

Robert Darnton

Deviations from Monographism



1939 born in New York; 1957-60 Harvard College; 1960-64 Oxford University. 1964 PhD. in history. Since 1968 he has been a Professor at Princeton University. In 1987 he became the Director of the *Program in European Cultural Studies*, Princeton University. He held fellowships and guest professorships in Paris, Stanford, Wassenaar, Oxford, and Berlin. He is a fellow of several academies and a member on various editorial boards. His research interests are focused on the period of the Enlightenment, particularly in France, on printing history and on cultural history in general. Among his recent publications: *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History*, New York, 1989; *Edition et sédition. L'univers de la littérature clandestine au XVIIIe siècle*, Paris, 1991; *Berlin Journal, 1989-1990*, New York, 1991; *Gens de lettres, gens du livre*, Paris, 1992; *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Prerevolutionary France*, New York, 1995. — Address: Department of History, Princeton University, 129 Dickinson Hall, Princeton, NJ 08544, USA.

Sure enough, I did not do this year what I planned to do. I did what I planned to do five years ago, when I arrived for my first stay in the Wissenschaftskolleg. Few Fellows have the opportunity to re-enter paradise after it has been lost; so I should explain.

When I arrived here in August 1989, I planned to write a monograph on the forbidden books of pre-revolutionary France. To my surprise, however, I found myself in a pre-revolutionary Germany. By October the revolution had become visible in the streets of Leipzig. By November it could be visited in East Berlin. Unable to resist the temptation of visiting, I spent most of the year chasing after events, interviewing participants, and trying to do some modest, street-level ethnography of everyday life in the GDR. The result was a book, *Berlin Journal* (I prefer its German title, *Der letzte Tanz auf der Mauer*), which captures something of the flavor of Berlin in 1989-90 but hardly qualifies as "Wissenschaft".

Generously, the Wissenschaftskolleg let me have a second try. Berlin remained as attractive as ever but relatively quiet in 1993; and when I

arrived for my second term as a fellow, I came with drafts of chapters and piles of documentation. So by January 1994 I was able to complete the book that I should have finished in 1990: *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France*. It will be published by W. W. Norton in January 1995 along with a companion volume of statistics and bibliography, *The Corpus of Clandestine Literature in France, 1769-1789*.

The work on those two volumes actually goes back to 1965, when I first discovered the papers of the *Société typographique de Neuchâtel*: 50,000 letters and a mass of account books from the only eighteenth-century publisher-bookseller whose entire archives have survived. The Swiss canton of Neuchâtel was a Prussian principality in the age of Enlightenment, and Prussia, in the person of Frederick II, seemed to epitomize the ideal of enlightened absolutism. Frederick was delighted to see his Swiss subjects enrich themselves by printing the works of the *philosophes* and smuggling them across the border into France, where the demand for "philosophical books" had been stifled by the censorship and the police.

The term "philosophical", however, turned out to have had a particular meaning to the professionals of the book trade. It covered everything illicit — bawdy, cheeky, scandalous, and seditious works as well as Enlightenment treatises. The publishers in Neuchâtel simply tried to satisfy demand. So by following their activities, one can see precisely how the illegal literary market operated and what books reached readers in France during the twenty years before the Revolution. Of course a single source, however rich, may give a biased view of the general phenomenon. In order to correct for the biases built into the archives of Neuchâtel, I have studied various sources in Paris: records of books confiscated by customs agents, accounts of police raids on bookshops, clandestine catalogues circulated by other publishers, and the mountain of information produced by the authorities responsible for the book trade (*Direction de la librairie*) under the Old Regime. The result, in the second of the two volumes I completed this year, is a survey of the entire corpus of forbidden literature: 720 works, which are identified and listed in a bibliography along with information about the demand for them in thirty French cities. This volume is essentially a reference work. I hope it will prove useful for students interested in the literature that was actually read in the eighteenth century ("la littérature vécue") as opposed to the literature that appears in conventional histories.

The first volume provides a general account of publishing and the illegal book trade. It takes up themes that I had developed in lectures at the *Collège de France* (published in 1991 as *Edition et sédition. L'univers de la littérature clandestine au XVIIIe siècle*), but it also addresses questions about the implications of this kind of "histoire du livre": How were books read?

How did they affect their readers? How can one pass from a diffusion study to the study of public opinion and ultimately to an understanding of events — notably the events of 1787-1789? I have not come close to resolving those questions, but I think I have refocused them in a way that will redirect my research over the next decade. By giving me time to think those questions through without worrying about the everyday emergencies of university life, the Wissenschaftskolleg gave me a new lease on life in general.

It also exposed me to the influence of my fellow Fellows — that is, to the temptation of deviating from the straight and narrow path of monographism (my term for the professional concerns that often overcome professors). Of course, I tried to resist. But a deftly-placed question from one of the more Mephistophelian Fellows, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, has gnawed at me all year: "Why don't you write less professionally?" This wicked idea received support from our Rector, who announced to all of us in September, "You are here to take risks." And while that suggestion rattled around in my head, I found myself cornered in conversations about the human condition with Ashok Desai while he was waiting for open-heart surgery and after he recovered from it. We all rejoice in the knowledge that Ashok emerged from his year stronger than ever. I am not sure I did. After leaving the *Martin Luther-Krankenhaus*, I sought shelter in the archives — this time archives located in the former quarters of the *Stasi* and of the Central Committee of the SED of the GDR. I want to write a different sort of book, a book of case studies and reflections on censorship as a phenomenon in authoritarian political cultures: France in the eighteenth century, East Germany in the twentieth century, and, in between, British India in the nineteenth century.

Finally, I should report that the year 1993 — 1994 gave me the opportunity to organize an informal seminar for Fellows interested in the subject of intellectuals and revolutionary change. We called ourselves the "Mittwochsgesellschaft" and met on Wednesday afternoons every two or three weeks throughout the year. Several Fellows had been observers, participants, or participant-observers in the revolutionary changes of Eastern Europe. They discussed general issues — the nature of cultural revolutions, the process of delegitimation, the sociology of the intelligentsia — and also offered a running commentary on what they had experienced — in Hungary (Andras Bozöki, political science), Poland (Remy Forycki, French literature, and Karol Sauerland, German literature), Russia (Marina Litavrina, the history of theatre), and East Germany (Mark Lehmstedt, German literature and the history of books).

At first, the seminar took the form of an East-West dialogue. But the Fellows did not want to be type-cast as representatives of East or West. So

the discussions turned into intellectual jam sessions, initiated each time by one of the *Mittwochsgesellschafts*genossen and organized around some reading that we did in advance. The other participants were: François Hartog (France, history and classics), Anthony Grafton (USA, history), Gianfranco Poggi (Italy and the USA, sociology), David Gugerli (Switzerland and Mexico, history and ethnology), Kurt Wölfel (Germany, German literature), and Paul Zanker (Germany, archeology and art history).

We did not reach any firm conclusions, but we enjoyed some fascinating tours of the intellectual landscape. At the end of the year, we discussed our work at a meeting of the old and new Fellows. Four of us began the meeting by brief talks, in which we defended a set of provocative theses. The theses give some idea of the issues discussed throughout the year. They are as follows:

Robert Darnton:

1. Although one can find "intellectuals" among the ancients and the humanists of the Renaissance, the intellectual as a social type was born in Paris between 1740 and 1750.
2. From 1750 to 1789, the population of "la France littéraire" more than doubled, and it included at least 1,000 Grub Street hacks, or "Rousseaux du ruisseau".
3. Demographic pressure compounded literary rivalries in a way that made intellectuals a powerful ingredient of the explosions of 1789 - 1794 and that challenges us to reconsider the role of literature in revolutions.

Gianfranco Poggi:

Intellectuals always confront two overlapping problems:

whether to think of themselves as a distinctive, relatively autonomous social group or as an aspect *or* component of a larger social entity;

whether to relate to institutionalized political power chiefly as the seekers of its protection and support *or* as its critics.

In the face of the current *kultureller Umbruch*, intellectuals have the opportunity to act as interpreters of the new circumstances. But they will probably miss the opportunity, among other reasons because of the competition from other, better equipped purveyors of meaning, chiefly the media.

Andr as Boz oki:

Three roles of intellectuals in the disintegration process of state socialism:

1. "Totalitarian" period: independent activity is not allowed, the system does not tolerate neutrality. The "thaw" comes from party-members who try to explain the dogma in a different way (e.g. reformist communist intellectuals around Gomulka, Imre Nagy and Alexander Dubcek); "loyalty" period (Hirschman).
2. "Post-totalitarian" period: a compromise between the bureaucracy and the technocracy. Political neutrality accepted, professional career-building is possible. Indirect censorship as a "velvet prison" (M. Hraszti). The pluralization of the public sphere: first and second public, and an emerging "grey zone" between them. Opposition comes from inside and outside; "loyalty" and "voice".
3. "Revolutionary" period: the elimination of the duality of the public sphere. The delegitimation process is over; intellectuals become involved in the political mobilization through movements and the press (writers, journalists, social scientists, actors, lawyers etc.). The culture of critical discourse is triumphant over the old discourses; "voice" and "exit".

Happy end? The consolidation of new democracy as hard times for the "movement-intellectuals". Building new loyalties and expressing new voices: intellectuals as masters, defining the new name of the game. The pluralization of intellectuals along ideologies and different attitudes toward politics. Between the state and market, between the state and civil society: intellectuals as inconsistent medium. "Exit", "voice" and "loyalty".

Karol Sauerland:

Die Intelligenz und die Revolution. Zum Beispiel Polen.

1. Eine Revolution waren die sechzehn Monate der Solidarnosé-Bewegung in Polen vom August 1980 bis zum 13. Dezember 1981. 1989 hat es in Polen nur Ansätze zu einer Revolution gegeben.
2. In einer Revolution geht es, wie es einmal Hannah Arendt formulierte, im Unterschied zu Revolten und Staatsstreichen um einen Neuanfang, die Gründung eines neuen politischen Körpers, die Konstituierung einer neuen Staatsform. Eine Revolution ist dann ausgebrochen, wenn sich Polizei und Armee weigern, die Waffen gegen die Bevölkerung zu gebrauchen.
3. Hannah Arendt sagte auch, es sei nicht Aufgabe der Revolutionäre (die ja zumeist Vertreter der Intelligenz sind), die Revolution vorzubereiten, sondern sie zu studieren und am Tage der Revolution, die immer unvorhergesehen ausbricht, von ihren Aufenthaltsorten — den Gefängnissen, Cafés oder Bibliotheken — zu den Akteuren zu eilen und sich an

der Schaffung des neuen politischen Gebildes aktiv zu beteiligen. In Polen eilten sie in großer Zahl auf die Werft in Danzig.

4. In dieser Revolution versuchten Vertreter der oppositionellen Intelligenz mit Rat und Tat der basisdemokratischen Bewegung zur Seite zu stehen. Sie arbeiteten das Gewerkschaftsstatut, Gesetzesentwürfe und Programme aus, die dann zum überwiegenden Teil öffentlich diskutiert wurden. Diese sechzehn Monate waren eine echte Schule der Demokratie.
 5. 1989 gab sich der überwiegende Teil der Solidarnosé-Intelligenz mit der am Runden Tisch unter Ausschluß der Öffentlichkeit ausgehandelten "halben Demokratie" zufrieden. Den Elan im Volke versuchte sie zu stoppen, was ihr am Ende auch gelang.
 6. Von politischer Macht hatte sie kaum Ahnung. So glaubten die meisten Vertreter der Solidarnosé-Intelligenz, den *homo politicus* Walesa in ein Denkmal verwandeln zu können. Der Konflikt war vorprogrammiert und damit auch die Enttäuschung der Öffentlichkeit.
 7. Der erfolgreichste Intellektuelle nach 1989 war Balcerowicz. Ohne sein radikales Programm der ersten Stunde wäre Polen heute ein zum Osten und nicht zum Westen tendierendes Land.
- B. Bemerkungen über die Siege der Postkommunisten im ehemaligen Osten.