

14 Mebilmachung senseless. A certain (bad) Futurism centered on speed, travel, and mass-in-motion gives way to the "contemplation" of a space where expansion and contraction coincide and where the widest time expansion can be made to coincide with complete stillness.

A "Leibniz" multiverse of information replaces a model still centered on an image made of material changes. "Now, you let pleasure be your guide": any monad of this multiverse would be immediately present right where it wants to be, as free as an angel from the constraints of "distance". One could naively object that in such space the time dimension ceases to exist (and this would damn the metropolitan form of life, so deeply rooted in the overbearing importance of the problem of time). Actually, the opposite is true. Only here, time cannot be viewed in terms of geometry and space (only here, the space-time continuum cannot be reduced to Euclidean measures), because every monad has its own internal time, free from the "omnitude" of that Logos-Chronos which the metropolis still tends towards (in its logic more than in its actual formation, as we have seen). Simultaneously communicating information only eliminates distance in physical or material terms; it does not eliminate the individuality of the single mollusks, and of the rhythms of their clocks at all. It eliminates the unpredictability of their "future" rhythms even less. Here, what was already inside a "drawer full of possibilities" (using Bergson's idea) cannot be achieved, just as a "finite" construction by Mondrian which does not achieve what was already inside a model. What is possible never becomes real, as if such reality were already somehow contained within what is possible; on the other hand, what is real casts its shadow "backwards" so that we can discover "what made it possible". While proceeding, even the mollusks, which were arbitrarily chosen as a reference point for constructing this finite (and unlimited) space, change; a priori it is therefore impossible to consider what is real as the attainment of what is possible, that is as a space already included (in the form of a possibility) within an idea which precedes and foresees it.

However, the fact that such a process is random and unpredictable does not at all preclude the possible construction of such a finite space, such a finite order of relations and information.

5. New York in Venice?

It is in his works "dedicated" to New York that Mondrian examines most the properties of his continuum. His New York is certainly not the "American grid" which Einstein contrasted with the authentic relativity of the "European city", but rather a more complex and problematic "icon" of the "European city" itself! It is as if any set reference system within it, any Galilean body, any set time Number, any privileged language or form, were to have disappeared. A street is a street, but it can also become a square or a building. In relation to the various gravitational fields, every element takes on a different shape and meaning. The distinction between plane/color and lyre/border falters until it completely fades in the "metropolitan dances and labyrinths" of his last works. No function here can be given a single sort of language. No language is "such a language" as to remain constant in every situation. The form of each language is the manifestation of its deformations. No Language nor Architect can plan the whole, even though its construction appears, as we have already seen, perfectly finite.

Overwhelming, then, becomes the memory of that Venetian mundus alter which Tafuri revisited in Venezia e il Rinascimento: a world in which "the proud emphasis on the virtues of a project, the scholarly, independent language of the Architect, and the hybris of Novitas give way neither to the mere mediocrity of compromise nor, even worse, to frustrating indecision, but to a complexio oppositorum which is really capable of reconciling opposites. Such consonance took life in someone like Leonardo Donà, who strenuously opposed Scamozzi's "autonomy" and admired Palladio's St. George's Church: consonance which gives form to the whole (informs it), starting neither from the identity nor from the analogy of given languages. A mere search for analogy is specially harmful towards continuity and tradition—as harmful as interrupting the planned hybris. Continuity and novelty intermingle unpredictably, independent of any abstract typology. Minute variations, subtle lines of thought (differences in density, outlines, thickness and dimension) link opposites. A typological or stylistic opposition could even produce and build forms, if considered together with these other utterly flexible variables. Mondrian's New York recalls the "mollusk" city

par excellence: Venice is an "open problem of European culture" (Tafuri).

However, at this point, the idea of "metropolis" no longer has any dimensional aspect. A "metropolis" can be the entire planet or just my individual brain. Ideally, meandering around the World is identical to travelling around my room; and it seems to me that this is a chance for freedom which no other epoch has ever known before.

La internacional del ensayismo

The International of Essayism

PIERRE BOURDIEU

De la "revista de cultura" *Babelia*, 22, 14 de marzo de 1992, publicada semanalmente por *El País*. Pierre Bourdieu es un sociólogo francés, autor de varios libros, entre ellos *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique* [Borrador para una teoría de la práctica] y *La Distinction* [La Distinción]. Traducido por Jorge Onetti para *El País*.

From the "cultural magazine" *Babelia*, 22, March 14, 1992, published weekly by *El País*. Pierre Bourdieu is a French sociologist and the author of various books, among them; *Outline of a Theory of Practice* and *Distinction*. Translated by Christopher Emsden.

Creo que el ensayismo es una enfermedad francesa, french flu, como decía E. P. Thompson acerca de cierta forma francesa de marxismo. ¿Por qué este arte de disertar con elegancia sobre los grandes problemas de la época encontró un terreno tan favorable en Francia y en París? Sin duda debido al predominio del modelo del escritor sobre el del sabio o el del profesor, que lleva a valorizar el efectismo de la escritura en detrimento de la profundidad y

el rigor. Sin duda, también se debe a que el modelo de intelectual, que se sustenta sobre una autoridad de escritor o de sabio para intervenir en el dominio de la política, a la manera de Zola, está en Francia más reconocido que en otras partes (en todo caso, más que en los países anglosajones).

Gracias a la televisión y a los periódicos, se ha impuesto la forma extremada del ensayismo, representada por una nueva categoría de productores culturales de quienes los *nuevos filósofos* constituyen el prototipo; esos *filósofos periodistas* como los llamaba Wittgenstein y que en su mayoría trabajaban para televisión, radio, o en semanarios y periódicos, lanzaron al mercado bienes culturales como un nuevo tipo de producto. Esas obras de producción cíclica y circulación muy escasa pueden dar el pego a los ojos de los no conocedores: remedan los signos exteriores de las investigaciones de la vanguardia literaria o científica y tratan, con las apariencias del gran pensamiento los grandes problemas del momento. Esta aptitud para la simulación mimética llega al colmo con esos productores que celebran la cultura perdurable y condenan la degradación cultural por parte de los medios de difusión en obras de rápida circulación y éxito en esos mismos medios (Alain Finkielkraut, *La derrota del pensamiento*) o que denuncian en dichos medios, y en libros inmediatamente celebrados por los propios medios, su poder tiránico (Debray, *Le pouvoir intellectuel en France*).

Existe hoy día una internacional del ensayismo que está en vías de suplantar o sumergir la verdadera investigación, al imponer su discurso perentorio e inverificable sobre todos los temas de conversación obligada de la *jet-set*: París y Mayo del 68, los inmigrados y los disidentes (...) los ecologistas y las feministas, Gorbachov y los verdes. Llegado a este punto, pienso en la obra de H. Stuart Hughes, *Sophisticated Rebels*, que cayó recientemente entre mis manos. Sólo citaré algunas líneas *escogidas al azar*, sobre “la obsolescencia de los intelectuales”, uno de esos tristes tópicos que sólo el círculo vicioso de las evidencias compartidas pone al abrigo del cuestionamiento: “Durante los dos tercios iniciales del siglo XX, pareció factible incluir casi todo lo referente a ética

política bajo la rúbrica de pensamiento social, (...) pero ahora esa posibilidad está descartada. El consenso se ha esfumado. (...) Demolida por dos guerras mundiales, colapsándose y reviviendo continuamente, la sociedad *burguesa* proporcionó un tema importante a los escritores que disfrutaban de un *status* privilegiado en ella, aun cuando proclamaran como su meta el sacudirla hasta reducirla a sus cimientos. Poco a poco, esa sociedad que se dejó llevar a majestuosas generalizaciones, se ha ido fragmentando. Con ese proceso de fragmentación, el intelectual, en el viejo sentido de la palabra, se ha vuelto obsoleto”. Y así sigue. A cada palabra uno querría y podría preguntar: ¿Qué quiere decir? ¿Por qué dice eso? ¿Cómo lo sabe?

La internacional del ensayismo funciona a toda máquina en las *footnotes* falsamente eruditas, donde vemos desfilar a todos esos pensadores que se apresuran a echar el velo tranquilizador de una idea *inteligente* sobre el acontecimiento puro. Una secuencia de conceptos en -ismo, marxismo, estructuralismo, posestructuralismo, posmodernismo y nombres propios unidos a clichés; Louis Althusser, “el pontífice del marxismo estructuralista”, “el posestructuralista Jacques Derrida”, algunas vagas referencias a la muerte del hombre, Lacan y Foucault y su “denigración de lo individual y lo humano”, algunas anotaciones aproximativas sobre Roland Barthes, y se puede llegar a los “dos arrepentidos y aún jóvenes insurrectos”..., los *nuevos filósofos*, André Glucksmann y Bernard-Henry Lévy, de quienes se dice que han “reflejado fielmente la mentalidad de sus lectores”.

¿Acaso es necesario continuar? Parafraseando a Boris Vian cuando habla de *L'écume des jours*, habría que hablar de la espuma de los periódicos. Lo menos falso, en este océano de asertos infalibles a fuer de infalsificables, es sin duda la constatación de que hemos entrado en la “sociedad de especialistas; una sociedad de rigurosas y a menudo mutuamente incomprensibles competencias técnicas”. Sin duda es cierto que el desarrollo de una ciencia del mundo social y de cuerpos de especialistas dedicados a comprender, al detalle y con métodos rigurosos, fenómenos que los antiguos

filósofos sociales intentaban aprehender en y mediante una intuición sintética, ha hecho más difíciles y más improbables las vastas visiones del mundo social y las profecías sobre el sentido de su evolución. Pero, paradójicamente, ha favorecido sin duda el desarrollo de un ensayismo periodístico que llena, en apariencia y al menor costo, las ambiciones de las *grandes teorías* del pasado: ese género intelectual algo equívoco del que Francia ha hecho una especialidad, ejerce sobre los herederos anglosajones de un puritanismo positivista una seducción ambigua que, un poco a la manera del *gai Paris*, inspira una fascinación siempre mezclada de desprecio. (...) Se asiste actualmente a una mundialización del ensayismo que, como puede verse con el *posmodernismo*, no retrocede ni ante la contradicción ni ante la paradoja y hace, por ejemplo, de la *fragmentación*, el principio de una nueva visión global del mundo.

Pero quienes juzguen útil que una voz llegada de París trate de alertar contra la seducción fácil de los *artículos de París* de tipo cultural, no deben encontrar en esta condena la justificación de una resignación tan fácil para la división del saber que resulta de la escisión del trabajo científico: así como “la hipocresía es un homenaje que el vicio rinde a la virtud”, el ensayismo pasa a ser un homenaje a la necesidad de trabajar por superar los límites inscritos en la especialización. Y corresponde a los artistas, a los escritores y a los sabios el inventar las formas de comunicación y de acción que les permitirán asumir realmente, mediante un trabajo colectivo, el papel histórico del intelectual del que hoy los *filósofos periodistas* nos ofrecen la parodia.

I believe essayism that is a French infirmity, the french flu as E. P. Thompson used to say regarding a certain Gallic form of Marxism. Why did this art of elegantly discoursing on the great problems of the day find such favourable terrain in France, and particularly in Paris? Without a doubt it is due to the predominance of the model of the writer over that of the savant or that of the professor, a predominance whose imperative valorizes the striving for rhetorical effects, to the

16 detriment of depth of thought or rigor. Doubtless it is also due to the fact that the authority of intellectuals, sustained by the roles of writer and savant, to intervene in the political domain, in the fashion of Zola, is more recognized in France than in other places (more, at any rate, than in the Anglo-Saxon countries).

By the courtesy of television and the newspapers, an extreme form of essayism has been imposed, represented by a new category of cultural producers of whom the prototypes are the so-called new philosophers. Most of these, whom Wittgenstein used to call "newspaper-philosophers", work for television, radio, or for weekly magazines and newspapers, and regularly launch into the market cultural articles and effects much as if they were a new type of product. Their works, of cyclical production and scant circulation, can deceive the eyes of the non-connoisseur: they imitate the external signs of the vanguards of literary and scientific research, and address, with all the trappings of profound thought, the great issues of the moment. This aptitude for mimetic simulation finds itself in pig heaven with those producers who celebrate everlasting culture, and condemn the cultural degradation propagated through the media and other means of diffusion such as books of rapid circulation and instant star status, generally using these same mediums (Alain Finkielkraut, *The Undoing of Thought*). Another tendency is to denounce, again in the aforementioned mediums, and in books celebrated immediately by these same mediums, the tyrannical power of these mediums... (Debray, *Le pouvoir intellectuel en France*).

What we have today is an Essayist International, and it well on the way to supplanting or submerging real research, to imposing its peremptory and unverifiable discourse on all the obligatory conversational themes of the jet-set: Paris and May'68, the immigrants and the dissidents (...), the environmentalists and the feminists, Gorbachev and the greens. Having come to this point, I think of H. Stuart Hughes *Sophisticated Rebels*, a work

which recently fell into my hands and from which I will only cite a few lines, chosen at random, on "the obsolescence of intellectuals", one of those tristes topiques that only the vicious circle of an all too widely shared evidence shelters from questioning: "During the first two thirds of the 20th century, it seemed plausible to include almost all reference to political ethics under the rubric of social thought (...), but now that possibility has been left behind. Consensus has disappeared. (...) Demolished by two world wars, continually collapsing and reviving itself, bourgeois society provided an important theme to writers who enjoyed a privileged status within it, even though they often proclaimed their goal to be that of shaking it until it was reduced to its foundations. Little by little, that society which let itself be carried away by grandiose generalizations has been fragmenting. Along with that process of fragmentation, the intellectual, in the old sense of the word, has become obsolete". And so it goes, on and on. At each word one could and would like to ask: What does that mean? What does he want to say? Why does he say that? How does he know?

The International of Essayism functions at full stride in falsely erudite footnotes which, in their haste to draw the tranquillizing veil of an intelligent idea over the pure event, amount to a name-dropping parade. A sequence of concepts mesmerized by their -isms Marxism, structuralism, post-structuralism, postmodernism, and proper names joined to clichés: Louis Althusser, "the pontiff of structural Marxism", "the post-structuralist Jacques Derrida", some vague references to the death of man, Lacan and Foucault and their "denigration of the individual and the human", a few rough notes on Roland Barthes, and perhaps one may arrive at the "two repentant and still young rebels"... the new philosophers, André Glucksmann and Bernard-Henry Lévy, of whom it is said that they have "faithfully reflected the mentality of their readers".

Is it really necessary to go on? Paraphrasing Boris Vian when he speaks of *L'écume des jours*, one

ought to refer to the froth of the news magazines. The least false, in this ocean of infallible (by dint of being unfalsifiable) assertions, is without doubt the contention that we have entered into a "specialists society — a society of rigorous and often mutually incomprehensible technical domains". Doubtless it is true that the development both of a science of the social world and of specialist bodies dedicated to understand, in detail and with rigorous methods, phenomena which the classical philosophers used to grasp at through synthetic intuitions, has made even more difficult and improbable any grand theory of the social world, let alone prophecies on the meaning or direction of its evolution or growth. But, paradoxically, it has without a doubt favoured the development and proliferation of a journalistic essayism which fulfills, in appearance and at little costs, the ambitions of the grand theories of the past: over the Anglo-Saxon heirs of a positivist puritanism, this somewhat equivocal intellectual genre of the essay, a national delicacy of the French, exerts an ambiguous, seduction. Somewhat in the manner of le gai Paris, it inspires a fascination always tinged with contempt. (...) We are witnessing a globalization of essayism which, as can be seen nor flinch in face of a paradox. Indeed, it makes of fragmentation; for example, the principle of a new global vision of the world. But those who would judge it useful that a voice arriving from Paris tries to alert them against any easy seduction by Parisian goods of the cultural sort, ought not to find in this condemnation any justification for a comfortable resignation to the division of knowledge which results from the schism of scientific work. Just as "vice pays tribute to virtue in the coin of hypocrisy", so essayism becomes a testimony to the need to work to overcome the limits inscribed in specialization. And it belongs to artists, writers, and savants to invent the forms of communication and action that will permit them to assume, by way of a collective effort, the real historical role of the intellectual, of which the newspaper-philosophers today offer us a parody.