

Intelligentsia, Intellectuals, and the Uses of Social Intelligence

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What else is there left to say about the intelligentsia? One hundred ten years ago, during the short stretch between the first Russian revolution and World War I, Sasha Cherny wrote this verse about the intelligentsia, sad and ironic at the same time. In hindsight, Ilya Ilf and Evgeny Petrov with their comic character Vasily Lokhankin seem like poor imitators.

The Intelligent

With the last cherished hope abandoned,
Tired tongue pathetically hanging out,
Fast asleep in his European clothes,
 He is snoring like an ailing steam engine.

Big Ideas exhausted in fruitless intrigues,
Yearnings suspended in the web cubs of the night,
Unread books piled up on the floor in the corner,
 His sacred tablets are shattered into pieces.

Bitter sounds of blowing wind outside...
But the walls are high and the sofa is snug.
Healing and bountiful is the sleep
 Of those drunk on unfulfilled hopes.

From the depth of your slumber please tell me
your secret – why are you so mortally tired of life?
Is it your chasing happiness around the world
 Or have you spent yourself cultivating the land?

His eyelids parted. And the barely audible voice
full of melancholy whispered to me:
“Brother! One hope I buried after another,
 Brother! Nothing exhausts you more than lost hope.

Fiery orations, bold gestures, unmet expectations
Have consumed me in that wild macabre dance.
A groom eternally waiting for a beautiful bride,
 “I am an ugly, crippled, nauseating man.”

Silence. The storm outside hasn't exhausted itself.
Ever so slowly my thoughts began to crystallize,
And feeling embarrassed, embittered, fed-up, I said:
 “Move over, my brother! Make room for me too”

Intelligentsia, intellectuals, and the uses of social intelligence

The word “intelligentsia” in translation from the Latin (*intelligentia*) means “cogitation,” “the power of comprehension,” and the “the ability to generalize and systematize concepts.” The word was widely used in this abstract sense in Western philosophy of the early modern era. *Intelligentnost*¹ should be distinguished from *mentalnost* – mentality (from the Latin *mens*, “mind”), the latter being a certain mindset formed under the influence of social, ethnic, political, professional, and confessional factors. The “conservative mentality,” “French mentality,” “Islamic mentality,” “engineering mentality,” these refer to the habit of thinking in accordance with one’s identity, which is formed outside the boundaries of thinking itself. *Intelligentnost*, like *intelligentia*, is, on the other hand, the propensity of the mind to independently consider and combine widely varying ideas, going beyond the bounds of any established way of thinking. *Intelligentnost* is the quality of impartiality, a total openness of thinking, a kind of universal sympathy and empathy in the cognitive sphere that allows people of completely different mentalities to grow close and come together in a united search for the truth.

In cultures where the power of reason – *intelligentia* – has clashed with traditional mentalities, the historical need for a special thinking class has arisen as an instrument of the active socialization of reason. The word “intelligentsia” thus took on a new meaning, as a reference to a group of people united by their goal of intellectualizing the state and society. In 1844, the Polish messianic philosopher Karol Libelt was the first to use the word “*inteligencja*” in this meaning in his work “On Love for the Fatherland.” The word, “*inteligencja*,” was long thought to have been introduced into the Russian language by P. Boborykin in the mid-1860s. However, researchers recently discovered that it appeared earlier, in a journal entry by the poet V. A. Zhukovsky dated February 2, 1836: “Three hours after that general disaster...the grand Engelhardt home was lit up, and carriages began to arrive, filled with the best Petersburg nobility that the Russian European intelligentsia we have here.” (Zhukovsky, 1836/2004, p. 40).

It’s customary to celebrate the anniversaries of great works: “the 100-year anniversary of the novel by Lev Tolstoy,” “Pushkin’s poem is 150 years old.” But there are also words that have contributed no less to the spiritual development of a people and humanity as a whole, than literary masterpieces. What would the Russian intelligentsia be without this self-designation? The word forms its object, in this case, an object capable of forming itself through an act of self-awareness. The intelligentsia arises at the intersection of two major coordinates of civilization: intellect and society. The mission of the intelligentsia is to intellectualize society, and at the same time, socialize the intellect. It is difficult to harmonize these two processes and the very existence of the intelligentsia as an intermediary between intellect and society testifies to its problematic and tragic nature. The intelligentsia, as it evolved in Russia, is an “intelligent irrelevance” (A. Herzen), intellect unassimilated, rejected by society, eager to sacrifice itself for the sake of achieving its social destiny, even if only in an impoverished, aggregated form. That is the sad, defeatist fate of the populist intelligentsia, largely renouncing the values of intellectual life to achieve unity with the people (“boots above Shakespeare”).

¹ Possessing the qualities of a member of the intelligentsia.

Another side of the same problem is the relationship between the intelligentsia and the state, also dualistic in nature: intellectualizing the state (a challenge the intelligentsia usually fails), and imbuing the intellect with state significance, subordinating it to some ideological and bureaucratic agenda. Thus, the Russian intelligentsia has, on one hand, succumbed to the “idolatry of the people,” and on the other, groveled before the state. Not surprisingly, the membership in this group bespoke marginality and confirmed the individual’s status as a social outcast.

Does this mean that the intelligentsia exemplifies a failed model of interaction between intellect and society and that it is time to do away with it? Are we ready to entertain a different model, in which the task of socializing the intellect is subordinated to the higher goal of intellectualizing society? This is a complicated question to which I have given different answers at various stages in post-Soviet Russian history. There are three key points in the history of “intelligentsia” as a concept which I propose to illustrate with brief accounts I developed in the last three decades.

In the 1990s, it looked like the intelligentsia had outlived its usefulness and would soon exit the historical scene and be replaced by intellectuals or professional thinkers.

In the 2000s, it seemed that burying the intelligentsia would be premature, given the mounting pressure from the state, and that the intelligentsia experience still has something to offer to civil society.

In the 2010s, it became even clearer that the intelligentsia has a vital role to play, and not only in Russia but in America as well, that its members can make a decisive contribution to the unification of humankind.

I use this is the chronological and logical order to organize the selection from my past remarks covering the 1990s through 2010, from the intelligentsia’s demise to the growing hope for its revival, even if in a different role and on a different scale.

1993: The intelligentsia and the people: the twin origins of two chimeras

Russia’s transition to private ownership is usually understood as the privatization of property, but this process has another important side: the privatization of knowledge. While the first type could lead to the disappearance of the historical category “the people,” the second kind of privatization could lead to the disappearance of the “intelligentsia.”

Debates about the people and the intelligentsia, a two hundred-year-old dispute, grew particularly fierce from the end of the 1960s to the start of the 1970s. As conjured up by Grigory Pomerants, the intelligentsia proclaimed itself to be “people of the air,” “people from nowhere,” and denied its umbilical tie to the body of the people. Moreover, it slammed the people for resisting progressive educational reforms, beginning with Peter the Great, which produced this ignorant, inert mass that yields to historical change only in response to violence. But the people always had their defenders, most notably Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who accused the intelligentsia of relinquishing its duty to serve the people and delivering them to Bolshevik ruin and worse than that, nurturing the monstrous idea of a totalitarian state and bringing it to life.

In Pomerants’ version, the persecuted, non-conformist intelligentsia falls victim to the people who reject the gifts of free creativity, who condemn Pasternak without reading him and applaud party pronouncements and government decrees. In Solzhenitsyn’s version, the people, robbed and decimated, are victims of the intelligentsia. The latter imposed its parasitic ideology

on the people and is content to live at the expense of the eternally toiling laborers, spiritually drained under the ruling atheist *obrazovanshchina* – the ironic term Solzhenitsyn coined to the formally educated but morally irresponsible and conformist (the term often translated into English as “the smatterers”).

These disputes go back to such landmark articles as Pomerants’ “Man from Nowhere” (1969), and Solzhenitsyn’s “Repentance and Self-Restraint, as Categories of National Life” (1973). These manifestos begat a lengthy polemic between “pluralists” and “conservatives,” which extended into the glasnost era. The argument grew increasingly bitter at the start of the 1990s when the question was raised, who would bury who? Would the intelligentsia use market forces to pulverize the people into privatized enterprises, farms, and firms, or would the people, assuming power, wipe the intelligentsia from the face of their long-suffering land?

In truth, the debate is an idle one, for the part of society defined as intelligentsia cannot exist without rest of society – without the people. The two are conceptually intertwined in a single system. And it is the private ownership that points to the unbroken bond between the people and the intelligentsia in Russia. If one is fated to disappear, the other will perish as well.

The Russian people adhered to a communal form of ownership longer than their European neighbors, and were praised for that by the Russian intelligentsia, both the slavophiles and the westernizers (from Khomyakov to Herzen, and Lev Tolstoy to the socialist-revolutionaries and the Bolsheviks). The fact that the ancient *obshchina* (a landholding group of peasants) still existed seemed like a good indicator that it was already transforming into a socialist phenomenon. I believe that the work of the intelligentsia was to construct a rational explanation to bridge that “still” and “already,” to find a socialist virtue in a holdover from serfdom.

One would think that by its nature, the intelligentsia would be prone to individualism, to separate itself from the masses. But this is a community of people who, unlike Western intellectuals and professionals, think in very broad terms. Their passion is to generalize everyday life’s private moments, frame them as abstract ideas, which then become regulators of social life. The intelligentsia instantly generalizes narrowly professional concepts, turning them into general principles of thinking. Thus, the Russian intelligentsia of the 19th century generalized Darwin’s theory of evolution, spliced it with the political economics of Marx, and transformed the two into a “guide to action.” Eventually, such abstractions emerged as “truth for all,” “art for all,” “property for all” – an overarching ideology that found a material basis in the people’s communal lifestyle.

It turns out that the people and the intelligentsia, despite all their differences, comprised a single whole: (a) living communally and (b) thinking generally. Any privacy, separateness, non-transparency is met with hostility. Just as a peasant might *envy* his enterprising neighbor who has managed to pull himself out of poverty with the help property ownership, a member of the intelligentsia is *contemptuous* of the hardworking professional slaving over his test tubes and microscopes instead of trying to solve the world’s problems. Fighting the “petty bourgeoisie,” those with a narrow professional perspective, insular mindset, and an abiding commitment to the *place of one’s own* – that is what the people and the intelligentsia indulge in with equal pleasure. In the proverbial language of abstraction, those disdaining communality are condemned with expressions like “I don’t know anything, for my house is at the edge of the village²” and “my

² “My house is at the end, I don’t know anything about it,” i.e., an unwillingness to participate in communal issues.

own shirt is closer to my body³.” In fact, this is the only way an ideocratic state can be founded: it requires both a communal way of life for the masses and lofty abstractions to lead the masses. After all Plato’s ideal state was not headed by professionals or tradesmen, but by “wise men,” omniscient ideologists and methodologists maintaining control over all sciences and trades. Their right and sacred duty was to instruct the artists how to compose paintings; the generals, how to wage war; and the shoemakers, how to stitch shoes. And this generalized know-how concentrated at the top of the state hierarchy reflects the communal nature of property at the bottom.

But if “the people” is an abstract category concocted by the intelligentsia, then the intelligentsia itself is a dialectically transformed being of the people. What, after all, is an *intelligent*⁴? It is a generally literate, cultured person, regardless of his profession. Such an abstract idea of literacy and culture can only arise in an illiterate and uncultured milieu. A tradesman or craftsman acquiring even minimal education would no longer think of a “cultured person” in general; rather, they would see “*the intelligent*” as a person from a different culture or profession: engineer or journalist, academic or politician. “Being cultured” is the dialectical counterpart of “being uncultured.” In this sense, the “intelligentsia” is an *abstraction of knowledge* generated by *not-knowing*, just as “the people” is an *abstraction of being* generated by *non-being*. The intelligentsia, as a pole of pure and universal consciousness, feels superfluous in being and endows its opposite, the people, with the fullness of being. Two abstractions project on each other their “not,” thereby forming a self-contained and balanced system.

Superficially, the apparent tragedy of this system is the inability of the intelligentsia and the people to come together as one. However, the deeply hidden tragedy underscores the chimeric nature of the whole constructs, neither developing nor splitting apart from within but subsisting abstractly as “*not the other*.” As long as the intelligentsia has existed it has treated the people as an abstraction projected outwardly as its opposite, and in turn, it has been treated by the people as a sphere of abstract knowledge.

The real tragedy of Russia is that it has remained a country of abstractions for too long. Meanwhile, Hegel’s law of the dialectical ascent from the abstract to the concrete has been operating in history, not just in the mind. When Russia becomes a “concrete” country in Hegel’s sense, a country of private property and private knowledge, both of these abstractions will collapse on their own. Something that is simultaneously simpler and more complex will arise in their place: a person who knows his modest place in life and refrains from the sin of abstraction and communalization, thinking concretely and living privately.

2003. From the intelligentsia to intellectuals.

If the intelligentsia as a chimera of the public consciousness has outlived its usefulness then is it not time to move on to a different, Western model in which the intellectualization of society prevails over the socialization of intellect? In this model, the combined forces of biology and artificial intelligence will open new horizons for civilization in the development of humanity, and the *intelligent*, as a weak, sacrificial, oppressed figure embodying intellect will give way to the intellectual.

³ I.e., his own interests are more important to him than those of others.

⁴ The Russian noun for a member of the intelligentsia.

“Intellectual,” like “*intelligent*,” is not a profession, but a calling, a way of thinking, and even a way of life. However, intellectualism implies a greater intellectual responsibility and focus. The *intelligent* wants to generalize the mind, remake it to adapt it to the people, while the intellectual strives to intellectualize society and raise it up rather than descending to its level. His objective is not to “mix with the people” but to engage society in the intellectual process, which is, in essence, a historical one (in this sense, Hegel was correct to view history as a phenomenology of absolute mind in its ascent to self-knowledge). Intellect, not physical labor, has been the main productive force in all times, and today, in the post-industrial information age, this has become obvious to all that the intellectualization of society will cause the intellectualization of politics as well, i.e., the art of the administration (or self-administration) of society.

The intellectual has three identifiable characteristics – three indicators, which can be used to distinguish him from the *intelligent*, the professional, and the ideologue:

1. The conscientious performance of one’s professional duty. An intellectual is no idler who “learned a little of something here and there” and therefore believes he has the right to pronounce judgment on everything in the world. The quote “I’m not an *intelligent* – I have a profession” attributed to Lev Gumilev illustrates this point. The intellectual is rooted in a specific profession and relies on defined skills and rules of thinking. The primary business of the intellectual is to create mental and spiritual values, to expand the noosphere and semiosphere of humankind, not to serve the material needs of the masses or carry out government propaganda. The true intellectual is distinguished from the simple *intelligent* by his well-honed professionalism and creative potential. Intellectuals defend the merit of the intellect against the exhortations to simplify one-self and follow homespun wisdom.

It is instructive to compare the results of surveys conducted by the COLTA journal/website using the methodologies of those done in the West, and the results of the latter by Prospect Magazine in UK (Greer, 2016) and Foreign Policy in the US (Samy vliiatelny, 2016). The Western lists contain a much greater percentage of professionals: economists, philosophers, politicians, analysts, and technocrats. These countries have more direct routes for the intellect to influence society. The Russian list is dominated by journalists and bloggers (including television anchors). Their intellectual work is not primary and not self-sufficient, but is mediated by work for the public through the media. Intellectual specialists are far less influential in Russia, and influential persons are much less frequently involved in properly intellectual work. Here are the top ten “global thinkers” of 2005: the linguist Noam Chomsky, semiotician and writer Umberto Eco, biologist Richard Dawkins, writer and politician Václav Havel, writer Christopher Hitchens, economist Paul Krugman, philosopher Jürgen Habermas, economist Amartya Sen, biologist and ecologist Jared Diamond, and writer Salman Rushdie.

Of the 101 leaders on the Open Space list (Colta 2009), over 40 are journalists or commentators. The top 10 were: Viktor Pelevin, Leonid Parfenov, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Patriarch Kirill, Sergey Kapitsa, Alexander Gordon, Boris Strugatsky, Eduard Limonov, and Dmitry Bykov. Journalists, particularly those working in television, and writers are in the majority, those whose specialization lies in media work, communication with an audience. There are almost no academics.

2. An intellectual is more than just a good professional. Being a good physicist, philologist, doctor, or lawyer does not necessarily mean that you are an intellectual. Intellectualism is a mission, a system of creative, public, and moral values. Grounded in their profession, the intellectual looks outward to the problems of society and all humankind, seeing

themselves as a representative of all kinds of thinking beings, as a human is, first and foremost, *homo sapiens*, a reasoning, thinking, and speaking person. It is the intellect, i.e., the ability to generalize is what makes the intellectual cosmopolitan in the best sense of the word – a citizen of the world, able to cross over the boundaries of his ethnic and cultural identity, to see the blind spots in the teachings of his society. “Nothing is more consistent with the mind than its distrust of itself,” wrote Pascal. The mind is always moving beyond the boundaries of the mind, expanding its borders.

3. One more trait distinguishing the mindset of the intellectual is a critical attitude toward mindset any institutions, the capacity to think out of the box, the ability to devise alternative institutions, concepts, rules, and symbols that do not fit in the established semiotic, conceptual, and social systems. The intellect is the means for creating an alternative, regardless of the intellectual or professional sphere: an alternative pedagogy, aesthetics, poetics, or philosophy. This is the capacity for non-conformity of thought and action, in all things, since it forms cracks in the monoliths of conforming ideas. The word “intellect” itself has etymological ties to “inter,” i.e., “between,” and literally means “to read between, to select between” (Latin: *lego* – I collect, select, read). These “borders,” the gaps between public spheres, positions, and professions are filled by alternative ways of thinking, by a “boundary-crossing” approach. The truly intelligent person is one who both knows the rules and knows how to break them, i.e., make productive mistakes, full of the energy generated from creative wandering (and even getting lost).

In this way the intellectual differs from the ideologue, who is the spokesman for a system of ideas in support of a particular class, party, religion, or social group and who becomes their voice, their demands. The intellectual, however, is able to transcend social class, party, ethnic group, religion, or any other identity. Leftist “partisan” intellectuals bear a great deal of responsibility for the blurring of these concepts, with their imposition of narrow political criteria on intellectual activity.

In the interpretation of Michel Foucault (1996), “the intellectual is defined... first, by his class position (as a member of the petty bourgeoisie in service to capitalism or as an “organic” intellectual from the proletariat); second, by the conditions of his life and work (sphere of research, employment in a laboratory, the political or economic demands that he submits to or rebels against in the university, the hospital, etc.); and finally, the politics of truth in our society.” So the merit of an intellectual is defined first, second, and third by his class position and political bias. Foucault essentially equates an intellectual with an ideologue serving the interests of a particular party or class.

What distinguishes the intellectual from the *intelligent*, professional, or ideologue is the criticism of any bias, a vector of expansion, rather than narrowing, of the intellect, which bows neither to the people, any social group, or any idol of authority (even in the form of destroying old idols in order to replace them with new ones), nor to the idol of the intellect itself. The key element of the intellect is the ability to doubt oneself, to move beyond the boundaries set by the intellect itself, even beyond the boundaries of intellectualism as such, to subject oneself to criticism and thereby make the intellect stronger as it acts as a spirit of universality. Intellectualism is the expansion of what can be thought, and, therefore, what is possible, what can be said, and what can be done. It is an extreme generosity and breadth of mental work, its roots in professional skills, and its horizon – the whole of humanity.

Consider some Russian intellectuals: Andrey Sakharov, Yury Lotman, and Sergey Averintsev. Their intellectual life consisted of movement beyond the boundaries of their specializations: physics, Russian literature, cultural antiquity and Byzantium... Sakharov moved

toward the idea of unifying humankind, Lotman, toward semiotics and the semiosphere, Averintsev, to Sophia and ecumenical Christianity. This ascent is a difficult process, with many intermediary steps that must be traversed gradually.

Intellectualism is imbued with the spirit of critical universality. The most universal thing about the intellect is that it examines critically existing systems or interests imposed on them from birth. Intellectualism is manifested not in pride but in the humility of the mind, in its ability to grasp the multitude of minds and cultures.

2008. Is it time to rid our language of the term “intelligentsia”?

In the post-Soviet period, it became fashionable to contrast “intellectuals,” that healthy tribe of intellectual laborers, and the “intelligentsia,” with their weak will and psychological complexes. The latter has allegedly already “died out,” and good riddance. Isn’t it time to rid our dictionaries of the word “intelligentsia”? That question was submitted for discussion on the show *Govorim po-russki* [Let’s speak Russian]. Here’s what the host, Marina Koroleva (2008), wrote in response:

“Intelligentsia.” An obsolete word? 03.28.2008.

“Discussions in recent weeks about the role of the intelligentsia in Russia have lead me to consider whether the very word “intelligentsia” has the right to exist in the Russian language and Russia reality. The dictionary definition is “a social group of persons professionally engaged in mental labor, primarily of a complex or creative type, the development and dissemination of education and culture, and are distinguished by the height of their spiritual and moral aspirations, and their elevated sense of duty and honor.” Different dictionaries have different definitions, true, but this one seemed to me to be the most complete. That is how we understand the word “intelligentsia,” is it not? But the surrounding environment has changed significantly. And does it exist now, this “social group of persons” that...etc.? As far as I can tell, it does not. And there is no one to whom we could apply the term. That is, one meets the individual “*intelligent*” now and then, but as for the “intelligentsia”....So perhaps it’s time to mark this dictionary entry “obsolete”? Or get rid of the word altogether.”

By the mid-to-late 2000s, it became even clearer that the state was targeting the intelligentsia with its “patriotic” propaganda, enjoying the full support of the people. I was surprised that the majority of participants in the *Ekho Moskvy* forum had no objection to mothballing “intelligentsia,” and saw that as a mark of progress. Let “*intelligent*” join the ranks of other archaic terms like “coachman,” “village constable,” “NEPman,” and so on.

This anti-intelligentsia spirit, deriving from intellectual people, outrages me. I confess that I love the word “intelligentsia” and what it stands for. And I see no reason that an intellectual, i.e., a professional in mental labor, should not also be an *intelligent*, i.e., think according to his conscience, unifying the merits of head and heart, of high intellect and integrity.

In some parts of Russia, people believe that the West has only intellectuals, professional thinkers, without pity or conscience, that intellectual abilities are in no way connected to ethical ones – but that connection is the meaning behind the concept of “intelligentsia.” Why have we decided that in our time, there is honor only in intellectualism, while *intelligentmost*, i.e., the

ethical involvement and social responsibility of the intellect, is some sort of remnant of either feudalism or communism completely incompatible with capitalism? In fact the complete opposite is true. Never before did the intellectuals in this part of the world have they spoken so much and so passionately about the role of the public intellectual, his moral sensitivity and empathy for the “little people,” his ability to think and act, his participation in the affairs of small and large communities, about everything that traditionally falls under the concept of “intelligentsia.” The intelligentsia is a socially and intellectually active part of Western society, which demographically forms a significant portion of the population in, for example, the United States.

Interestingly enough “Intellectuals” and “intelligentsia” are not defined in opposition to each other in English. The latter is used as a collective signifier for the educated and enlightened class, the importance of which is steadily growing in the modern information society. “Intelligentsia: intellectuals who form an artistic, social, or political vanguard or elite” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

“Intelligentsia” may be the noblest Russian contribution to the linguistic treasury of humankind. Other terms are marked in the dictionaries of foreign languages as being “from the Russian” – Vodka, KGB, gulag, pogrom, kolkhoz, apparatchik. And now we want to erase this one positive trace of Russia in foreign dictionaries. If that word didn’t exist, it would have had to be invented. It certainly shouldn’t be ditched, for in their still glowing warmth of life, words are exactly what sustain the fading concepts and phenomena they signify. A word is part of the gene pool of the nation, a seed from which culture grows.

The call to put an end to the intelligentsia and *intelligentnost* “to shake their dust from our feet” is reminiscent of Nietzsche’s suggestion that “someone who is falling deserves to be pushed.” The falling ones, in this case, seem to be tripping themselves. Yes, the Russian intelligentsia has always had one glaring shortcoming – its lack of self-respect, a tendency towards self-destruction: either in the name of dissipating into the mythical “people,” or with the purpose of aligning itself with the no-less-mythical West. The desire to drive the “intelligentsia” out of language and society is in fact the worst, masochistic trait of the intelligentsia itself, which is not its essential feature however. He who is ashamed of the word is indeed unworthy of its dignity.

2016. Is there an intelligentsia in America?

I find ample evidence to support this conclusion. The university I teach at is filled with the intelligentsia. Its members inhabit art exhibitions, theaters, and any place where something of cultural significance takes place, including professional conferences and civil forums. Their presence is ubiquitous even if not always visible. Their efforts and enthusiasm create a multitude of public, cultural, educational, and philanthropic volunteer organizations. In the American Norton Dictionary of Modern Thought, an intellectual is defined as singular noun, the plural form of which is “the intelligentsia.”

Members of the intelligentsia are those engaged in mental labor, active in public causes and keenly aware of their moral responsibility. The aforementioned models of the 20th century Russian intelligentsia – Andrey Sakharov, Yury Lotman, Sergey Averintsev, as well as Dmitry Likhachev, V. V. Ivanov, A. Voznesensky – have their American counterparts in Noam Chomsky, Arthur Miller, Norman Mailer, Susan Sontag, Paul Krugman, Camille Paglia, and Bill Gates. These are publicly active academics, researchers, discoverers, builders, and entrepreneurs.

There are more such people in the United States than in any other country in the world. In the estimate of Richard Florida, who coined the term “the creative class,” they make up about 35-40% of American society, that is 40-50 million people. They formed the backbone of the Clinton voters in 2016, and did, in fact, win the national elections, losing only to the poorer showing in the electoral vote.

The American and Russian intelligentsias have much in common – first and foremost, the connection between intellectual labor and social responsibility. Someone can be an intellectual without being an *intelligent*. For example, a person whose thinking does not stray from the bounds of his profession such as an excellent programmer, physicist, or surgeon who doesn’t care about anything else. An *intelligent* is an intellectual who goes outside the framework of his profession, a “public intellectual” as such a person is labeled in the U.S. *Intelligentnost* is the moral and civil craving for freedom of thought. This is not only the ability to create things of cultural value, but the desire to share them, to establish them in the social consciousness. The Russian intelligentsia has been getting flattened for centuries between the hammer of the state and the anvil of the people. That is why it has so often betrayed its purpose, renouncing freedom of thought in favor of “homespun truth,” “working together and within the rule of law.” No one was more eager to denounce the intelligentsia than the intelligentsia themselves.

And behind, in the glow of legends,
A fool, a hero, an *intelligent*
In the flames of decrees and adverts
Burned for the glory of dark forces
That carried him, slyly,
With a mocking air
For exploits, if not for the fact
That two times two is not 100 at once.
And behind, in the glow of legends,
The idealist/*intelligent*
Wrote up papers and placards
About the glory of his own sunset.

Pasternak, “A Sublime Malady”

This tendency of the Russian intelligentsia towards self-flagellation and readiness to give up intellectual values in favor of serving “the people” and the “government of the people” was noted critically as early as 1909 by the authors of *Vekhi* [Milestones]. This tempted several enlightened people to renounce the compromised *intelligent* and replace this word with the term “intellectual.” No, the intelligentsia cannot do without intellectual freedom and honesty, but it also cannot restrict itself to those qualities alone. *Intelligentnost* is also the readiness to suffer for truth, to endure persecution, to connect ideas with one’s personal experience and fate. After the heir disappointment of the 2016 presidential election, the American intellectual elite has tasted the bitter fruit of democracy – the awesome powers of the *demos* – that the Russian intelligentsia gorged on for so long.

New Yorker editor David Remnick, the long-time Moscow correspondent for *The Washington Post*, ends his article about the presidential election this way: “It is all a dismal picture. Late last night, as the results were coming in from the last states, a friend called me full

of sadness, full of anxiety about conflict, about war. Why not leave the country? But despair is no answer. To combat authoritarianism, to call out lies, to struggle honorably and fiercely in the name of American ideals—that is what is left to do. That is all there is to do.” (Remnick, 2016).

This melancholic doubt and self-reflection, combined with the determination to act, is the innate quality of the intelligentsia. The American intelligentsia will probably turn out to be historically more powerful and more successful than their Russian and Soviet counterparts, if for no other reason than its sheer numbers. Trumpism is not an autocracy, a dictatorship of the proletariat. Alas, American intellectuals have experienced the unprecedented hostility of the new administration and the demos that brought them to power. Now they will be forced to engage in greater civic and ethical self-determination, i.e., forced to become the intelligentsia.

One can hope that at this tragic turning point in its history, the American intelligentsia will not choose to renounce that mantle, to denounce themselves as liars and plunderers, indulge in nihilism and veneration of the people, to hold the chant of the savage higher than Shakespeare. The Russian intelligentsia’s weakness became obvious when, under the heavy hand of the state, its social function – to enlighten, to bring to reason, to spiritualize – was transformed into an ideological function inimical to intellectual honesty. The first duty of a thinking person is to transform thought into a vehicle for action, not to serve the lowest instincts of the masses or the propaganda needs of the state. That is the purpose of the intelligentsia as *intelligentia*, a cognitive power personified in a publicly engaged social and professional class. Therefore, in my view, we would do better not to abandon the term “intelligentsia” but try to live up to the lofty aspiration marked it from the start.

One of the consequences of the 2016 election was that the American intelligentsia embarked on new levels of self-reflection, which drew it closer to the Russian intelligentsia. It has been difficult in the past to explain to Americans the Russian divide between intelligentsia and people, between intelligentsia and state. Somehow, America had happily evaded all that. What are “superfluous people” and why can’t they find a place among the masses in their own country? Why can’t “the simple people” ascertain its intelligence, depth, and love of freedom? American historical experience has not included the tragic self-awareness of being an “intelligent irrelevance.” Only the Southern aristocrats who lost the Civil War experienced and nurtured this melancholic and deeply introverted sensation, and from thence the great literature of the American South. But that was 150 years ago, and the psychological trauma has been mostly healed.

And now a new landmark, the painful Russian experience of the divide between the intelligentsia and the people is repeating itself in unexpected ways in America. We can expect the nation to grow a great deal more introverted – not in the sense of political isolationism (although that is concerning), but in the psychological sense – looking deep within oneself. While the soul may not attain happiness through suffering, it can discover itself through it.

America now has a chance to attain its own soul through suffering. It will take on many of Europe’s, especially Russia’s, accursed questions as its own. Questions raised by the like of Turgenev, Dostoyevsky, Merezhkovsky, *Vekhi* authors... Questions of the Silver Age and of the dissidents in the 1960s-1980s. This might be the only positive outcome of the American elections – the birth of tragic self-awareness in the happiest and most prosperous country, the formation of a self-examined nation, which may bear new fruits and enrich the world.

2017. The intelligentsia, globalism, and humanification

The historical process is leading us away from sociocracy in its different forms – democracy, ochlocracy, aristocracy – and to infocracy and noocracy, i.e., government by intellect. In Hegelian terms, after passing through its stage of “unhappy consciousness” and oppression by the state and the people, the intelligentsia is poised to restore its original meaning as the “power of comprehension.” The 21st century is the time for a synthesis that will unite the new and expanded sociality of humankind as the harbinger of the universal mind.

The intelligentsia (*intelligentia*) in this double meaning combining the Latin and the Russian, the intellectual and social semantics, is the ability to use the intellect in its most universal manifestations, connecting us with other people and with all of humankind. Every being must go through *humanification* over the course of its life, i.e., become human as an act of self-definition. Humanity as an attainment means that one belongs to humanity not just by birth but through free choice. It means giving universal human values priority over all others (national, class-based, political, professional, religious, etc.). This process of development, which leads the individual from identification with any one group to integration with all of humanity, is the intention of the new intelligentsia as a global rational society. It means entering into the field of meanings and objectives pertaining to humanity as such, the reunification of the individual with the universal. “Humanification” has nothing to do with similar religious transformations, of God becoming man in the form of Jesus Christ; it is an entirely secular process – the conscious acquisition of humanity in a manner befitting an *intelligent*. This is each person’s calling – to undergo *humanization*, i.e., to become who he or she is.

Humanification is an intellectual and existential process, unlike globalization, which takes place at the level of economic, political, scientific, and technical processes, and involves the masses, subordinating them to objective trends of planetary development. Humanization could furnish an ethical and psychological foundation for globalization, but it could also challenge globalization – if the latter imposes stultifying forms of universality on people, restricts their choice, and expands the power of corporations, states, or political clans over the individual. Globalization, thus, is a two-faced creature: It can be a material and historical form of humanization, and it can be a means deployed by “interest groups” to appropriate humanity.

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, in his 1486 “Oration on the dignity of man,” points to the different paths to self-definition that humans, as “indeterminate” and thus free beings, can take:

At last, the Supreme Maker decreed that this creature, to whom He could give nothing wholly his own, should have a share in the particular endowment of every other creature. Taking man, therefore, this creature of indeterminate image, He set him in the middle of the world and thus spoke to him: “We have given you, Oh Adam, no visage proper to yourself, nor any endowment properly your own, in order that whatever place, whatever form, whatever gifts you may, with premeditation, select, these same you may have and possess through your own judgment and decision. The nature of all other creatures is defined and restricted within laws which We have laid down; you, by contrast, impeded by no such restrictions, may, by your own free will, to whose custody We have assigned you, trace for yourself the lineaments of your own nature. I have placed you at the very center of the world, so that from that vantage point you may with greater ease glance round about you on all that the world contains. We have made you a creature neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, in order that you may, as the free and

proud shaper of your own being, fashion yourself in the form descend to the lower, brutish forms of life; you will be able, through your own decision, to rise again to the superior orders whose life is divine. (Mirandola, 1486/1956, p. 6-7)

This initial “indeterminate” nature of a human is a prerequisite to his choice as a universal being capable of self-definition. If a person chooses not to be a human being and foremost, but only a representative of a particular nation, party, religion, or profession, he deprives himself of further freedom of self-definition. *Intelligentnost* provides each individual a broad spectrum of human values and symbols that serve in his universalization.

Intelligentnost is the ability to expand one’s individual will to fit universally human concepts and objectives. There is a conscious act of will at the foundation of humanization: “I recognize myself as human and put my humanity above all other group identities. I shall overcome them to the extent that they separate me from other people” (Ibid.). This humanitarian self-awareness is a logical and ethical extension of Descartes postulate: “I think, therefore I am.” The fact of existence is derived not from the evidence of external senses (which can deceive), but from the act of one’s own thought.

I think of myself as a human, therefore, I exist as a human. Humanization is impossible without this conscious act of will. It not only returns a person to his true nature but also raises him above both specifics of birth (race, ethnicity, sex) and corresponding social qualifiers (class, religion, ideology, culture, upbringing, etc.).

We can identify three stages of reaching a state of pan-humanity: biological, social, and the one characterized by *intelligentnost*. At the first stage, a person belongs to the human race, as an animal does to its species. At the second, various forms of socialization develop, which divide people into ethnic, cultural, religious, professional, class, and political groups. At this stage, the ranks of humanity as a single whole empty out, since more individual, concrete forms of sociality become more firmly established. Mainly, the whole of human community is outside the field of consciousness, a certain negative class: since everyone belongs to it, no one does. At the third stage, which few achieve, the consciousness of belonging to all humanity emerges as a specific act, an existential choice. The need to “join” humanity arises as one joins other organizations, i.e. by voluntarily and purposefully joining this community. Pan-humanity arises as it transforms from an empty class into an overfull one, i.e., when it develops from a simple fact of nature into an act of self-reflection and self-definition.

The moral value of humanification corresponds to the “categorical imperative” of Kant: “Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end.” This means that all individual, group, and intra-group definitions of the individual as a natural and social being are subordinate to their panhuman self-identification.

Humanification requires a second, spiritual birth or its own kind of “baptism” into humanity, i.e. the conscious commitment to the mission of being human – and putting that before all other missions. Sergei Bulgakov called this the “creative self-birth of humanity”:

The historical birth of a person, a free and god-like creature, not only entails birth in the original sense...but also the certain *self-creation of a person*. The latter is not only born this way or that way, but becomes himself only through his free expression of will, as if *expressing consent to himself, determining his own being*. (Bulgakov, 1917)

The self-birth of man occurs at all levels, from the individual to the universal. The commonality that unifies people as representatives of a biological species, gradually, through their upbringing and maturation, breaks up into a multitude of group identities. People learn to be citizens of their countries, members of their church, masters of their crafts, fans of their team, followers of this or that fashion, proponents of this or that socio-political interest. For most, meanwhile, their belonging to humanity will become an empty abstraction that in no way influences their sphere of practical interests and actions.

Humanification is the reunification of the individual with humanity, now as the goal and possibility of personal development. The fate and values of all humanity are transferred to the center of one's personal interests. Humanification restores, at the level of conscious acts of individual will, the unity of the human race, inherent in people as a species.

In the 19th century, Auguste Comte proposed his idea of the religious veneration of humanity, and proposed new rites, a priesthood, and a new calendar. The rational core of this idea was still enclosed in a religious and dogmatic shell: the creation of yet another super-faith, so that humanity would worship itself. In the 20th century, humanity, riven by class, national, religious, and political conflicts, lost the consciousness of its unity. In the 21st century, political and economic globalization and the development of communication networks have re-affirmed the idea of a pan-humanity. This is self-organization by homo sapiens, whose rationality manifests itself in the fact that they consciously embrace their species and are not consigned to this category by nature.

Pan-humanity is a union of the intelligentsia, i.e., free-thinking individuals. Individual membership is the only possible way to join – unlike the United Nations or the World Council of Churches and other global organizations that bring communities and collectives together. The paradox is that the members of this union are likely to be people who are fundamentally opposed to joining any organization, since their need to be humans, first and foremost, is at variance with any “membership.” Karl Jaspers wrote:

“He who wishes to live in an open, unorganized and non-organizable community of genuine people – previously known as the “invisible church” – lives today as an essentially single person, connected to other single individuals scattered about the globe, in a union that will withstand any catastrophe, in a trust that is not set down in contracts or guaranteed by the fulfilment of any certain requirements. (Jaspers, 1976, p. 106)

This union is a reflective one, based on an existential choice, *the decision to become* a human, and does not entail any forms of external organization.

Pan-humanity is, however, not understood dogmatically as a set of certain values, but critically, as the ability to pass beyond the borders of any community, and thereby belong to the community of all humankind. In this sense, the greatest degree of individuality corresponds to the greatest degree of universality, as Vladimir Solovev wrote.⁵ Everything about us that does not fit under the umbrella of nation, party, profession, team, etc., belongs to us as individuals – and at the same time, to humanity, the most universal of categories. *Intelligentnost* is going past the borders of those cultures to which we belong by birth and upbringing (national, professional,

⁵ “...The universality of a being is in direct proportion to its individual: the more universal it is, the more individual, and therefore an unquestionably universal being is an unquestionably individual one.” (Solovev 1877-1884).

etc.), the ability to overcome them through concrete cultural acts without being circumscribed by any one culture.

2018. The need for the intelligentsia

As the unification of the state and people has gained momentum again in Russia after the 2010s, it has become ever clearer that the position of the intelligentsia in society has not been left vacant, that it is still a dangerous job and a risky calling. There is a range of epithets for this “thin layer” of society: “fifth column,” “national traitor,” “national conscience,” “representative of civil society.” Writers Lyudmila Ulitskaya, Dmitry Bykov, Olga Sedakova, Denis Dragunsky, and Victor Shenderovich; historians Yury Pivovarov and Andrei Zubov; those working in the arts and culture like Irina Prokhorova, Boris Grebenshchikov, Andrei Makarevich, Yuri Shevchuk, Alexander Sokurov, Vladimir Mirzoyev, and Andrei Zvyagintsev... The shortest definition of what connects all those people in the context of Russian history comes down to a single word: “intelligentsia.” If the phenomenon is proving to be continually vital and vibrant, then it is too early to retire the term. In the Soviet era, the word “*intelligent*” acquired adjectives like “sniveling,” “soft-bodied,” and “rotten,” in part because the intelligentsia bowed before the state and “the working people” but that time has passed. The word “intelligentsia,” in this new context, not just post-Soviet, but post-Crimean, doesn’t signify weakness as much as the perseverance, courage, and strength of mind at this latest turn in Russian history.

So, who is the intelligentsia after all, and why shouldn’t a move toward intellectualism of the Western type replace its values for modern civilization (including American civilization)? The intelligentsia is the sick conscience of the shameless world, the reason of the mad state run amok, the light of the unenlightened society... The intelligentsia represents the anguished sacrificial relationship of the intellect to state and society due to the failure of its social mission, and those compromises to which it is pushed by the unreasoning world.

The fate of the intelligentsia in its Russian form is to either suffer under the oppression of the state and alienation from the popular majority or to betray oneself in order to serve the idols of state and people. When this deep conflict between intellect and state has been exhausted, then, the intelligentsia, having fulfilled its mission, can transfer its functions to the intellectuals professionally implementing the constructive purpose of the mind.

But modern history shows that even the most intellectually advanced societies (German, American) are not immune to the irrational impulses of the state, from ideologies of blood and soil, isolationism, and national supremacy. Those societies will need the intelligentsia like a breath of fresh air – the intelligentsia in the Russian sense of the word. The stance it took in the past was noble and self-sacrificial at times, cowardly and sycophantic at other times. The intelligentsia arises in places where the process of intellectualization passes through a difficult, repressive zone, and in the process becomes a problem for itself. The divide between the individual mind and the unenlightened society causes the unique psychological complex of the restless and penitent *intelligent*. He occasionally doubts his own right to existence, but even in that self-negation rises to a new level of self-reflection.

It’s time to go back to the epigraph which prefaced this essay. Notice that the last two sentences of Sasha’s Cherny’s poem “Intelligent” effectively overrides its premise. In spite of the familiar condescension toward this creature – tiered, moribund, sloppy – the author, or perhaps

his lyrical self, doesn't part with this character; rather he is looking to settle alongside the intelligent: "Scoot over, brother, make room for me too!"

Look at the most active social strata of Russia's society today – bureaucrats, military personnel, secret servicemen, clergy, business people, thieves, managers... Asks yourself – in which group you sense the kindred spirit? With whom would you rather talk about the meaning of life and history, justice and freedom? The answer is – with those who embody the spirit of intelligentsia. This is still the warmest and brightest niche in Russian society. This is where the most hopeful stirrings take place. Spread out through the blogosphere, the intelligentsia is in the forefront of the nonsystemic opposition, advocating for political prisoners, telling bitter truths to the people and demanding sanity and accountability from power. The country deprived of its thinking core, without self-reflexive reason – is doomed.

A view of the future

For all its future glory, the humanity's collective intellect, this the builder of the technosphere and ruler of the noosphere, must not forget how historically ill-fated the "thin layer" of intelligentsia has been. Pressed between the hammer of the state and the anvil of the people, these sparks of reason fading in the cold wind of cosmic and political entropy. These pioneers of the mind, though they may have not made new discoveries, built new machines, proved any theorems, or composed great poems, nonetheless deserve their own mournful and exalted page in the annals of the mind, commemorating the painful and hard-won experiences and failures of their public self-realization.

New imbalances in the development of the mind could lead to the re-emergence of yet another meaning of the term "intelligentsia" – its use to refer to the natural mind in its divergence from the more powerful but disembodied, and therefore "heartless" artificial intelligence. One can imagine, in the not-too-distant future, the term "intelligentsia" used, as an homage to the mind's power to dissent, for describing that part of the "natural" intellect that stands in tragic opposition, and may in the end fall victim to artificial intelligence. The old books read: "the intelligentsia against the KGB," but the new ones will proclaim: "the human intelligentsia against A.I."

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