

The 'Death of the Intellectual' and the Discourse of Supersedence

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Keywords: *intellectual, discourse, etymology, history, signs*

Abstract: The paper focuses on the status of the intellectual and his/her function in the society producing or neglecting such a cultural role. The method of investigation is based on:

a. the semiotic approach offered by John Deely (2005: 73) who considers that "what distinguishes the human being from the other animals is that *only human animals* come to realize that *there are* signs distinct from and superordinate to every particular thing that serves to constitute an individual ... in its distinctness from its surroundings";

b. Lacan's theory of the 'four discourses' (Evans, 2005: 95-97), particularly the discourse of the master and that of the university;

c. the strategies offered by cultural studies;

d. the diachronic perspective of the topic applied to English literary texts (particularly to John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, 1967), having as a background Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859).

Starting from the hypothesis that an intellectual is the holder and 'trumpet' of new ideas, we want to show the reasons why such a cultural type is in full swing in some ages or in full neglect in others, and the effects produced on the society (un)breeding intellectuals. The 'discourse of supersedence' brings to surface, on the one hand, the power of the intellectual to metamorphosize him/herself in order to react and respond to the needs of an everchanging society, and, on the other hand, an intellectual's relations with power and the way such relations are viewed and turned into discourse. The 'death of the individual' and the rise of an institutional structure with its specific language(s) are elements that build up an intellectual's identity as a discursive effect within culture.

I. Introduction

I.1. Why such a topic?

This attempt to write a paper on intellectuals, on their metaphorical *death*, or better said, apparent absence (translated into visible active participation), starting from and always bearing in mind a literary (*The French Lieutenant's Woman*, 1967), containing, in its turn, the tenets of a scientific (*The Origin of Species*, 1859) text, may seem strange. It is neither a sociological, nor a historical or psychological study. It is much more restricted, but nevertheless, deeper in focus as it raises one aspect issuing from a literary discourse produced one hundred years later than the span of time devised in the novel (1867 –

1869). This aspect refers to the foregrounding of one cultural type – that of the intellectual – within the Victorian social, political and cultural frame. 'Perching' on the shoulders of the 20th century (as Julia Kristeva may have said), allows Fowles to look deep down into the layers of time, to pose questions and try to find answers concerning the supersedence of the species called intellectuals. Such a game of question-and-answer left for the reader to *unriddle* unsolved problems raises another challenging issue: the function of literature as seismograph. Fowles shows that it [literature] is the most sensitive instrument of measuring the *infinitesimal* changes taking place at the level of the human mind, of development of ideas, of the subtle phenomenon of progress emerging from failure and error. Why *The French Lieutenant's Woman* particularly and not another novel by Fowles? There are several reasons, that, may turn, indirectly, into a plea for a perceptive reading, which proves again that a literary text catches nuances left otherwise untouched:

- it scrutinizes the Victorian world through the lens of the 20th century; by creating an invisible bridge between present and past (as the world of the novel encompasses several ages with their own system of values), it reveals how different societies (Victorian and modernist, for example) "have understood [themselves] when subjected to the litmus test of dropping the term 'intellectuals' into its public debate"¹;
- the literary discourse with its use of connotative language, besides its task of conceptual analysis (through metaphors), makes possible the emergence of significations from different and diverse perspectives; thus, the symbolical act of *putting to test* by positing an intellectual on the counters of a market turns such a cultural type into an exhibit-as-product item belonging to a specific culture within a specific historical context and occupying a certain hierarchical position; from a discursive point of view, the change from symbol, through metaphor, to irony registers the shift of paradigm operating at the level of mentalities from the 13th to the modernist and postmodernist eras;
- the novel also emphasizes the idea that it is through literature and within its confines that the oxymoronic pattern/model of an intellectual's place in society may be more clearly understood: a model which interprets the performative act of an intellectual as bound-free; hence the ironic mode of the Fowlesian discourse which best illustrates *how* "the question of intellectuals has been posed and answered in Britain in the course of the twentieth century" (Collini 2006:7) and *how* to pursue the rise and fall of a *cultural species* through the judging of failures;
- the text also sends to what might be called 'an intellectual's pursuits' in the Victorian society (science and religion, literature, the fine arts and travelling) and who they may be undertaken by (men rather than women);
- it also shows a term's struggle to survive within a discourse of 'masters'/snobs/gentlemen; thus, it is not only a species that is put to test, but also language itself;
- the text suggests the answer to *how* the problem of intellectuals is posed in the Victorian world and the way it may be pursued by modernists; that is why, the structure of this paper is built on the model offered by Fowles's novel: from etymologies, through an indirect act of naming (defining by traits, by what it is not, yet, without using the denominator 'intellectual'), to relations, hierarchies of value, habitat (the mind as habitat and battle-ground for opposing influences and conflicting ideals).

I.2. Etymology

The analysis of a name and the search for its etymology is both a way of fixing somebody's or something's existence in time and the possibility of recording distinctive

¹ Collini, Stefan. 2006. *Absent Minds. Intellectuals in Britain*. OUP, p.7.

traits which differentiate items among themselves and of mapping a specific pattern for that name. Such an exercise (particularly with the creation of the concept of *intellectual* as a common denominator explaining discoveries in the domain of knowledge) means an ever new changing of frontiers, an act which coincides with the dynamics of enlarging perspectives and of deepening the levels of understanding.

It is interesting that Fowles's text takes the reader to the medieval times with the mapping of the concept's major trait, that of search, of the desire to discover new things able to generate new hypotheses. The etymology² of *intellectual*, used as an adjective (= a quality of something), goes back to the ME [ad.L. *intellectualis*, f. *intellectus*] and displays the following significations: **1.** of, or belonging to, the intellect or understanding; that appeals to or engages the intellect (1834); **2.** apprehensible or apprehended only by the intellect; nonmaterial, spiritual; ideal (1711); **3.** characterised by or possessing intellection or understanding; intelligent (1797); possessing a high degree of understanding; given to pursuits that exercise the intellect (1819). As a noun, *intellectual* denotes **1.** the intellectual faculty; the intellect, mind (1667); **2.** used as a synonym to *intellect* (1615); **3.** (pl.) things pertaining to the intellect (1650); **4.** an intellectual being; a person having superior powers of intellect (1652); used in syntagms such as 'a dinner of intellectuals' in 1884.

Thus, an *intellectual* is the being possessing the quality of apprehending something at a higher level of understanding than any other being. The idea of hierarchy is implicitly contained in the denotative definition when admitting the existence of levels of understanding. It is exactly what Fowles's discourse on the rise and fall of intellectuals refers to. There are two reasons for his going as far back as the 13th century for tracing the history of such a cultural type: the first is given by the social and historical circumstances of founding the two universities³ in England, metaphorically conceived as 'cradles of knowledge', and by the effects such intellectual spaces can produce upon human minds; and, the second, refers to the possibilities (offered by the diachronic perspective, and using the instruments offered by the semiotics of culture) of recording the changes which give rise to new hierarchies built up on a system of values which every great age creates in consonance with the level of knowledge attained. Thus, as the Fowlesian discourse shows, every development in ideas is a rebellious phenomenon as it aims at obtaining an ever more accurate *picture* of the changes in the domain of knowledge⁴ and in the development of reality; which means that every such *picture* is superseded by a set of higher values supported by the new ideas discovered by all those endowed with superior powers of intellect. And it is not by accident that Charles Smithson – the character in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* – is a 19th century paleontologist in search of *tests* hidden beneath layers of history. The etymology of the paradigm *test* and its being used ambiguously in the text reveals the novelist's strategy: that of studying the validity of an age's system of values with special lens⁵. Hence the discovery that supersedence is supported by what Peirce calls "an infinitesimal" tendency to change and

² The etymologies belong to Oxford Dictionary on Historical Principles. The act of digging up for etymological roots is offered by the novel itself: Charles Smithson is in search of *testa*, which is a strong opportunity for the narrator to trace the dynamics of the word.

³ Oxford University was granted its first official privileges in 1214; Cambridge University was established in 1284 (apud the *New Penguin Encyclopedia*, edited by David Crystal, 2002).

⁴ Fowles's discourse also contains questions concerning the (im)possibility of acquiring knowledge only through the data offered by reason. Are learning and logical thinking enough to reach a level of understanding the changing phenomena in reality, or is there necessary a certain amount of subjective experience or religious faith in order to respond to the needs of an individual in a specific age and to act according to the principles and values established by that age.

⁵ For the use of lens (the lens of a microscope and of a telescope) as a narratological strategy to demonstrate hypotheses see Cmeciu 2002.

diversification⁶. It is this unobservable disposition to move, to turn direction, to diversify, which is the cause of the researcher's testing and being tested at the same time, of observing and being observed, of changing something and himself in response to all the alterations encountered during the act of demonstrating new ideas; all these traits merging into a possible *portrait* of the intellectual as perceived by a 20th century narrator who might be Fowles himself.

Leaving behind the career of a gentleman, Charles Smithson turns into a 'queer species' – one that manifests itself by using his mind to ask and answer questions on a variety of different ideas - as far as he seems interested in searching for, observing, studying extinct creatures and in reflecting upon the causes and effects of change or in trying to obtain a spiritual profit, rather than a material one, out of all his queries.

I.3. A brief history (through a growing lexicon)

The 13th century seems to be dominated by the nominal paradigm of 'sages'; the Renaissance by that of 'scholar', or encyclopedic mind, and, starting with the Enlightenment onwards, the semantic field includes names such as: moralists, 'men of letters', 'men of ideas', 'men of thought', thinkers, 'cultivated men', with new additions towards the end of the Victorian period and during the modernist age: men of culture, observers, critics, commentators.

The French influences are to be observed in the syntagms 'men of ...', while Charles Smithson's American adventure unfolds to him the possibilities of 'learning'/finding out that an intellectual activity may be seen as trade. And yet, the noun 'intellectual' first comes into use at the end of the 19th century as a term denoting the defenders of Dreyfus (Collini 2006: 21) and as a response to a new social and political context, "involving a structural change" in the (French) society. Thus, the presence of a term in the vocabulary of a community at a certain period of time is a 'linguistic birth registration', which, semiotically, coincides with the putting into discourse, that is, with an act of communicating something according to codes, and with the existence of (a Peircian) *representamen*, *interpretant* and *object*.

The absence of the term in the novel and the use of other terms, such as researcher, scientist etc. shows, from the very beginning of the text, a fracture in relationships established between such 'men' and the public at large, a slowness in accepting structural changes, although the reader is told that "another wind was blowing in 1867". Lack of communication, contempt, recording of different needs and pursuit of different ideals in a trade society map a discourse of Darwinian struggle to exist both as individual and as symbolical representation of a group in search of strategies to show the others how superior knowledge can be shared for the benefit of all, or, on the contrary, what disadvantages it may bring about if codes are misunderstood. Charles Smithson becomes a demonized figure alleged to pursue either the little goals of Ernestina Freeman, a prisoner of Victorian market needs, and, thus, turning into an extinct species, or to follow the high ideals of the liberal new woman Sarah Woodrugh, and yet, get confused with the blindness of principles he cannot change and thus, ending by being left at crossroads not knowing exactly which way/direction to choose/to go along. It is this struggle of trying to find the true voice of expressing and communicating new needs which Fowles studies and poses as the problem of intellectuals alongside with the emergence of the term to signify it. In other words, does it remain for the reader to scrutinize histories of need and change and give a name to defenders of new ideas?

⁶ In "On the Notion of Reality as Changing" (*apud* Kallen 1953:116), William James explains the paradoxical nature of this paradigm which is the *brick* of the Victorian discourse of change: "The mathematical notion of an infinitesimal contains, in truth, the whole paradox of the same and yet the nascent other, of an identity that won't *keep* except so far as it keeps *failing*, that won't *transfer*, any more than the serial relations in question transfer, when you apply them to reality instead of applying them to concepts alone."

II. What is an intellectual⁷?

Before trying to answer the question and define the term, we should remember that the latter half of the 20th century, particularly the decade when the book was written (it was published in 1969) witnessed a greater interest in the function and duties of intellectuals. The mere enumeration of some titles shows the climate which favoured Fowles's interest in tracing the evolution of such "a rare species" in the course of time:

- on the one hand, we should mention at least two titles belonging to the 20th century: in 1969, John Gross published *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters*, a man of letters whose life and career shaped the cultural sphere in England from the 18th century through the Victorian into the modernist age; in 1966, Sartre⁸ delivered a series of lectures, focused on the nature and role of the intellectual, and known as *A Plea for Intellectuals*, which begins with the question 'What is an intellectual?';
- on the other hand, the concern shown by a host of Victorian writers, philosophers, critics, editors (Carlyle, Arnold, John Stuart Mill, Leslie Stephens) about the field of activity of 'truth-seekers', men of science/of culture/of letters (or whatever name they are known by in the Victorian culture), a concern made public in articles for reviews, journals or other writings. The major issue is 'the putting of the researchers' principles and theses to the test' of 'practical authority':

Here is John Morley's opinion on what modernists define as 'intellectual':

"Though England counts her full share of fearless truth-seekers in most departments of enquiry, yet there is on the whole no weakening, but a rather marked confirmation, of what has become an inveterate national characteristic, and has long been recognized as such; a profound distrust, namely, of all general principles; a profound dislike, both of much reference to them, and of any disposition to invest them with practical authority; and a silent but most pertinacious measurement of philosophic truths by political tests. The most obvious agency at work in the present exaggeration of the political standard as the universal test of truth, is to be found in some contemporary incidents. The influence of France upon England since the revolution of 1848 has tended wholly to the discredit of abstract theory and general reasoning among us, in all that relates to politics, morals, and religion." (John Morley, *On Compromise*, 1874, apud Collini 2006:73-74)

With all this in mind, what is Charles Smithson when studied with the microscopic and telescopic lens of an intellectual⁹ like John Fowles?

⁷ For the modern senses of the noun 'intellectual' and its definition, see Collini 2006:46-48, who considers that there are three major classificatory criteria: sociological (an intellectual being a member of an occupational group, such as: professors, writers, journalists, government workers, and the like; this meaning, corresponding to *intelligentsia*, shows a "new class" whose function is to advance common interests in and for modern societies); subjective (the term is used to identify persons with interests in books, ideas, and intellectual debate) and cultural (an intellectual is that person who possesses intellectual authority on the basis of achievements or appointments and who tries to use that authority to the benefit of the broader public on subjects that go beyond their domain of activity). It is this type of authority, allowing them to be the possessors of a cultural capital (Bourdieu), which identifies intellectuals as a cultural type distinctive not only temporally but also spatially, and which has given rise to debates over how and for what ends such authority should be used).

⁸ John Fowles's interest in French literature and philosophy is well-known.

⁹ Although the paradigm 'intellectual' is not used in the text (as shown above, it was introduced in the late 1890ies), there are its distinctive traits as a mix emerging from both character and narrator which allows us to show that the concept existed, and that the use of a word or another sends to the dynamics of referents superseding one another in order to signify the changing relations within a society.

Chapters are dedicated to defining him by displaying his characteristic traits, and yet never forgetting that, beneath the surface, there is a span of one hundred years' time against which the infinitesimal changes of reality and those of a subjective creative self have been recorded.

He [Charles Smithson] "liked to think of himself as a scientific young man" interested in palaeontology, and who "would not have been too surprised had news reached him out of the future of the aeroplane, the jet engine, television, radar: what *would* have astounded him was the changed attitude to time itself." (p.15.); while, as if *sworled* around 1867 as temporal axis, projected into a long time ahead, and reflected in a mirror, the narrator-intellectual's concern encompasses a mix of abstract philosophical approach to time with a tendency to 'use' it for practical purposes. The sense of lack of time and of overcoming it through producing something, such as writing, for example, carries with it the intellectual's fear of "inner nothingness" (what Fowles names as *nemo*, the Latin word for *nobody*), a state of mind alleviated by religion. It is within the confines of religion, science, philosophy and writing that the *whatness* of an intellectual could be defined. Starting with discovering data offered by geology and palaeontology – "the reconstruction and dating of fossils being two vital acts to the evolutionary argument"¹⁰ – an exercise introducing science as intellectual discipline to both Charles Smithson and to Fowles the narrator, the two 'truth-seekers' continue to dig up the temporal layers until finding solutions for subduing time. The gradual shift of paradigm from religion to writing, the latter building itself up on the findings of the other three mentioned above, is observed in the text in terms of a dynamic hierarchy of values slowly changing in the course of one century.

It is interesting to observe that the semantic field of the intellectual contains two important verbs: *to look for* and *to look at*. They circumscribe the territory of an intellectual's activity: the former, which "I", as Fowles said in an interview taken by V. Dupont, "vaguely attach to science, wanting to increase scientific knowledge", maps the quest of an ideal in life; the latter, "in a full sense of existential awareness of the now" (the same interview), reveals and displays the art of observing and reflecting upon the acquiring of knowledge by magnifying the "sense of existingness", of never dying, of living intensely through the very act of producing something. The two verbs map the bourns of an intellectual's identity; hence, the large amount of synonyms for the latter and its very frequent use.

Charles's 'asking life too many questions', his experiencing of time, his accepting that knowable reality means the reality of self-perception, the narrator's searching for "time's signature over existence", the strategies of reflecting lens and of flexible endings, all are signs which identify an intellectual's struggling to establish relations which might place him/her in a position of power.

We may define, then, a Fowlesian intellectual as the being who gains, or strives to gain, the knowledge of how to make life endless, in order to give it a potential value by attaining, or failing to attain, certain ideals of knowledge, of beauty or of power.

II.1. Distinctive signs/Attributes

What distinguishes one intellectual from the other in the text is the way of thinking, the degree of curiosity, the fastness to take a decision and the responsibility of assuming the effects of the solutions given as answers to the questions posed.

But the text also shows that distinctiveness manifests itself through the interest in action, and in different activities. The idea of participation, of taking the initiative is supported linguistically by the relationships between modal verbs. The semiotic analysis of such relationships between modalities that qualify action (will to know and ability to reach

¹⁰ Burrow, J.W.: 'Editor's Introduction' to *The Origin of Species by means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, by Charles Darwin, 1859/1985, p.29.

knowledge and turn it into capital) and those that moderate action (must, shall, should) shows that they constitute the structure of the most meaningful pattern of an intellectual's life (Johansen and Larsen 2002: 99). The game between *will*, *knowledge* and *ability* within the Greimasian pattern of qualifying modalities reveals the following possible types of action developed by the two males: a higher rate of deliberate (+will, +knowledge, +ability, +action), desired (-ability, -action, +will, +knowledge) and omitted action (+will, +knowledge, +ability, -action) for the narrator-intellectual; while for the researcher, there is a greater rate of erroneous (+will, +ability, +action, -knowledge), failed (+will, +action, -knowledge, -ability) and accidental (+knowledge, +ability, +action, -will) actions (apud Johansen and Larsen 2002: 100). Then, the fact that modalities such as *must* or *should* are mostly used when Charles Smithson is referred to, shows his dependency on established rules, his incapacity to live according to a set of codes fabricated by himself and imposed to others. The narrative strategies used by Fowles – of studying two types of intellectuals in action at a temporal distance of one hundred years, of naming them differently, which involves another reference, hence their power to represent and to become signs for somebody; or that of constructing a *house of fiction* with three *exits/endings* – are meant to show the importance allotted to openness, to freedom of action when referring to such a cultural product. The degree of openness of movement and of thinking confers more fastness to the process of understanding, of gaining knowledge and, consequently, of turning a researcher into a dynamic intellectual, into a more active participant to the process of producing something/signs in their capacity to create relations of representation. (Gadamer 2005:477, 499).

The other problem which the study of this cultural type raises at this point of circumscribing its temporal identity refers to its turning into a tragic individual. Charles Smithson's struggle seems dull; in spite of his desire to be free, to move freely, he lacks the ability to do so and his actions lack a dynamic flexibility based on spontaneous turns; his structural background, that of being a Victorian gentleman, makes him comply with the rules of comfortability; hence, the impossibility of rapid action which might produce deep structural changes. It seems that this is Fowles's purpose: to define an intellectual by circumscribing his territory, his types of action, his desire to produce signs able to represent his endeavours as distinguishable from others (because every age creates its own species). The will to gain knowledge and the ability to alter strategies in order to restructure, reorganize and reconnect is an act not only of superior understanding but also of creating a new thing with each action done, an act of empowering the doer, by giving free way to several possibilities of action.

II.2. Roles performed by intellectuals

To translate Darwin's 'natural selection'/'survival of the fittest' into Fowles's intellectual's discourse means to trace the trajectory of a struggle which confers unto such a being the position of power and makes him play the role of subject, of producer of ideas, of consumer of exterior data in order to reshape them according to the needs of a community and to creatively manipulate those he comes to/wants to establish relationships with. It is the power to put into practice the ideas nourished by the mind, to make abstractization useful that turns Darwinian struggle into a profitable 'affair'.

The following conversation between Foucault and Deleuze highlights the major issues of the discourse on intellectuals, with the further addition that a writer's metaphorical language can better illumine things which otherwise remain invisible:

"Foucault: The intellectual's role is no longer to place himself "somewhat ahead and to the side" in order to express the stifled truth of the collectivity; rather, it is to struggle against the forms of power that transform him into its object and instrument in the sphere of "knowledge", "truth", "consciousness", and "discourse". In this sense theory does not express, translate, or serve to apply practice: it is practice. But it is local and

regional, as you said, and not totalising. This is a struggle against power, a struggle aimed at revealing and undermining power where it is most invisible and insidious. It is not to “awaken consciousness” that we struggle (the masses have been aware for some time that consciousness is a form of knowledge; and consciousness as the basis of subjectivity is a prerogative of the bourgeoisie), but to sap power, to take power; it is an activity conducted alongside those who struggle for power, and not their illumination from a safe distance. A “theory” is the regional system of this struggle.

Deleuze: Precisely. A theory is exactly like a box of tools. It has nothing to do with the signifier. It must be useful. It must function. And not for itself. If no one uses it, beginning with the theoretician himself (who then ceases to be a theoretician), then the theory is worthless or the moment is inappropriate. We don't revise a theory, but construct new ones; we have no choice but to make others. It is strange that it was Proust, an author thought to be a pure intellectual, who said it so clearly: treat my book as a pair of glasses directed to the outside; if they don't suit you, find another pair; I leave it to you to find your own instrument, which is necessarily an investment for combat. A theory does not totalise; it is an instrument for multiplication and it also multiplies itself. It is in the nature of power to totalise and it is your position, and one I fully agree with, that theory is by nature opposed to power”.¹¹

II.3. Positions

Scholars, men of science, intellectuals – whatever their name might be – have been given a privileged position. The paradox here arises from the fact that such a position is given either by the people they ignore, or despise (for the latter's lack of knowledge), or they themselves claim to be regarded with respect for their learning, for their superior power of understanding, a tendency which is tinged with selfishness and leads to self-isolation. It is a kind of oxymoronic structural relationship, an embrace-reject attitude which carries with it the division of the people into two: the few educated and the many uneducated, the high- and the lowbrow, the élite and the vulgar, the lighted, the illumined minds and the invisible, unknowable, the master minds and the slaves. It should be observed that the latter item of these syntagms is metaphorically associated with food, or with places where food is prepared (particularly the kitchen). The most striking result of this cultural division is the ironic or negative resonance which the term ‘intellectual’ has. The taking of power is at stake again: Sam's gradually usurping the position of his master is an example in point.

Lacan's theory on the four discourses¹² (of the master, the academic person, of the hysterical and of the analyst) provides the elements which support the changing of positions according to relationships, the (im)possibility, (in)ability to satisfy certain needs or to reach some ideals, but, above all, it poses the problem of the discourse, which presupposes the existence of the Other, and of the structure of language which contains and gives linguistic expression to the type of relations establishing themselves between the intellectual and the others. The algorithm which represents each discourse contains four symbols in an equation: S1 = the signifier master; S2 = knowledge; S = the subject; a = surplus of pleasure¹³.

¹¹ ‘Intellectuals and Power: A Conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze’, (1972). Trans. in LCM.

¹² For this part of the paper, we used Lacan's *Écrits* (1966/1977), Evans's *Dicționar introductiv de psihanaliză lacaniană* (2005), and Soler's *What Lacan Said about Women. A Psychoanalytic Study* (2006).

¹³ We prefer the term *pleasure* to *jouissance*, in order to emphasize the cultural rather than the psychoanalytical approach to discourse.

The discourse of the master, characteristic of Charles Smithson's Victorian age¹⁴, gives the dominant position to the master (S1)/the educated, aristocratic gentleman, playing the role of researcher, of seeker of *tests*, which represents the subject (S) (symbolically written under S1) for *other* signifiers (S2). This act of investing the master/subject relation with meaning, always involves a surplus, an *objet petit (a)*, which turns the master's attempt to communicate full possession of the *others* to failure. Thus, we can say that Smithson's discourse hides, beneath it, two important aspects: the splitting of the subject (hence the quest for the true self) and the surplus (of work, of pleasure, of knowledge, of information, even of desire) which is fought for by both the seeker of tests and the seeker of material satisfaction (Sam, the servant).

$$\frac{S1}{S} \rightarrow \frac{S2}{a}$$

The discourse of the university, characteristic of the intellectual-narrator, is created/produced through a quarter counter clock-wise rotation of the positions in the previous discourse. The dominant position is allotted to knowledge of and by the *other*. It signifies the position of *other(s)* as signifier for master which represents the subject; which means that no matter how neutral the sharing of knowledge might seem, and no matter the social frame wherefrom it is imparted to, there is always an authority imposing its will, this time, the authority of S2 to whom knowledge is shared. Knowledge, science, the attempt to understand the phenomena outside and the crises inside are characteristic of the seekers of answers to doubts, to questions which, most often, remain unsolved, or appear as riddles¹⁵ left to *others* to guess their meaning.

$$\frac{S2}{S1} \rightarrow \frac{a}{S}$$

These two algorithms constitute, in our opinion, the structural backbone of Fowles's text, and foreground the cultural aspects of the questions of and on intellectuals; in other words, *how* their identity is *construed*.

The study of an intellectual's positions within his discourse reveals that the success or the failure of his endeavours is based on both exterior relations (his dependence on the others' attitude towards him) and inner relations (exerted by *the other* representing the effect which the language that is addressed to him, by *another subject* that comes from the past, from *another* temporal position, working either as a cultural heritage or a personal experience has; hence the *burden* of so many hundred of years marking the existence of an intellectual). Language renders these two types of relations through metonymy (a combination of signifiers, a series of cause-effect interdependence seen at the level of having or trying to take power) and through metaphor (as a substitution of one signifier for another, which means that through a metaphorical operation, something of the first signifier passes to the signified producing a positive 'meaning-effect', as Lacan calls it and symbolically shows it with a +). This metaphorical supplement of meaning and metonymical negative/minus meaning-effect, *looked at* the level of roles and positions may explain the desire of the intellectual, belonging to any cultural age, to change the status of

¹⁴ Although the two years (1867 – 1869) which constitute the span of time of all the events in Smithson's life are meant to mark the transition between one mode of thinking and another: from the (apparently) stable, coherent, organized Victorian pattern of life to the flexible, incoherent, ambiguous modernist *model* of existence.

¹⁵ The first epigraph of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, is taken from Thomas Hardy's poem *The Riddle* (with no year mentioned). The last two epigraphs belong to Martin Gardiner's *The Ambidextrous Universe* (1967) and Matthew Arnold's *Notebooks* (1868). From *unriddling* the signification of 'true piety' (does it mean *acting what one knows?*) to "Evolution is simply the process by which chance (the random mutations in the nucleic acid helix caused by natural radiation) co-operates with natural law to create living forms better and better adapted to survive.", we, as 21st decoders of communicative algorithms, observe, while *looking at* them, that the process of sharing knowledge records the traces of an *evolution* of the discourse of co-operation whose major purpose is the manipulation of *new* ideas.

object into that of subject. From *watched, observed, scrutinized*, from *obeying* the orders of *others*, although apparently situated high up on the social rung, the intellectual struggles for *free movement, free thinking* and *free participation* in a natural habitat, a desire which is translated through modalities of qualifying action, through states expressing perceptual awareness, or through verbal constructions rendering reciprocal transference. The game of roles and positions, supported by the structure of language, displays, at the deep level of discourse, the act of supersedence, a type of Darwinian *natural selection*, of *survival of the fittest*¹⁶ signifier producing its signifieds; and, at the surface level, or in between, the struggle of the intellectual to change his position as object into active roles played by the subject.

III. The 'death of the intellectual'

We have already shown that by producing and expressing ideas, intellectuals *play* with power; that is, by fighting against its different forms of manifestation, they try to take it. So, the 'co-operation' which the verb 'to share' includes in its semantic sphere is only apparent because, as Foucault's algorithm discloses, there is always the *other's* desire to manifest authority over *another* position in order to impose ideas = their power onto sharers of knowledge. Becoming both creators and critics of authority and of ideology within this process of co-operation, intellectuals, metonymically seen as a series of manipulators to be manipulated, turn into a species that is 'for sale' (the display of knowledge on the counters of a market *uses* the product and leads to its metaphorical extinction) in Victorian markets or 'for public exposure' on the *stage* of institutions such as universities, law-courts, mass-media (newspapers etc). Either a subject to scandal, or a public person involved in a public performance which turns the stage into a *political institution*¹⁷ (Gadamer, 2006:141) "par excellence because only the performance brings out everything that is in the play ..."

By being publicly exposed, an intellectual *is used*, which means that he is subject to extinction; while struggling to take power he ends by being taken in its possession.

And yet, through his role of producer of new ideas, the intellectual is the abstract embodiment of the seeker, animated by the desire to know, and, consequently, to change. He is the 'only species' – Fowles seems to say – that possesses the power to see beyond a mere system of related entities (a surface relation of relatedness between subject and object, for example), which is a characteristic of common creatures. This idea sends us to Deely's *semiotic animal*. For the American philosopher, "semiosic creatures [are] creatures which grow and develop through the manipulation of sign-vehicles and the involvement in sign-processes, semiosis" (2005:73) If every animal is a semiosic creature "able to survive and thrive only thanks to whatever semiosic competence it is able to manage", then, what distinguishes an intellectual from the other semiosic humans?

Translating Deely's theory of semiosic competence into the practice of Fowles's text (also bearing in mind Foucault and Deleuze's conversation on theory and practice), we can say that, as a mind-dependent being, an intellectual (with the will, the knowledge, the ability and the power to perform an action) is the only one "capable of distinguishing relations as such from *related things* or from *objects observed*." (*idem*:74). Capable of developing a semiotic consciousness, the intellectual *dies* as *ens reale*, but is superseded by *ens rationis* when pursuing the quality of the sign "to function as *an other-representation* within semiosis" (*ibidem*) and when understanding the difference between (triadic) relation and the sign itself in its material or psychological manifestation.

¹⁶ The syntagm *survival of the fittest* was adopted by Darwin from Herbert Spencer's theory to replace "his own *natural selection* and 'fit' in his sense [is] related to a given environment, not to an absolute scale of perfection." (Burrow 1985:33).

¹⁷ *Institution*, taken semiotically, with the meaning of a signifying function. The stage, then, is instituted, an act which gives it its representational character.

IV. The discourse of supersedence

If the intellectual-narrator in Fowles's text replaces the scientist through his capacity of apprehending the power of relations within the sign, relations which generate new *other* representations in the mind, then, we can say that he supersedes the traditional species through "an act of institution" that allows a free play of signifiers and signifieds, the latter being recognized as the effect of the former. Thus, the mode of being of an intellectual can be circumscribed in terms of "presentation and action of knowledge, which includes performance, image, commun(ica)tion and representation (Gadamer, 2006:145), a 'presentation and action of knowledge' which manifests itself only in and through language. If metonymy showed just a combination of signifiers – let us remember all the types of 'men of ...'-linguistic structures governing the Victorian discourse – without any supplementary addition meant to keep the species alive -, metaphor, with its substitution operation, is asked to govern the discourse of supersedence. Thus, the concept of understanding is enlarged: it does not mean only the decoding of past texts, but the apprehending of the essence of all phenomena of evolution through the meaningful presence of the signs located in the past (Gadamer, 2006:158). An ever new identity of the intellectual-narrator (linguistically expressed through metaphors: a telescopist, a Maker, maker, an Isis hid by the veil, a transposer, the freedom that allows other freedoms to exist etc.) shows the power to metamorphosize, a power which is given onto him when becoming the possessor of a cultural capital (Bourdieu 1985), which is but the superior understanding of *how* time works, of *how* it plunges some thing into oblivion or projects an-other thing into the future, or *how* and *what* it digs up from such distances to offer it as a model/reason for change. Hence the six hundred years' distance needed to prove that a mind-dependent being cannot die. One name supersedes another definition when knowledge is not spatialized through names belonging to the same category as if in a series on a production line; when it is dug up, searched for through past and future to be raised to a meaningful present surface, then, transference of meaning to *an-other* representation within semiosis (rendered through challenging ideas), makes the species survive.

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