

Jerzy Jedlicki

PROBLEMS WITH THE INTELLIGENTSIA

The remarks presented in this article are an offshoot of the experiences of writers and researchers working for the History of Intelligentsia Section at the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences. This section, established by Ryszarda Czepulis–Rastenis,¹ was headed by the author of these words in the years 1991–2005, and the fruit of its collective work was among other things a set of studies devoted to the historiography of the intelligentsia in a few European countries,² then a number of essays by the head and members of his team,³ and finally a three-volume *Dzieje inteligencji polskiej do roku 1918* [The History of the Polish Intelligentsia until 1918].⁴

¹ See Ryszarda Czepulis–Rastenis, *'Klasa umysłowa'. Inteligencja Królestwa Polskiego 1832–1862* (Warszawa, 1973); *eadem*, *Ludzie nauki i talentu. Studia o świadomości społecznej inteligencji polskiej w zaborze rosyjskim* (Warszawa, 1988); *eadem* (ed.), *Inteligencja polska XIX i XX wieku. Studia*, 6 vols. (Warszawa, 1978–91).

² Jerzy Jedlicki (ed.), *Historycy europejscy o inteligencji i intelektualistach, Kultura i Społeczeństwo*, XLIV, 2 (2000).

³ *Idem*, 'Autocréation de l'intelligentsia', in Chantal Delsol, Michel Masłowski and Joanna Nowicki (eds.), *Mythes et symboles politiques en Europe Centrale* (Paris, 2002), 384–99; Maciej Janowski, *Polish Liberal Thought Before 1918* (Budapest–New York, 2004); Magdalena Micińska, 'Obshchestvennaia zhizn i mecenatstvo nauki i prosveshchenia v Varshave posle ianvar'skogo vosstania', in Denis A. Sdvizhkov (ed.), *Intelligentsiia v istorii. Obrazovannyi chelovek v predstavleniakh i sotsial'noi deistvitel'nosti* (Moskva, 2001), 103–38.

⁴ Jerzy Jedlicki (ed.), *Dzieje inteligencji polskiej do roku 1918*, 3 vols. (Warszawa, 2008), i: Maciej Janowski, *Narodziny inteligencji 1750–1831*; ii: Jerzy Jedlicki, *Błędne koło 1832–1864*; iii: Magdalena Micińska, *Inteligencja na rozdrożach 1864–1918*.

I THE PROBLEM OF DEFINITION

Almost every Polish text about the intelligentsia — whether written by a historian or a publicist — mentions at the very beginning the ambiguous character of this term and a necessity to agree in what sense it will be used. This observation, though true, is not original. As a matter of fact nearly all the terms used by a social historian, and especially all the collective nouns, at least those referring to modern society, are ambiguous and vague.

If we take the notion of 'szlachta' (the gentry), for example, it lost its clear-cut character with the progressing disintegration of estate society. In 19th century writings the word 'szlachcic' (in Polish denoting rather 'gentleman' than 'nobleman', for the members of 'szlachta' had no titles), could denote: (1) a landowner, (2) a descendant of a gentry family, (3) a member of the so-called legitimate gentry, that is families entered in the registers run by state heraldic offices on the strength of Russian or Austrian legislation, (4) person who retained the old patriarchal gentry customs. One could be a 'szlachcic' in one of those senses, but not qualify as one in others. Nevertheless the term was widespread, but in what sense it was used, depended on the context.⁵ Also the term 'Jew' ceased to be unequivocal, when its genealogical, denominational and national criteria stopped being inseparable.

This was so because in modern society social classes and ethnic populations had no longer a caste character, their boundaries could be crossed, and were no longer as clear-cut as before. Consequently, their names were no longer exact, their meaning diverged, and the scope of each became vague. Of course, a historian may introduce to his description categories arbitrarily defined, or even invented by himself, but in effect he will use an artificial language, which is not communicative enough and which diverges from the vocabulary of the sources. It seems that little success can be achieved by following this line, and this method is not to be recommended.

⁵ See Jerzy Jedlicki, *Klejnot i bariery społeczne. Przeobrażenia szlachectwa polskiego w schyłkowym okresie feudalizmu* (Warszawa, 1968), 247–51.

A historian should follow the changing fortunes of a historical notion, and observe its vicissitudes.⁶ This was the method we⁷ adopted while writing 'The History of the Polish Intelligentsia', which did not save us, for it could not, from having problems with its definition.

The earliest Polish definition of the 'intelligentsia', and at the same time the first known text including this word comes from 1844. It was an essay by Karol Libelt, a philosopher educated in Berlin who settled in the Poznań province. Under the influence of the school of Hegel, Libelt acknowledged the intelligentsia as:

all those who having received a more careful and extensive education in the institutes of higher learning, become the leaders of the nation as its scholars, scientists, officials, teachers, clergymen or industrialists, who are at the head of the nation due to their higher enlightenment.⁸

One can easily see that this definition combines educational and professional criteria, which as if determine the aspirations to the leadership of the nation.

This combination became a source of many misunderstandings, which can be felt to this day. In fact, many people started to see the intelligentsia as a model-creating, moral elite of a society deprived of a right of free public expression of its views, and consequently, being classified among this group could be understood as a kind of ennoblement, in a very Romantic sense. Thus, the author of a programmatic article in a periodical published in Lviv wrote in 1861:

in order to call them the intelligentsia, society demands that its members should understand the national cause, cherish it, work and be ready to sacrifice a lot for it, in a word it demands that they should love their

⁶ More extensively see Reinhart Koselleck, 'Sozialgeschichte und Begriffsgeschichte', in Wolfgang Schieder and Volker Sellin (eds.), *Sozialgeschichte in Deutschland*, 4 vols. (Göttingen, 1990), i, 11–46; Jerzy Jedlicki, 'Kłopoty pojęciowe historyka', in Ewa Chmielecka, Jerzy Jedlicki and Andrzej Rychard (eds.), *Idealy nauki i konflikty wartości* (Warszawa, 2005), 265–71.

⁷ Whenever I use the pronoun 'we' in this article, I have in mind the authors of *Dzieje inteligencji polskiej do roku 1918*.

⁸ Karol Libelt, 'O miłości Ojczyzny', *Rok pod względem Oświaty, Przemysłu i Wypadków Czasowych*, 1 (Poznań, 1844), 53.

country ... This word [the intelligentsia] in its Polish concept has some spiritual dimensions that no eye can measure ... thus it can by no means be applied only to specialization.⁹

This kind of exaltation was understandable in a year of patriotic manifestations which, in Warsaw alone, cost hundreds of lives. The movement that was born of those events and led to the tragic uprising of 1863, was in fact headed by the young intelligentsia.

From then onwards, it has been recognized in Polish writings that the intelligentsia, of its very nature, should, due to their education, feel an obligation of service to the nation and society, until, in the works of many authors, this became a condition for inclusion in this group, which to this day appears in such an elevated form. As is well known, in the Russian thought, which adopted the notion of intelligentsia a quarter of a century later, the term was even more strongly marked by the values of service to the people and to social progress.¹⁰

The authors of 'The History of the Polish Intelligentsia', however, firmly adhere to the standpoint that although a lot of attention should be devoted to the ideals and ethos of the intelligentsia, its 'mission' and 'leadership', these values cannot be treated as components of its definition, for this would lead to the idealization of its collective picture. Moreover, convictions and ideals are too controversial and intangible qualities to serve as criteria for the qualification of persons and milieus to the social class under our examination. So the working definition of this class that we have accepted says it is made of people who received an education enabling them to work in professions considered, in a given era, as 'qualified'.

This simple initial assumption by no means removes the problems we encounter in constructing a narrative, since a historian constantly has to deal with borderline situations and cases. How can we treat, for example, the clergy: should they be regarded as part of the intelligentsia, or not? We have decided that the corporate and hierarchically organized clergy belongs to the history of

⁹ C.Ch., 'O inteligencji w znaczeniu polskim', *Dziennik Literacki*, 100 (1861).

¹⁰ See Andrzej Walicki, 'Polish Conceptions of the Intelligentsia and Its Calling', in Fiona Björling and Alexander Pereswettov-Morath (eds.), *Words, Deeds and Values: The Intelligentsias in Russia and Poland during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Lund, 2005).

the Catholic Church, but the priests who have been teachers in secular schools, scholars or authors of political writings cannot, of course, be overlooked by a historian of the intelligentsia.

We generally have not formalized the requirement of education, which changed depending on the period, profession and legislation. On the one hand we have professions and positions protected by the legal requirement of obtaining a university diploma, and on the other the unjustly depreciated teachers of elementary schools, clerks who copied documents or, up to a certain moment, surgeons, some minor legal advisers, that is the underdogs of the intelligentsia who not always even completed their secondary education, but performed work that distinguished them from the urban plebeians.

When we examine a society which is in constant motion, whose members move up and down the ladder of social prestige, we are dealing again and again with borderline categories and cases and we should not be worried about it.

Of course, the adoption of a definition which is broad and not leak-proof, for it cannot be otherwise, entails the impossibility of creating a uniform picture of the Polish intelligentsia.

And it is all very well! A historian will tell you about the divisions of this group (according to education, property, earnings, social and professional position and — what is perhaps the most important — the world outlook), about the differences and conflicts that divide it — this is our craft. We do not try to produce some uniform collective portrait of the educated class, just as we do not believe in the actual existence of different national characters.

Of necessity, a historian will devote more attention and space to the people who have distinguished themselves in some way and whose names have entered biographical dictionaries, but the question remains, whom have they distinguished themselves from? The social form of the intelligentsia's existence is its *milieu*, just as for the gentry it is their neighbourhood, and for the peasants — the village or parish. The intelligentsia, wherever they were found, even in small numbers, created a milieu: local, professional or academic, in a word, a social milieu of their own choice.

Thus the history of the intelligentsia — as we understand it — is a history of the milieus and the ties between them, that is contacts and mutual understanding that are supra-local and

supra-professional. These contacts, established regardless of the divisions existing in this class, can be traced — in the 19th century — mainly through the extremely rich, both in content and numbers, collections and editions of letters. The literate class wrote a lot and willingly about their needs, interests and worries, and this correspondence creates a dense network of interpersonal understanding, the infrastructure of the national culture of a divided country. It creates the picture of the Polish intelligentsia as a class of people who — certainly not always and not all — tried to combine their professional duties that provided their living and were the basis of their social position, with a sense of social duty, although they conceived it and fulfilled in different ways.

II

THE PROBLEM OF GEOGRAPHY

Is the intelligentsia some geographical curiosity, a class peculiarly Polish, Russian or East-European? And what are we asking about by posing this question? We have no doubt that teachers, officials, doctors or engineers lived and worked in other countries as well. We are asking whether and where the intelligentsia conceived of itself as a separate 'intellectual class', a specific social formation with some special qualities.¹¹

Without going into detailed international comparisons, for this is a subject deserving a separate consideration, we may see that from the 19th century onwards the intelligentsia has had its counterparts everywhere, though they were bearing different names,¹² but its independence as a class was the greater in proportion (1) to the longer predominance of the post-feudal privileged class, and (2) to the weaker status of the bourgeoisie and its attractive power. In fact, the intelligentsia, regardless of their provenance, as a rule distinguished themselves from the gentry by representing a different system of values in which the social status of an individual was not determined by his noble birth and inherited property, but by his education and personal services to

¹¹ Jedlicki, 'Autocr ation de l'intelligentsia'.

¹² Cf. Denis Sdvi kov, *Das Zeitalter der Intelligenz. Zur vergleichenden Geschichte der Gebildeten in Europa bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg* (G ttingen, 2006).

his country.¹³ The chances for the success of this silent struggle for primacy were growing with the gradual weakening of the once firm political and economic position of the landowners.

On the other hand, in western countries, professors, lawyers, doctors or architects — professionals, in a word — did not differ largely, either by their aspirations or way of life, from the wealthy bourgeoisie, and constituted its integral part, even if bearing a special name, like *Bildungsbürgertum*. In Eastern Europe the situation was different, since there the burghers, mainly small merchants and craftsmen, were a dispersed provincial class with mediocre aspirations, and the small group of the high bourgeoisie who invested in larger industrial and railway enterprises was mainly composed of newly-rich Germans and Jews, who only in the second or third, generally well-educated and assimilated generation, shared the world of ideas of the Polish intelligentsia, could communicate with them, though they were not always accepted by this milieu.¹⁴

In a word, the intelligentsia distinguished itself as a separate social class mainly in those countries where capitalism did not yet upturn the landscape of civilization and the traditional social structure. A third system of reference, however, apart from the gentry and the burghers, in relation to which the intelligentsia had to self-determine themselves, was the state. Given a weak development of the private urban economy, and a shallow market of qualified services (for example medical or legal), it was the state which was the first employer of the intelligentsia, who filled all the posts in offices, schools, law-courts, state banks and other civil and military institutions. At the same time the state was perceived — in Poland — as a foreign invader, and in Russia — as a conservative social oppressor. Thus the intelligentsia developed as a class with a chronically dissociated sense of loyalty: they were fed by the service to the state, and at the same time they hated and dreamed of abolishing the tsarist government (a similar hatred was aroused by the Prussian and Austrian governments, or Turkish in the Balkans). And this dissociation was also typical of the attitude of the government: it as a rule distrusted (and rightly) the intelligentsia, and at the same time could not do without them.

¹³ Czepulis-Rastenis, *Ludzie nauki i talentu*.

¹⁴ Helena Datner, *Ta i tamta strona. Żydowska inteligencja Warszawy drugiej połowy XIX wieku* (Warszawa, 2007).

Thus in countries with despotic governments that did not allow any liberties to their citizens, the qualified intelligentsia at the same time supported and undermined the structures of power. This conflict of loyalties revealed itself in different ways in individual lives, and appeared with renewed vitality in the communist states of the 20th century.

Moreover, wherever the arising national movement strove for the creation of new states and disrupting the established European order, the intelligentsia was the creator of its unifying symbols and historical legends, manifestoes, appeals and realms of memory, as well as the means of the national education of the masses. Poland before 1914 was a perfect example of such an initiating role of the educated class, but the same phenomenon could be observed in Serbia, Italy or Ireland.

Thus the problem of geography can be solved not by distinction, but by gradation. The less developed was the private-capitalist economy, the weaker the civil society and the worse conditions of its self-organization, the more arbitrary the state power and its control over society, the stronger ethnic or class conflicts within the empire — the greater was the informal role of the intelligentsia as the only class capable of articulating the social and national needs and interests of the population.¹⁵

In consequence, in the 19th century the intelligentsia had its breeding ground, though not its only *habitat*, in Eastern Europe (including Russia) as well as in Mediterranean Europe, and in the next century in the dependent and colonial countries that liberated themselves from their protectors, where the alienated and not numerous intelligentsia, usually educated in good European universities, became leaders of the emancipation movement.

III THE PROBLEM OF THE APPRAISAL OF THE POLISH INTELLIGENTSIA

Initially, in the middle of the 19th century, the self-appraisal of the young intelligentsia that discovered itself as a new and

¹⁵ Walicki, 'Polish conceptions'; Jerzy Jedlicki, *A Suburb of Europe: Nineteenth-century Polish Approaches to Western Civilization* (Budapest, 1999).

distinguished segment of society, was good. They realized, of course, that their qualifications and cultural aspirations were limited by a lack of the institutions of higher learning at home, nevertheless the new hierarchy of values that they launched added to their sense of importance. This could be felt in the events of 1848, especially in the Austrian partition where journalists, men of letters and lawyers found themselves at the front-line of struggle for political liberties and national autonomy.¹⁶

The patriotic manifestations in Warsaw, and in other towns of Congress Poland and Lithuania, filled the intelligentsia with an illusive feeling that they were followed by the urban and even rural folk. The above-mentioned ideas of service and national leadership now determined their concept of their own historical role. Only the predictable tragic downfall of the 1863 Uprising against the tsarist power — an uprising the starting and control of which, as well as the whole civil organization were an indubitable work of the intelligentsia¹⁷ — undermined their aspirations, without, however, destroying them.

The positivism of the 1870s was an intellectual formation thoroughly created by the intelligentsia who challenged by it the still dominating gentry conservatism. Positivists modified the ideas of service to society and national duty of the educated people by purging them of a temptation of an armed struggle for liberation, however they did not renounce, but only refined these ideas. Their press organ declared in 1880:

The role of the intelligentsia is decisive for the fortunes of the nation, and since self-awareness is the primary condition of its existence, they are the group which must define itself in order to shape the future of society; they also bear the responsibility for all the consequences of their social work.¹⁸

Liberalism of Warsaw was taking shape under the strict tsarist political censorship, thus it had to conceal its aspirations to national independence, though it could fairly legally declare the educational and civilizing mission of the intelligentsia towards

¹⁶ Lewis Namier, *1848: The Revolution of Intellectuals* (London, 1957); Jedlicki, *Błędne koło*, 99–113.

¹⁷ Jedlicki, *Błędne koło*, 244–91.

¹⁸ 'Zadania inteligencji naszej', *Przegląd Tygodniowy* (1880), 605.

the common people. Such exponents of fettered liberalism as the ideological leader of the positivists, writer and editor Aleksander Świętochowski, saw this thin educated stratum as leaders of intellectual and moral progress in a backward peripheral country. One of them wrote about this stratum:

Since they are to think for the whole society, they should certainly keep above the interests and sympathies of any individual stratum ... The intelligentsia should not only be the wisest group of society, but also the best ... It is the destiny of the intelligentsia to be preachers of ideas.¹⁹

The positivist ideas, combined with the sacrificial pathos of Romanticism, were launched by the writer Stefan Żeromski, who in his novels and short stories of the end of the 19th century created the figures of heroic female-teachers and doctors who sacrificed their lives and personal yearnings in order to dedicate themselves completely to the mission of enlightening the dark common folk and struggling to improve the living conditions of the exploited classes.²⁰

However, the idealization of the intelligentsia was paralleled by a contrary trend in the writings of Polish publicists: the satirical mockery of such pretensions. Even as early as the middle of the 19th century conservative writers, especially in the Austrian partition, gibed at the poets and journalists who had illusions about assuming the leadership of the nation. Later, towards the end of the century, the criticism of the intelligentsia came from its own ranks, from authors who by no means may be called conservative. The man who excelled in such taunting was the leading writer of the positivist era, Bolesław Prus, who apart from novels ran weekly columns in newspapers, drawing material for them from everyday life.

It is an irrefutable truth — he argued in one of his feuilletons — and too sad for words, that the intelligentsia have no link with the peasants, they don't know or understand them, don't perceive them and don't try to influence them. A Jewish inn-keeper and usurer, a minor legal adviser or

¹⁹ W.M. K[ozłowski], 'Czy mamy inteligencję?', *Ateneum*, 2 (1893).

²⁰ Halina Janaszek-Ivaničková, *Świat jako zadanie inteligencji. Studium o Stefanie Żeromskim* (Warszawa, 1971).

even a thief ... are treated with more confidence by the peasants than the intelligentsia, who pretend to be the leaders of society.²¹

At the same time the Warsaw weekly *Głos*, established in 1886, which, according to its declaration, was the spokesman of 'popular civilization', lashed the professional intelligentsia as a stratum of cosmopolitans and snobs, who fascinated by Europe, mimicked it as well as they could, and did not fulfil their duty towards the Polish common people. This was also the direction of criticism launched by the National Democratic Party (the so-called *endecja*). One of its founders, Zygmunt Balicki, wrote in a straightforward manner that a large section of the Polish intelligentsia, degenerated under oppression, yielded to foreign influences, 'hostile to our society and its national goals'; they could be accepted only on condition that they engage in the programme of awaking the national consciousness of the peasants and give primacy to Polish interests.²²

The Left was not more lenient. The socialist activists of the end of the 19th century who in the Russian partition had to organize themselves illegally, expected of the educated people not so much professional work, as involvement in party activity and in revolutionary agitation ran by the 'intellectual proletariat'.

The most serious critic was the philosopher and writer Stanisław Brzozowski, perfectly familiar with European social thought, especially susceptible to the influence of Georges Sorel. Brzozowski, a typical intellectual, did not belong to any party but — like many others — was struck by the collective power of the strikes and demonstrations of the workers in Congress Poland and Russia, manifested in 1905. In this context, the Polish intelligentsia, detached from any productive workshops, deprived of the dynamic of the working class, seemed to him a historically infertile group, unable to play any significant historical role. Brzozowski accused them of a lack of seriousness and courage of convictions and saw their only chance for redeeming themselves in getting rid of their 'intellectual foibles', in whatever sense they could be understood.²³

²¹ Bolesław Prus, 'Drobne uwagi o wielkich kwestiach', *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* 8 (1886), 2-3.

²² Cit. from Barbara Toruńczyk (ed.), *Narodowa Demokracja. Antologia myśli politycznej 'Przeglądu Wszepolskiego' 1895-1905* (Warszawa, 1981), 134.

²³ Andrzej Walicki, *Stanisław Brzozowski — drogi myśli* (Warszawa, 1977), 192-237.

All those critics and mockers were educated members of the intelligentsia in the full sense of the word, so we may say that they expressed the self-criticism of their class who was still not sure whether it lived up to its high, supra-professional patriotic and social duties, and some section of which — also in independent Poland after 1918 — felt tempted to support radical leftist or rightist movements, whether socialist or nationalist.

One may compile a substantial anthology of such texts. In 1945, at the threshold of the so-called People's Poland, a well-known sociologist connected with the peasant movement, Józef Chalasiński, provoked a stir in the press by his lecture entitled 'The Social Genealogy of the Polish Intelligentsia', whom he described as a class that inherited the vices of the gentry, was socially exclusive, enclosed in their own drawing-room 'ghettos', and indifferent to the needs of the masses.²⁴ Regardless of the author's intentions, this direction of criticism was in principle in keeping with the policy of the communist rulers who either wanted to win over the old, pre-war intelligentsia, or — as far as possible — to ridicule them and push them into the margin of life as an incurably 'reactionary' class. A talented poet, Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński, going along with this tendency of the ruling circles, wrote a satirical poem 'The Death of One of the Intelligentsia', where he derided the Hamlet-like dilemmas of his hero and his reserve towards the arrangements of the new order:

Suffering from cold. Apolitical.

Nostalgic, ailing, sceptical.

...

Always late. Maladjusted.²⁵

From quite a different end of the Polish political spectrum, Jerzy Giedroyc, the editor of the Paris monthly *Kultura*, a man who laid great services in the ideological struggle against communism, expressed again and again — especially in his profuse private correspondence — his great disappointment with the attitudes of the intelligentsia in Poland, whom he accused *en bloc* of cowardice

²⁴ Józef Chalasiński, *Przeszłość i przyszłość inteligencji polskiej* (Warszawa, 1997).

²⁵ Konstanty I. Gałczyński, *Wiersze* (Warszawa, 1956), 246–51.

and opportunism. One of his correspondents, Czesław Miłosz, then professor of Slavic literatures at the University of California, accused the Polish intelligentsia rather of nationalist leanings and the shallowness of their liberal world outlook.²⁶

Each of those obviously contradictory accusations certainly concealed some grain of truth. The point is, however, that this intelligentsia, so many times derided and appraised, very seldom denoted a collection of living people with various characteristics and likings, who had individual experiences and fortunes and were every day absorbed by their work, professional, scientific or artistic, in conditions that were not chosen by themselves. It rather seems as if these lamentations and gibes referred to some abstract collective entity, some confraternity or order subject to one common rule.

What we most seldom find in the disputes of publicists that have been taken up again and again for a century and a half, is the suggestion that the Polish intelligentsia — as any other — may perhaps be varied and that in their attitudes to life, characters and opinions they have always been largely divided. According to various criteria, they could be (a) leftist, liberal or rightist; (b) composed of sincere believers, conformists, or people for whom sanctity had no appeal; (c) anti-Semites, people indifferent in this matter, or respectful and tolerant; (d) those eagerly supporting arbitrary rule, passively obedient and well-adjusted, or boldly opposing the ruling power; (e) those that were 'doing well' under any conditions, lived modestly or led a wretched existence in the margin of social and economic life, etc.

Publicists, and sometimes also scholars seem to be invariably prone to create rash generalizations and collective portraits, and the controversies between the critics of the intelligentsia and its (less frequent) defenders, between gibers and moralists, revive to this day.

A historian does not intend to reconcile those contradictory judgements, he will only try to describe the conditions of life, work and the social position of various groups of the intelligentsia and in this way reach an answer to the question about what aspirations, models of behaviour, ideological visions, but also prejudices

²⁶ Jerzy Giedroyc and Czesław Miłosz, *Listy 1952–1963*, ed. Marek Kornat (Warszawa, 2008), *passim*.

and phobias were born in the individual milieus of this class. And finally see how, to our surprise, they have survived all the cataclysms of the 20th century.

At the same time a historian will try to show that despite all their divisions and inborn vices the intelligentsia were the linking element of national culture and historical consciousness and at the same time a class with most European horizons. They have never had the same convictions, but they all faced the same problems and the same responsibility — and they face them to this day.

IV THE PROBLEM OF EXISTENCE

The thesis about the disappearance of the intelligentsia has persistently recurred during the last twenty years. Again and again, somebody declares in the press or in the media that we are facing the 'exit' of the intelligentsia — but somehow it does not disappear completely and something remains until the next exit.

These grave-diggers seem not to take into consideration that all the traditional social classes are slowly disappearing. This is the lot of the peasantry, who in the 19th and 20th century were the most numerous class in Eastern Europe. While the cautious land reform of the inter-war period and the radical of the years 1944–5 were aimed at parcelling big estates and dealing land out to smallholders, today the accelerated evolution goes in a contrary direction: small and middle-size farms are disappearing, and land and livestock are being concentrated in industrialized large estates. What disappears as a result is also the traditional rural culture and customs, folk art and the local colour of the provinces.

The same happens to craftsmanship, there are whole groups of handicrafts and services which disappear together with the ritual guild culture. Technological modernization and the thorough reconstruction of the branch structure of industry have entailed the dwindling of the old type of the working class; a skilled-worker and a technician now get almost the same type of training: after the era of 'Solidarity', the protests of workers in Poland most frequently try to defend the last strongholds of state industry.

The whole model of social structure changes before our very eyes from a system of clearly delineated classes into a system of strata without sharp divisions — which does not mean that people stopped inheriting the conditions (and privileges) of being brought up in a wealthy home on the one hand, or of being raised in the poverty of a socially underprivileged family on the other.

Thus the intelligentsia is subject to the process that is general. There have always been great differences between its members, both social and economic. Today they are even bigger, mainly due to the sky-high emoluments of bank, corporation or media managers. Earlier, however, despite those disproportions, the intelligentsia were interconnected by the exceptionality of their education and, in this context, a special type of ‘good breeding’, a way of life, and of speaking, by a certain sense of superiority, of belonging to the ‘elite’. These conspicuous distinctions, are now, of course, being effaced, due to the spread of secondary and higher education, especially that practically-oriented, while at the same time the transmission of culture within the family is weaker, and the way of life becomes similar everywhere, mainly due to the influence of the powerful media. Consequently, the intelligentsia have no more sense of possessing their common ‘code’, and also of belonging to one class despite its stratification.²⁷

So in this respect the adherents of the thesis about the disappearance of the intelligentsia are probably right, although some of them combine this conviction with a badly-concealed contempt for the modest female teachers or librarians. Generally, however, they have something more in mind. They declare in their articles and books that the constitutive role of the intelligentsia, its ‘mission’, to which this class perhaps unduly pretended in the past, is today socially redundant. The intelligentsia is supposed to be replaced, and this process is going on, by experts.

‘Mission’ is a notion from the Romantic vocabulary, today not very pertinent, indeed. However, the adherents of the thesis about disappearance seem to assume, not always *expressis verbis*, that this redundant role is the voicing of opinions in matters of common weal, as well as leadership in the citizens’ self-organization. There

²⁷ More extensively see Henryk Domański (ed.), *Inteligencja w Polsce. Specjaliści, twórcy, klerkowie, klasa średnia?* (Warszawa, 2008). Cf. also Tomasz Zarycki, *Kapitał kulturowy. Inteligencja w Polsce i w Rosji* (Warszawa, 2008).

can be no doubt that these tasks were performed mainly, though not exclusively, by the intelligentsia. It was quite natural that the class whose members had been trained at school and in professional work, in the ability of formulating their thoughts, reading learned works and essays, writing and public speaking, were better than others prepared for initiating public discussions and collective actions, and establishing associations and foundations.

Due to the democratic policy and mass culture these predispositions have spread more widely, although one cannot help feeling that this has happened at the cost of a lowered standard of debate. Certainly, no social stratum holds a monopoly today for acting in the public sphere, although there is still some connection between activeness and education. What can be meant, however, by the statement that the intelligentsia will be replaced by experts? Experts in what? In signalling threat to civilization, in defending the wronged and humiliated, in defending the principles of democracy, in initiating a political debate, or, if need be, a public protest? In each of these domains an expert opinion may be useful, however, the vision of a monopoly of experts and technocrats — each in the sphere of his specialization and competence — is too reminiscent of the *brave new world*.

The common duties of educated people used to be formulated anew and postulated even earlier, and in every era, in accordance with the type of state, the level of civilization and the civil rights. Today these duties in post-communist countries are doubtless understood in a different way than before, in accordance with the situation, and many do not understand them at all. Nevertheless one may hope that the supra-professional role and responsibility of the educated strata will not disappear completely, and therefore it is worth repeating that the burial of the intelligentsia announced many times seems by all means premature.²⁸

(transl. Agnieszka Kreczmar)

²⁸ Jerzy Jedlicki, 'Inteligencja w demokratycznym teatrze', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 31 Dec. 2004; *idem*, 'Przedwczesny pogrzeb inteligencji', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 28 Jan. 2006.