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The Last Intellectuals. Russell Jacoby. New York: The Noonday Press, 1987, 274 pages, \$9.95 paper.

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For the reader who cares about ideas, and the "intellectual life," *The Last Intellectuals* is a sobering book. Its basic thesis is that the post-1940s United States generation has produced no intellectuals, and that the last intellectuals belonged to the previous generation. As an academic, my initial reaction to Jacoby's thesis was one of shocked skepticism. The proof of this thesis, however, hangs on his definition of "intellectual." It soon becomes clear that what Jacoby means by the term intellectual is a non-academic who writes for the larger public, who writes on economic and political issues, who raises the consciousness of the public, who engages in cultural criticism around a sense of community — and who is a relatively independent freelancer secondarily publishing in small magazines and pamphlets. Further, not only is the intellectual a person of ideas but a writer of quality prose as well. Once these premises are accepted, Jacoby's thesis unfolds smoothly, if not inexorably.

In terms of the pre-1940s generation, Jacoby points to such exemplars as Lewis Mumford, C. Wright Mills, Daniel Bell, J.K. Galbraith, Susan Sontag, M. McLuhan, Gore Vidal, Kenneth Burke, Norman Mailer, I.F. Stone, and a number of others. While some, such as C. Wright Mills, were academics, they were also intellectuals who wrote for the larger public. Jacoby mourns the absence of progeny issuing from this generation.

What has happened to the post-1940s generation of public intellectuals? And what has led to their disappearance? According to Jacoby, the 1950s marked the closing of the "cultural frontier." First, the 1950s urbanization destroyed bohemia; it died with the beatniks and the 1960s hippie generation, both of which were incorporated into mainstream culture. The "bohemians" provided an atmosphere and a critical social mass necessary for generating and sustaining free intellectuals. Second, with urbanization the intellectual's audience and the means to reach that audience dried up: the small avant-garde magazine and the sympathetic small newspaper began to disappear.

Third, and perhaps more important, the post-1960s generation, that presumably would have replaced the older intellectuals, joined the rapidly increasing ranks of the university professorate. During that period, the university ingested this generation of potential intellectuals like a huge amoeba. Unlike bohemia, or beat-cafe society that "gives rise to the aphorism and essay; the college campus yields the monograph and lecture—and the grant application" (p. 31). A generation of potential intellec-

tuals traded the insecure freelancing existence for the security and reward of the academic life. But academics write and publish for other academics, not the public.

According to Jacoby's definition, an intellectual academic is a contradiction in terms. Moreover, he argues that to survive as an intellectual in the university is difficult if not impossible, because the public/political mission of an intellectual diminishes the chances for tenure. Either the university dean or president denies tenure due to political pressure, or the faculty committee does not recommend tenure because the intellectual's writing is not academic. While some intellectuals have been university based, they are more often than not, like C. Wright Mills, dismissed.

Jacoby gives a considerable amount of space to the "new left" Marxian academic. Unlike the previous generation of Marxists, the new left, too, has been co-opted by academia; they, too, write for other new left academics in specialized journals and in abstract language. The public is left without spokespersons. Careerism and professionalism are the order of the day. And "as professional life thrives, public culture grows poorer and older" (p. 8). The intellectual becomes an endangered, if not an inevitably extinct, species.

Despite Jacoby's careful reasoning and documentation, one gets the feeling that, though his thesis is essentially sound, something is not quite right. He acknowledges that "times have changed"; that (perhaps à la McLuhan) the media of the intellectual have changed, that this is the age of TV, of the talk show, and of the pop culture magazine, not the book or pamphlet. Some magazines continue to publish "intellectual" pieces, and talk shows have guest intellectuals (e.g., Gore Vidal and William Buckley). Granted, as Jacoby points out, the magazines that do publish intellectual pieces seldom publish unestablished post-1940s intellectuals.

Jacoby perhaps draws his net a little too tightly. For example, he seems to exclude the writers of the feminist movement. Certainly they are public, and certainly their critique is political and cultural criticism. Nor does he mention black writers or the large pop psychology literature, presumably because pop psychology is not political or cultural. Jacoby cites numerous books on urbanization by academics that have been semipopular, but which he rejects as not being "intellectual." While his thesis is, I think, sound, if in no other sense than a Hofstadterian conclusion to the historical anti-intellectual trend in American life, something still does not seem quite right. And it is not simply that "intellectual" seems to mean only politically liberal.

I have the feeling that Jacoby mourns a bygone age, an age of John Paine pamphleteering, an age when there existed an audience constituted by a common culture. With the cultural move to the "liberal" and to the "left" during the 1960s, the traditional American ideology of *individualism* and *community* became (necessarily) excessive. The call for "responsibility" was heard only on the political "right," a part of the political spectrum apparently excluded from his definition of intellectual. So the question becomes: What does it mean to be an intellectual in an age of diversity, of cultural multiplicity?

From Jacoby's description of the social processes leading to the demise of the intellectual, there is perhaps an unintended explanation of what has happened to this social phenomenon. Lacking a common culture, perhaps the intellectual is shaped by diversity and de-centralization; perhaps the intellectual function is, like the culture, fragmented, changed; perhaps the term "intellectual" pertains not to individuals speaking for a coherent entity (i.e., culture) which no longer exists, but is instead a multiplicity of functions, embracing academics, pop psychology, talk shows, pop magazines, and a multiplicity of media events; perhaps "public" now means "pop"; perhaps the intellectual, too, is specialized, and perhaps the intellectual function has been transformed and the "person of letters" is a dinosaur. *The Last Intellectuals* may be yet another

nostalgia book, written for people like myself, and academics who may be sublimated intellectuals.

Because of specialization, and increasing levels of education, the intellectual function seems to have become a pervasive and interstitial function within the micro social spaces of the system. Jacoby would doubt it. In any event, if it has, Jacoby would maintain it does not deserve the term intellectual.

The Last Intellectuals is not based on a new thesis, as Jacoby points out; but it is an important one and Jacoby gives it renewed depth and articulation. In doing so, however, he is too critical of academe. His critique rests on the assumption that academe should be a political force in the culture. Indeed it has become so, on some levels, much to its detriment in many respects (i.e., it is too subject to pressure from pop culture). Jacoby does not seem to appreciate that disciplines of study need to be as non-political as possible. To the extent that academics should engage in culture criticism for the public, Jacoby seems to overlook the option that perhaps universities should create departments of Cultural Criticism with their own non-academic criteria for promotion and tenure. *The Last Intellectuals* makes it clear that the culture at large cannot sustain an environment for the nurturing of intellectuals, thus the university may indeed be the intellectual's last cultural refuge. *The Last Intellectuals* is well worth reading.