structures align themselves to the movement (ie become an affiliated part of the movement and hence subject to movement discipline) or not? In the terrain structured by the 'people/state' antagonism there was still no space to be located outside of the movement - except, by insistent if implicit implication, within the state. Nevertheless, this period did see the institution of a fair number of policy research bodies with their faces set firmly against the state, and related in formal or informal ways to structures of the liberation movement, including the labour movement.⁶

February 2 shifted the horizon of liberation, previously located somewhere in the future indefinite, to within tangible reach. With this, and quite suddenly, a second path to power, alongside the original, offensive confrontational path opened up. The emergence of this new path, the path of negotiation, has had three effects on the movement. First, it has focused attention on the imminence and hence urgent practicalities not only of negotiation but of actual rule; second, it has opened up the distinction between the discourse of radical needs and demands of 'the people' that has impelled the offensive path on the one hand, and the urgent necessity for developing a discourse of means for trying to achieve or address them, on the other; and third, it has at least raised the question as to whether the liberation movement needs to develop a distinction between mass civil society structures which would articulate the radical needs of the people, and properly political structures which would attempt to embody these, and other needs and demands from other interest groups, in a new policy plan for all South Africans. In other words, it has raised the question of civil society and its relation to the party and the state. With this, the terrain of operation of progressive intellectuals in South Africa has changed decisively. Overnight, movement political leaders have come to need practical, workable policy alternatives to a host of issues which have, and which will, come up during negotiation. There is only one possible sector where the technicalities of these workable alternatives could issue from, and the political leaders will turn with increasing urgency to the intellectuals who have become positioned more or less closely to them. And these leaders are unlikely to have much sympathy or use for those who have practised critique for so long that the transition to reconstruction is difficult if not impossible.

Theoretical niceties concerning critiques about technicism, or the incorporability of positive knowledge, a legacy from pre-February 2 likely to endure for some time, will hold no water with the movement leadership. If progressive intellectuals hold back in this period, they will open up a path for technocratic intellectuals to the movement, who have long had no qualms about proposing technical solutions to politico/technical problems.

But this is a time of great risk, for political leaders and intellectuals alike.

Reconstructive means-oriented work, if it is forced to proceed too quickly - and there is every indication that President de Klerk means to push the process of negotiation towards a political settlement as quickly as possible - will develop at an ever-greater distance from the needs of the people. In fact, this feature of current South African politics could on its own force the liberation movement into power as a party destined to disappoint the aspirations of the masses and, hence, precipitate the loss of faith in the promises of modernity that has evolved so ineluctably in the West and East alike. In what follows, we will explore whether this is avoidable in South Africa or not.

It is important to emphasize that February 2 marks a formal, not an historical, rupture. Many of the formal post-February 2 features we identify were gestating long before February 2 and emerged, in many cases, as rudimentary forms before then. Perhaps more seriously, many pre-February 2 features have endured and will continue to endure long beyond that date. Whether the potential prefigured by the rupture will be realised will depend upon strategic and political factors. For example, many activists developed a power base within the 'people/state' rubric. Probably by invoking the will of the people, some of them may resist all post-February 2 attempts to mediate this popular will by political means (negotiations), or by policy formulation, which they will reject insofar as it is not 'by and for the people' - that is, by them. In truth, the worst thing that can happen is for negotiations and policy formulation to happen behind the backs of the people. However, the resistance of this group of activists and intellectuals will have the effect of closing down rather than opening up public spaces in civil society which, we will argue later, are essential for the success of both negotiations and democratic policy formation.

It is not clear right now how political leaders will attempt to deal with these contending tendencies, especially as they involve two different kinds of power, political and popular. In any case, this is something which practical politics - organisation, strategy and charisma - will decide. The question for intellectuals is how they will deal with this tricky, imperfectly transformed terrain. Will (or even should) they professionalise themselves? Will we see a dissolution, or universalization of ideological commitments and a consolidation of their position vis a vis other social classes as South Africa moves towards a modern mixed-economy, probably social-democratic, state? We will briefly review some current theoretical developments that could help us in this regard.

Critics, reconstructors and proto-politicians

Attempts to understand intellectuals in class terms, sometimes called New Class theory, tend in our view to make at least two moves that are open to question.

First, they define intellectuals unproblematically in terms of educational qualifications, thereby blurring the point that two people with the same qualification may be performing two entirely different social functions. It is not so much that a university professor can counterfactually opt out to become a hobo (as in the celebrated case of the Oxford don some 15 years ago). Rather, it is that the same qualification or credential can be put to very different social uses depending upon the location and role of the qualification holder. Indeed, we would go so far as to say that there will be cases where they might be considered not to be in the same social category at all. Disputes in New Class theory have concentrated on whether qualifications as capital should be regarded literally (as in Wright and Roemer's recovery of human capital theory) or metaphorically (as in Bourdieu's cultural capital theory) (see Martin and Szelenyi, 1987:21-27). They have not so far considered, except indirectly as we shall show, that the 'highly educated' might constitute more than one incipient New Class or social category, on the basis of their location and function (see also Giddens, 1987:271).

Secondly, until fairly recently, New Class theory, by overhomogenizing intellectuals as a group, has not considered that different qualification holders in different roles and locations might be practising power of quite different kinds. In our opinion, Martin and Szelenyi's recent paper makes an important start towards correcting this defect. We think that it is illuminating to distinguish, as they do, between knowledge whose face is turned towards practical mastery, and knowledge whose face is turned to symbolic mastery. The basis for the former is 'mere practice', for the latter, norms and principles sanctified in a culture of critical discourse (CCD), claiming intrinsic authority without recourse to any external referent. We agree with them that practical (or technical) mastery predominates under conditions when the productivity demands of capital are to the fore, and that symbolic mastery predominates when these are for historical reasons less salient. We also agree that all modern intellectuals are a complex schizophrenic mixture of the two faces of knowledge, although very few intellectuals will embody both faces in their daily work.

This depiction helps us considerably in making sense of what intellectuals are doing right now in South Africa. In particular, it clarifies the movement of those progressive intellectuals who, with greater or lesser enthusiasm, are forsaking the niceties of liberal or radical critique and who are sincerely attempting to get down to reconstructive policy work. Whether these are simply old-style technocrats or not, it is clear that these intellectuals are pursuing technical mastery concerns mostly in 'junior partner' (or 'handmaidenly') relation to significant social categories - the unions, or the nascent assumptive political party (or parties) of the liberation movement.

This depiction also helps us understand why this new drive to reconstruction is viewed with a good deal of suspicion by obdurate left critics who, usually on the grounds that the liberation movement is selling out the working class to a post-colonial regime that will perpetuate capitalism, abstain from the heady rhetoric of reconstruction and, disconcertingly in concert with liberals who simply feel threatened by any kind of non-academic authority, wrap themselves up in traditional academic work. The reconstructors respond to this with hope-filled impatience. The critics respond in turn with a sniffy and apprehensive melancholia. Both affirm their allegiance to modernity in the process.

Martin and Szelenyi have been helpful for us in distinguishing between our critics and our reconstructors, the symbolic and the technical would-be masters. Different as these two categories are, however, we would distinguish a third category which is even more different from these two than they are from each other. We call this third kind of intellectual the proto-politician, who is located within the state bureaucracy or party, just as the former two are located in civil society. We would say that there is not just an empirical distinction to be made here. The basis of judgements is different; the forms of accountability are different; and the form of power, consequently, is different. This deserves further elaboration.

Whether critical or reconstructive, pursuant of practical or symbolic mastery, all intellectuals have to base their judgements upon, and have to justify their judgements in terms of, the appropriate canons in something like a culture of critical discourse. This defines the authority-base of all intellectual judgement. Conversely, no matter how highly educated, no matter how intellectually informed, all policy makers who are within the state or its bureaucracies have to base their judgements upon political criteria which, either in their need for compromise or in their adherence to an ideology, always have in some measure to go beyond the limits dictated by the canon. Of course, we would be foolish to exaggerate the distinction between intellectual (analytical) and political (strategic) judgement in the face of some major sociological debates over the last century or so. Nevertheless, we believe that there is a narrow distinction to be drawn here, which is sharpened by considering the various forms of accountability which the intellectual and the politician must respect. We would say that the intellectual has a dual accountability: as intellectual, in the first place to one's discipline and one's peers, and as citizen, to enriching public debate by bringing the results of this intellectual work out of the private world of the academy into public democratic fora for public discussion. We would say that this should apply to both critical and reconstructive work. We elaborate on this in the final section.

The policy planner or bureaucrat, on the other hand, is accountable in the first

place to the bosses, who are ultimately accountable to the party and its usually heterogenous constituencies of interests and concerns. Policy is usually a compromise between intellectual protocols and political realities, one which intellectuals, in terms of their discipline, are rarely satisfied with. The two jobs - of intellectual clarification on the one hand, and political decision on the other - should not be confused or conflated on the empirical ground that incumbents of both are 'highly educated' and are therefore both intellectuals of some New Class. Of course there will always be considerable empirical overlap between incumbents of these two positions. But it is by blurring the distinction between these that intellectuals of the movement can use their cultural capital and their movement connections to gain political positions. The resultant confusion between intellectual criteria and political accountability in the end dilutes the quality of intellectual work and is, therefore, to the detriment of the party and ultimately to the state (see also Muller and Cloete, 1985a; Bourdieu, 1989).

There are numerous forces abroad in South Africa today which are concerned to make knowledge and intellectuals more productive and more efficient by tying them more directly and unmediatedly to capital or the party. It can be discerned in various forms of populism, a hangover from pre-February 2, that would place party allegiance before intellectual contribution. Far more seriously, it is discernible in current state moves to privatise the parastatal research institutes and university research, tying such research far more directly to private client interests (Cloete and Muller, forthcoming). And it can also be discerned in the recent proliferation of scenario planning and research institutes within the corporate conglomerates of the mining and finance sectors. It should be apparent that we find such 'junior partner' or 'handmaidenly' (Muller and Cloete, 1985b) tying of knowledge production directly to private interests unsatisfactory, to say the least. It is to address this that we feel the need to insist upon the specificity of intellectual work vis a vis other forms of work in civil society on the one hand, and political work on the other.

Indeed, different as critics and reconstructors are, they too often share a central feature of their operation, one that undermines democracy by coming to bear on public policy and the political process in an unmediated way, behind the back of civil society, so to speak. Whether implemented by (and ultimately frustrated by) the bureaucracy, as in the East, (Szelenyi, 1986/7) or by the market and the managers in the West, the result has been the same: massive social discontent. In this way, intellectuals are probably more central to modernity and its discontents, than Szelenyi and Martin give them credit for. Either way, the question for us is whether South Africa's interrupted path to modernity allows it to sidestep the Eastern or Western roads. It will be our argument that this can only happen if knowledge is made more fateful and worldly, if the critics and the

reconstructors alike are brought into public sites where their conclusions can be mediated in relation to other worldly discourses before they are brought to bear upon policy formulation. It is in public fora that political demands can encounter concrete proposals as well as critique. It is only by means of such encounters that citizens can participate in the compromises which necessarily have to be made in arriving at social and public policy. And it is only when citizens are part of such compromises that the necessity of disillusionment can be averted.

We are not overly naive about the prospects for such public fora. The fate of civil society in the West and in the East is not encouraging. In order to make the argument for public fora plausible, we need to show that South Africa's interrupted modernity allows us the possibility of a third road through modernity. It is to these questions that we now turn.

The South African road and the present re-visited

Under a 'people/state' division, there is no private domain of society, strictly speaking: 'the people' is a public category which overrides all private distinction. At the height of the stage of offensive struggle, private choice was hardly an exercisable option, as the people's militias, the 'comrades', policing the consumer, education and rent boycotts underscored all too frequently in the pre-February 2 period. We have suggested that prizing open civil society consists in prizing open the distinction between the public and the private. Now, conventional Western capitalism and its market mechanism has traditionally functioned to maximise the private domain, dissolving all sense of the public - common aims, general visions, a sense of community (Taylor, 1986) - into the private realm of circulation, where these can be re-routed as simulations via the media and consumed privately in the home.

In a society of minimal selves reduced to the private (Lasch, 1984), the public self of the citizen has been isolated in such a way that the possibility for public collective consultation in public fora is highly circumscribed. According to writers like Melucci (1989) new social movements, including the new religious fundamentalisms, are predominantly a defensive response to the experienced loss of community and of the public, they act mainly to defend citizens from further state incursions into their lifeworlds, not as public fora for mediating a public interest that an attentive and representative state should take into consideration. In other words, they are positioned beyond the point of disillusionment in modernity - in postmodernity, as some would say.

There is a further reason why civil society in modern capitalist societies is said to be unable to provide a genuine public realm. This is because civil society has been hegemonised by the ruling class and its cultural habitus, giving the

bourgeoisie a special advantage in any public forum constituted to consider not only different needs but also different options for addressing them. Indeed, many marxists would go so far as to say that civil society is itself a fiction of liberal ideology which masks the fact that divergent interests are hegemonised and are, therefore, not harmonisable in the marketplace.

These are compelling arguments, and certainly have to be taken seriously. Our main argument in response is the following. Vitiating as the 'people/state' antagonism was in the pre-February 2 period, it has also provided one or two paradoxical benefits. In the first place, the pre-February 2 totalisation of the public into 'the people' has, to some extent, blocked the unrestrained privatisation of selves, or at the very least restricted the dissolution of the public part of selves to some degree. While certain middle class fractions of the black community have certainly been shaved off the popular bloc, it is also true to say that there remains a deep groundswell of *communitas* in black communities that has survived the upheavals of urbanisation, dislocation and the privatising deprivations of the market. How extensive and solidary this *communitas* is, and how long it will last in our newly-evolving civil society, is hard to say. But it is at the present a capacity and a resource for articulation of the public that has long ago fragmented probably beyond repair in 'normal' capitalist market societies.

In the second place, as Laclau and Mouffe have argued, a paratactically dichotomised 'people' cannot be hegemonised, only controlled. Hegemony requires that different elements of civil society be de-articulable and re-articulable. The suppression of difference within the popular bloc in the pre-February 2 period made very little available for hegemonic re-articulation. Again, it is hard to say how quickly processes of ruling class hegemony will be able to 'fix' the newly emergent differences in the civil domain, or whether the legacy of monolithic popular rejection will leave individuals and interest groups with a resource to at least temper a hegemonic walk-over. Our feeling is, again, that a significant potential capacity exists for the notion of public spaces or fora for public debate to be an entertainable option. Indeed, it does not seem to us impossible that as differences emerge in civil society, they may be solidified into a democratic form of articulation which avoids the privatised wasteland of, say, American public life, and perhaps is able to avoid too the suppression of private difference that has reaped its own bitter harvest in the East.

At present what is happening in South Africa is the following: In the first place a conventional form of popular political struggle will continue to be directed directly at the state in a way similar to the old confrontational strategy. The difference with pre-February 2 will be that these struggles will increasingly be waged in the name of specific interest groups - teachers, workers, students,

rather than monolithically in the name of 'the people'.⁷ The release of differences will in the first instance then release specific interest groups to act without guilt on their own behalf. Differences will also increasingly emerge within these constituencies. Where these groups act in concert (and this will also happen), this concertedness will have to be the result of a far more consciously forged alliance, on the basis of hard-nosed bargaining about the dovetailing of their various interests.

In the second place, a second form of political strategy is emerging, one of negotiation rather than confrontation, but still construed as a process between a single interest group, or an umbrella group, and the state. Both of these state-engagement strategies are likely to be with us for some time, partly because of the legacy of pre-February 2, but more importantly because they are dealing with short-term strategic issues. At the same time, however, we are also seeing the emergence of a different kind of grouping in our opening-up civil society, one that is expressly constituted as a forum for the consideration of policy and public issues between contending interest groups, as well as between these and state officials.⁸

What is happening in these fora is not the establishment of policy, but the airing of different needs, and different views on the shape policy might take. In other words, these fora are expressly concerning themselves with the longer-term, they are distinctly inclusivist rather than exclusivist, and they have embarked on the long haul to create a public sphere in South Africa.

It might be useful briefly to outline what we think a public forum is and is not. A forum is a virtual (not physical) space which allows for the engagement of different need-constituencies with their discourses of needs; of different intellectual constituencies with their discourses of critique and means; of proto-politicians and real politicians with their considerations of strategy, ideology, practicability and compromise. A forum is thus a site where the civic, intellectual and political functions can engage with each other, can become mediated. Fora are thus essentially mechanisms of mediation.

Whenever there is an unmediated relation between a group of intellectuals and their knowledge-options and either a civil society client or the state, then the public sphere of civil society is being circumvented in one or other way, and we cannot speak of a forum. There are in particular two kinds of unmediated consultation emerging in South Africa, and which will close off rather than open up public spaces. The first is what might be called serial brokerage, where an individual intellectual or a proto-politician speaks to a variety of needs- and/or means-constituencies serially, taking proposals from one, modifying them perhaps, circulating them to others, and so on. Whilst this will certainly help with the circulation of views in civil society, it is a very indirect form of mediation,

leaving far too much power with the broker. The second is what we have referred earlier to as handmaidenhood, where a group of intellectuals work directly in a clientelist and unmediated way with a single interest group or perhaps umbrella group. This can lead to the formation of a policy lobby. So far, lobbies in South Africa prefer to deal directly with the state. Our contention would be that they should at least route policy options through public fora before they engage directly with the state.

In the short run, the operation of fora can be capsized by a number of factors. They will not get going if the legacy of pre-February 2 retards the clarification of either needs or means discourses, or both. They will be derailed if they become overpopulated with critics, who could easily bog the discussion down in a metadiscourse which will block an effective discussion of alternatives. Democracy will not be served if intellectuals who assay to speak 'for the people' outnumber 'the people' themselves. And proto-politicians can easily exclude certain options from the agenda or, for short-term strategic reasons, try to close discussion and force consensus prematurely. These and many other teething problems should be expected. But, however laborious it may be to get the fora underway, they will, if they get to operate at all efficiently, hopefully at least avoid the following classic pitfalls. The first is that of unmediated critics who, by monopolising meanings, collapse the space where mediation and compromise can occur and thus, as Martin and Szelenyi say, pre-empt democratic discourse. The second is that of unmediated reconstructors who, by shortcircuiting the public domain altogether, shortcircuit the process of democratic mediation itself.

Impelled on the one hand by the urgency created by the foreshortened horizon of liberation, and relieved from immediate implementability (and hence of strategy) by its continuing relative distance, we can see fora setting themselves up as arenas where conflicting private interests can meet and encounter the means discourse of possible futures. Liberated from the no-longer (the prehistory of the revolution⁹) and also from the not-yet (the posthistory of actual rule) these fora are inserting themselves into a honeymoon present where the 'new' South Africa has been promised but not yet constituted. It is just possible that here, between the no-longer and the not-yet, a sense of the precariousness of our common destiny can compel the discovery of a common public view, just as it is doing in the new social movements in Europe, like the ecology and peace movements.

Can these fora evade the pitfall of modernity? As a curious amalgam of pre- and post-modern forms, they invent a highly unstable and temporary present whose future importance is presently obscure. How long they can survive is moot. Whether they can produce anything is moot. Naive in the extreme,

idealistic against all odds: and yet crucially necessary to those within the party-to-be who care about democracy, the success or failure of these fora in mediating interests and discourses will mean the difference between party rule in the old style (and hence, on the long road to inevitable failure and disillusionment), or party-participative rule of a kind not yet existing. And without these fora, intellectuals will be trapped by modernity.

The following are amongst the imponderables for the immediate future: whether popular forms of struggle will indeed give way gradually to more democratic forms; whether a public domain can indeed be opened up as civil society is prized open in this transitional period; whether intellectuals can indeed accept the challenge of reconstruction without slipping into either excessive technicism or obdurate critique; whether the emergent interest groups will be able to develop a co-ordinated politics or will, as in the West, become fatally fragmented and politically dispersed; and whether South Africa can discover a South African road that evades at least some of the excesses of the Eastern and Western roads to modernity and beyond.

NOTES

1. February 2 was portentous beyond its own imaginings. Not even President de Klerk realised quite what would ensue from his announcements. We are still too close to the empirical event to give it an appropriate generic tag, like *glasnost* or *perestroika*. In other words, we are pointing here to an event that has historical significance beyond its immediate effects.
2. The UDF is a loose front of civic, youth and women's organisations broadly within the ANC's ideological fold.
3. 'Paratactical' is a concept used by Laclau and Mouffe to denote that an opposition is literally without a grammar (ie mechanisms of articulation and mediation); the opposite of paratactical is syntactical.
4. This formulation could be read to imply that we conceive of 'the people' and 'the state' in an overly literal or topographical way. We use the spatial metaphor only to elucidate a relatively complex point. We certainly do not mean to imply that there is an 'outside' and an 'inside' in this matter.
5. This slogan was one of the main rallying cries of the student boycott movement at its height, circa 1985.
6. We are thinking here of groups like Community Agency for Social Enquiry (CASE), PLANACT, Sociology of Work Programme (SWOP), Education Policy Unit (EPU), Economic Trends group, and Centre for Health Policy Studies (CHPS), to name but a few.
7. During the last few months, there have been an unprecedented number of teacher, medical worker, and police and prison worker strikes, some of whom have never struck before during the preceding 10 years.
8. We have in mind here initiatives like the ANC-supported Centre for Development Studies (CDS), the left-liberal Five Freedoms Forum (FFF) and Institute for a Democratic Alternative South Africa (IDASA). We do not want to suggest that the new research structures mentioned earlier should be construed as fora.
9. We mean here the impossibility of violent overthrow, not necessarily the impossibility of revolutionary socialism. For an elaboration of this distinction see Panitch, 1989.

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