Mannheim's Free-Floating Intelligentsia: The Role of Closeness and Distance in the Analysis of Society

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Mannheim's concept of the free-floating intelligentsia has become a catchword throughout the social sciences (and maybe even beyond) because it seems to solve the crucial debate about the possibility of a value-free social science. In the probably most prominent contribution to this debate Max Weber claimed that the social scientist may very well be led by personal motives and interests when it comes to the choice of the research topic, but s/he has to abandon all notions of involvements and preferences in the elaboration of this topic.[1] The concept of the free-floating intelligentsia, however, seems to suggest a social scientist who – floating above society – does not have to be concerned by problems of this kind at all. Being completely detached from social affairs altogether, s/he is able to gain an objective perspective on society, which is pleasing to all those who have always aspired to shape the social sciences after the ideal of the natural sciences.

But Mannheim's concept of the free-floating intelligentsia is much more complicated than its sometimes crude reception suggests. In fact, the role Mannheim ascribed to intellectuals changed considerably throughout his career, as John Heeren[2] points out: dividing Mannheim's intellectual development into four stages, the concept of the intellectuals gains importance only in the second stage with the appearance of *Ideologie und Utopie*[3] in 1929, and is elaborated in the third stage in the early 1930s, mainly in his essay on 'The problem of the intelligentsia'.[4] Both texts show a relatively optimistic view of the political function of the intellectual that cannot be found any longer in

Mannheim's later works on social planning and reconstruction. In this essay I will mainly concentrate on these two texts because it is here that Mannheim introduces and elaborates the concept of the free-floating intelligentsia. The role Mannheim assigns to the intellectuals, however, can only be understood against the background of Mannheim's sociology of knowledge which is most clearly laid out in *Ideologie und Utopie*.

The main problem in Mannheim's sociology of knowledge is that knowledge is existentially bound or connected (*seinsgebunden* and s*einsverbunden* respectively).[5] This means that the social qualities of the knower shape the characteristics of his/her thought, not only with regard to the genesis of ideas, but also concerning the form and contents as well as the formulation and intensity of experience.[6] However, this existential connectedness is particularly acute in the social sciences, where it leads to an infiltration of the social position of the investigator into the results of his/her study, as Mannheim points out: whereas the assertion that twice two equals four gives no clue to where or when it was formulated, any result in the field of the social sciences is characterized by its situational relativity (*Seinsrelativität*) and can thus be traced back to a particular intellectual and social background.[7]

But if all knowledge in the social sciences is dependent on a particular standpoint, how can we nevertheless gain reliable knowledge of society which is not completely relativistic? And if we cannot come to any valid non-relativistic, non-particularistic understanding of society, is social critique at all possible? In this context Mannheim introduces two further concepts in order to avoid relativism and to restore the validity of assertions in the social sciences: relationism and particularization. *Relationism* – probably the most crucial procedure in the sociology of knowledge – demands that assertions and opinions have to be related to a certain mode of interpreting the world, which in turn is ultimately related to a certain social structure that constitutes its condition. Though critics claim that this relationism ultimately culminates in relativism, Mannheim sees a clear distinction:

> Relationism does not signify that there are no criteria of right-
> ness and wrongness in a discussion. It does insist, however, that
> it lies in the nature of certain assertions that they cannot be for-
> mulated absolutely, but only in terms of the perspective of a
> given situation.[8]

However, in relating an assertion to a particular standpoint, one restricts its claim for validity to a narrower scope, as Mannheim himself points out.[9] Thus the determination of truth in the social sciences can only be approached by *particularization*, i.e. step by step by taking more assertions and perspectives into account, with the unity of truth or the totality of social reality to be found on a higher level. But who is to relate, particularize and finally to synthesize the different viewpoints present in society? Since Mannheim attempted 'to substitute sociology for epistemology as cultural arbitrator of the modern age',[10] it is not surprising that the sociologist – in the role of the 'free-floating intellectual' – plays a crucial role in the process of establishing some form of truth in a highly fragmented society. According to Mannheim, the intellectuals are in the exceptional position of being able to see society in its totality and to bring about the necessary synthesis of the prevailing ideologies. Thus, for Mannheim, totality does not only exist, but is – at least for a small group – also accessible. Being able to grasp society in its totality, Mannheim's intellectuals actually appear as 'a group capable of achieving universal truth'.[11] Indeed, it was Mannheim's intention to construct a new basis for the analysis of social life in a time characterised by the loss of a common conception of problems, as Louis Wirth points out in his introduction to *Ideologie und Utopie*.[12]

In the following, I will first illustrate the particular position Mannheim ascribes to the intellectuals in order to examine if this problematic identity really destines the intellectuals to be the bearers of the social synthesis Mannheim desires. In analysing society, however, both closeness and distance characterize the position of the intellectual and make problematic the concept of the free-floating intellectual. As I will show, Mannheim himself equally emphasized empathy and detach-

ment to be necessary characteristics of the intellectual. Finally, I want to examine whether the political role Mannheim ascribes to the intellectuals goes beyond theoretical analysis and social critique, leaving some room for political action and social change in the name of utopia.

The Intellectuals' (Non-)Identity

Mannheim first introduces the term 'free-floating intelligentsia' when talking about the bearers of the synthesis bringing together the partial political perspectives which by themselves cannot give an overview of social totality. According to Mannheim, this synthesis is more than the quantitative middle between the demands present in a particular society; synthesis also means selection.[13] A proper selection, however, demands certain qualities that can only be found in a '*relatively* classless stratum' which Mannheim calls – in the terminology of Alfred Weber – 'the "socially unattached intelligentsia" (*freischwebende Intelligenz*)'.[14] It is not surprising that Mannheim puts the German term in the English version which seems to weaken the original meaning of the – literally translated – 'free-floating intelligentsia'. But contrary to what the term suggests, Mannheim does not conceive of the intellectuals as being really 'free' from any social influence; on the contrary, their heterogeneity leads to a particular openness towards different influences which cannot be found in any other stratum:

> Not, of course, that it is suspended in a vacuum into which social interests do not penetrate; on the contrary, it subsumes in itself all those interests with which social life is permeated. With the increase in the number and variety of the classes and strata from which the individual groups of intellectuals are recruited, there comes greater multiformity and contrast in the tendencies operating on the intellectual level which ties them to one another. The individual, then, more or less takes a part in the mass of mutually conflicting tendencies.[15]

Thus the individual intellectual may very well have a political affiliation;

it is the intellectuals as a heterogeneous collective whose social and political position is difficult to locate. In this context one should keep in mind the German version and its differentiation between *seinsgebunden* and *seinsverbunden*. As Loader suggests 'socially free-floating' has to be regarded as an antonym of 'existentially bound' but not of 'existentially connected', which is the weaker term only suggesting some relationship between a particular world view and the social existence, but not assuming any causal or deterministic bond.[16] That the 'intelligentsia did not float above social conflict but rather was directly connected to it'[17] becomes even more obvious in the qualified definition of the intellectuals which Mannheim puts forward in a later essay:

> It is an aggregation between, but not above, the classes. The individual member of the intelligentsia may have, and often has, a particular class orientation, and in actual conflicts he may side with one or another political party. Moreover, his choices may be consistent and characteristic of a clear-cut class position. But over and above these affiliations he is motivated by the fact that his training has equipped him to face the problems of the day in several perspectives and not only in one, as most participants in the controversies of their time do.[18]

Thus the intelligentsia is only free-floating with regard to one aspect: it does not share in the productive process and therefore does not form a single class. It is only due to this lack of class-belonging that the intellectuals are able to take into account more perspectives than those who according to Mannheim are determined by their particular position in the economic process. Thus the 'controversies' Mannheim is talking about seem to be class struggles and Mannheim appears to maintain a Marxist conception of society as being divided by class conflicts. In fact it is not Mannheim, but the intellectuals themselves who have adopted a proletarian 'class sociology' operating 'with only one sociological category: class', as Mannheim[19] points out:

> And so the intellectuals, inexperienced in sociological thinking, have come to face the alternative, class or non-class, to discov-

er their own nullity; for since they are no class they surely must
be a social non-entity.

Obviously, Mannheim takes for granted that the intellectuals are an
autonomous group striving for an identity independent from their
original class affiliations. This independent identity, however, can just
as well be questioned, as is done by Antonio Gramsci, a contemporary
of Mannheim. Gramsci reveals the intellectual autonomy as ideology
of what he calls the 'traditional intellectuals'. Experiencing some form
of historical continuity, the traditional intellectuals tend to develop an
'esprit de corps' and conceive of themselves as an autonomous group
with a character of its own.[20] At the same time there are 'organic intel-
lectuals' who, on the contrary, are defined just by their organic link to
a particular social group and not their independence from it, as
Gramsci points out:

> Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain
> of an essential function in the world of economic production,
> creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of
> intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its
> own function not only in the economic but also in the social and
> political fields.[21]

The organic intellectuals almost 'naturally' act in the interest of the
subaltern group they are coming from. Sharing its destiny, they have
had authentic experiences which enable them to influence and articu-
late the group's collective will. The traditional intellectuals on the other
hand turn out to be merely agents of the ruling class. Thus, Gramsci's
intellectuals are not defined as a specific group, but rather by the func-
tion they fulfil in encouraging social change. Referring to a mode of
being in the world, the intelligentsia ceases to be an elitist concept and
becomes potentially all-inclusive: 'All men are intellectuals',[22] Gramsci
famously states.

Mannheim, however, sticks to a much more restrictive concept of
intellectuals as a distinguishable group that has to be provided with an

identity of its own. But how can the intellectuals establish a common identity in a society which is mainly interpreted as class-based? Not surprisingly, Mannheim shows that in a time of growing self-awareness the intellectuals were in fact the last group to acquire self-consciousness.[23] Their lack of participation in the productive process left only two ways for them, as Mannheim points out: either they aligned and identified themselves with a particular party or class or they developed a consciousness of their own position and the particular mission resulting from it. The first way is limited by mistrust of the class competitors who feared that the intellectuals would transform the confrontation of real interests into one of ideas and thus 'jeopardize the combativeness of the parties to which they adhere'.[24] The second way requires the intellectual 'to think from his own point of view – as nowadays every group must – in order to find his place in a changing order of things'.[25] Even if the intellectuals follow the second way, the problem of their collective identity remains. The position of the intellectuals is difficult to make out because they simply do not 'react to given issues as cohesively' as other groups and their political behaviour is 'least uniform', as Mannheim concedes.[26] Nevertheless Mannheim claims that there may very well exist a unifying bond between intellectuals: their *Bildung*

It is important to keep in mind that the German term 'Bildung' is broader than the English 'education'. This has historical reasons resulting from the German *Bildungsideal*, elaborated in the humanist tradition most famously by Wilhelm von Humboldt. But in order to really grasp the German meaning of *Bildung* one has to keep in mind its etymology. Thus the word '*Bildung*' contains the word '*bilden*' ('to build'). According to Mannheim *Bildung* undermines tendencies of differentiation and connects the educated with each other, but maintains their polyphony at the same time:

> Modern education from its inception is a living struggle, a replica, on a small scale of the conflicting purposes and tendencies which rage in society at large. Accordingly the educated man, as concerns his intellectual horizon, is determined in a variety of

ways. This acquired educational heritage subjects him to the influence of opposing tendencies in social reality, while the person who is not oriented toward the whole through his education, but rather participates directly in the social process of production, merely tends to absorb the *Weltanschauung* of that particular group and to act exclusively under the influence of the conditions imposed by his immediate social situation.[27]

Thus it is *Bildung* which makes the intellectual free, free not from all social influences and conflicts, but free to see them from all perspectives. 'Being a microcosmos of socio-political conflict at large, and not simply part of it, the intelligentsia alone would be able to construct a pluralistic synthesis', as Loader argues, and this 'unique capacity gave the intelligentsia a social identity of their own'.[28]

According to Gramsci, it is an error to look for a unitary criterion that distinguishes intellectuals from other social groups 'in the intrinsic nature of intellectual activities' because such a criterion could rather be found 'in the ensemble of the system of relations in which these activities (and therefore the intellectual groups who personify them) have their place within the general complex of social relations'.[29] Thus it is not the intellectual activities per se which define the intellectual, but the position and meaning these activities have in society. Hence Gramsci concludes that though all men are intellectuals in the sense that they have an intellect to use,[30] 'not all men have in society the function of intellectuals'.[31] For Mannheim, however, the intellectuals are defined by their *Bildung* which enables them to see society in its totality and offer points of orientation in an increasingly pluralistic world: they have to play the role of the 'watchmen in what otherwise would be a pitch-black night'.[32] This claim of total knowledge accessible to the exclusive group of free-floating intellectuals is the source of the Frankfurt School's critique of Mannheim as outlined by Martin Jay. The main argument of the Frankfurt School is that the

> 'very goal of total knowledge … betrayed an underlying acceptance of the classical German Idealist notion of a transcendent

subject capable of a harmonious, all-embracing view of the whole. Such a hypostatized subject did not, indeed could not, exist in a contradictory world.' Hence, the free-floating intellectuals could not 'really attain a total view of truth, for truth did not reside in the totality, at least not yet'.[33]

Considering the Frankfurt School's critique, Mannheim's image of the intellectual as watchman is a strong understatement. Taking Mannheim's concept of the free-floating intelligentsia seriously, the intellectuals rather appear as gatekeepers to the realm of truth.

The Tension between Closeness and Distance

The metaphor of the watchman illustrates the somewhat ambiguous situation of the intellectuals: obviously the watchman plays an important role in the society which he belongs to and which he must know quite well in order to fulfil his duty properly; at the same time the watchman has to take the position of an outsider in order to be able to watch the society and its occurrences from outside. The same is true for the intellectual who must know the social group s/he wants to analyse very well in order to take its perspective and really understand it. On the other hand the position of the intellectual is characterized by social distance which enables him/her to get an overall view of society in its totality. This tension between closeness and distance has been an important issue in the social sciences, where it has strong methodological implications. While it is possible to know a physical object from outside, this is impossible with regard to society. Even if the social scientist is able to gain some distance from his/her immediate social affiliations, s/he cannot escape all social influences because s/he simply cannot cease to be a social being, as Norbert Elias points out:

> For while one need not know, in order to understand the structure of molecules, what it feels like to be one of its atoms, in order to understand the functioning of human groups one needs to know, as it were, from inside how human beings experience their own and other groups, and one cannot know without active participation and involvement.[34]

Since the thinking of the social scientist is always affected by his/her particular social background, Elias sees the problem 'in how to keep their two roles as participant and as inquirer clearly and consistently apart'.[35]

Though Mannheim shares Elias' concern regarding the problem of involvement and detachment, his view of the intellectuals is a different one. Despite emphasizing the importance of the intellectuals coming from as many strata as possible in order to bring with them various authentic experiences, he still requires them to somewhat distance themselves from their original group affiliations and to develop an identity of their own. Thus, Mannheim's intelligentsia does not seem to directly participate in society in any other role than as intellectuals. Nevertheless the intellectuals are far from being excluded from social affairs. On the contrary, their education allows them an 'expansion of the self through its participation in a multipolar culture, as Mannheim illustrates: 'One individual may live more than his own life and think more than his own thoughts. He can rise above the fatalism and fanaticism of solitary existences ....'[36] Ironically, it is only their 'aloofness and inclination to withdraw from the practical concerns of society'[37] resulting from the intellectuals' position in the division of labour which gives them access to a broader perspective on life.

Of course the experience of distance is not limited to the intellectuals. In *Ideologie und Utopie* Mannheim suggests three general ways of achieving a detached perspective allowing one to gain knowledge. The most common one is probably social mobility, with a member of a group leaving his/her social background and thus being able to see it with (almost literally) different eyes, i.e. from a completely different point of view (locally, as well as socially). In the case of the intellectuals, however, distance is one of the most typical characteristics of their role, as Mannheim illustrates: isolated in their studies, learning from books leads to some remoteness from 'real' social affairs. Moreover intellectual engagement requires a certain degree of financial independence and a certain amount of leisure time which in itself can be 'a source of

estrangement from reality, for it conceals the frictions and tensions of life and invites a sublimated and internalized perception of things'.[38] Though aloofness is of heuristic value, Mannheim is very well aware of the fact that the intellectual experience is typically only a mediate one: while books expose the student to situations to which he has no direct access, they also create a false sense of participation – the illusion of having shared the lives of peoples without knowing of their toils and stresses.[39]

Obviously, *Bildung* and the resulting detached position and possibility to chart society is not enough to really understand social affairs. Social phenomena are not objective facts that can merely be known from outside. Insight is central in the social sciences, be it in the form of Charles A. Cooley's 'sympathetic introspection'[40] or in Max Weber's *Verstehen* (understanding). Similarly, Mannheim stresses empathy to be an important quality of the modern intellectual, enabling him/her to really understand the lives and feelings of others.[41] Thus, both, empathy and detachment are critical characteristics of the intellectual allowing him/her to gain insight into and an overview of social affairs at the same time. Only in this combination can the 'urge to reach beyond the radius of one's own action and immediate situation' be really fulfilled. And it is this 'transcending impulse' which according to Mannheim 'is basic to every intellectual process'.[42]

Intellectuals and Praxis

As I have just pointed out, the transcending impulse characterizing the intellectuals allows them to take more than one perspective on society and thus to see through the different ideologies and to synthesize them. However, not every reality-transcending orientation is ideological; it could just as well be utopian. Unlike ideologies, utopias succeed in transforming reality according to their own ideas, as Mannheim points out: 'only those orientations transcending reality will be referred to by us as utopian which, when they pass over into conduct, tend to shatter, either partially or wholly, the order of things prevailing at the

time.'[43] Thus the criterion for differentiating utopias from ideologies is their realisation.[44] Representing not only the will, but also the power to change present conditions, utopia is the driving force of history. Accordingly, politics cannot be thought without utopia. Particularly in times of democratic competition, all social groups have to become utopian, since they can only survive if they develop a project of transformation, as Charles Turner maintains.[45] Also Mannheim conceives of utopia as being essential for the well-being of society. Whereas the disappearance of ideology would not cause any harm to society, the destruction of utopian reality-transcendence would lead to a matter-of-factness which would eliminate human will altogether:

> The disappearance of utopia brings about a static state of affairs in which man himself becomes no more than a thing. We would be faced then with the greatest paradox imaginable, namely, that man, who has achieved the highest degree of rational mastery of existence, left without any ideals, becomes a mere creature of impulses. Thus, after a long tortuous, but heroic development, just at the highest stage of awareness, when history is ceasing to be blind fate, and is becoming more and more man's own creation, with the relinquishment of utopias, man would lose his will to shape history and therewith his ability to understand it.[46]

Thus the will to create as well as to analyze history is dependent on the existence of utopia. This indicates that intellectuals play an important role with regard to utopia and social change. If their proneness to transcend the immediate situation enables them to analyse society on a theoretical level, does it also allow them to decide its direction and thus to actively engage in social change? In Mannheim words: 'can one expect the weather-cock to control the wind?'[47] Or is the intellectual destined to remain the watchman of society without being able to actively intervene in it?

Mannheim's answers to these questions seem to be somewhat ambivalent. In *Ideologie und Utopie* he takes a clearly positive stance towards utopia and allots the intellectuals an important role in the transformation of society. Considering the German version (which is without the first and the last chapter of the later English version) one can easily see the stronger weight assigned to the chapter on utopia. Therefore Bryan Turner regards *Ideologie und Utopie* as 'a study of revolutionary politics'[48] and Colin Loader suggests that it 'was a call to action, an attempt to involve intellectuals in the political process'.[49] Indeed, in *Ideologie und Utopie* Mannheim emphasizes that the future design of the utopian element is dependent on the intellectuals: there are always intellectuals who align themselves with a rising stratum struggling for supremacy. The task of the intellectuals in this alliance is to provide the necessary utopian outlook.[50]

However, the political role of the intelligentsia becomes problematic, once this stratum has gained power and the intellectuals are set free. In this situation, the intellectuals face four options: Some remain with the politically radicalized wing of the socialist-communist party; others escape to the past or shut themselves off from the historical world and practise their utopian thinking in an apolitical way. Finally, one group becomes sceptical and engages in the destruction of ideology. It must be this group in which Mannheim placed his hopes, as Loader suggests: 'they did share with the free-floating intelligentsia the lack of utopian commitment and a critical spirit.'[51] Thus, intellectuals can be a utopian force in the first place, but they cease to be one once their utopia is about to become realized, i.e. once the political group they were affiliated to comes into power and the intellectuals are set free. Then their political role becomes a much more scientific one. Being free-floating they are able to detach themselves from immediate involvement in political affairs and hence to survey and evaluate the different positions. Therefore they are the ones to provide the necessary knowledge for politics, a task politicians are too involved to fulfil. In this respect, sociology of knowledge seems to be 'somehow central to any strategy for creating a *rapprochement* between politics and rea-

son'[52] or between theory and praxis, for it enables the participants in the political process to reorientate themselves in the social and political world and to adjust their actions accordingly. The task of the intellectuals is to warrant that the political world including political practice is governed by reason. This warranty of reason at the expense of spontaneous action finally culminates in Mannheim's writings on social planning. However, the role of political sociology cannot be to actually make, but only to prepare political decisions, as Mannheim emphasizes:

> Political sociology in this sense must be conscious of its function as the fullest possible synthesis of the tendencies of an epoch. I must teach what alone is teachable, namely, structural relationships; the judgements themselves cannot be taught but we can become more or less adequately aware of them and we can interpret them.[53]

When Mannheim is thus trying to sketch the sphere of political sociology, he restricts the intellectual to an advisory role. Nevertheless, Zygmunt Bauman is convinced that 'Mannheim's intellectuals stand above the politicians … as their analysts, judges, critics'.[54] In so far as 'Mannheim's intellectuals are still intent on designing social orders'[55] best fitted to control the masses, they seem to fit into Bauman's category of 'legislators', as distinct from 'interpreters'. According to Bauman, modernity was dominated by 'legislative' intellectuals whose task was to guide and instruct the masses. Post-modernity, characterized by the erosion of the nation state, the growing power of the market place and the challenge to absolute truth, is related to 'interpretative' intellectuals, restricted to offering their expertise and interpretation of increasingly confused matters. However, Mannheim seems to anticipate the shift from legislators to interpreters in his own works by more and more excluding the intellectuals from any practical or creative involvement in the political process. This exclusion, which was not to be found in Mannheim's writing about utopia, becomes particularly evident in Mannheim's later essay on 'The problem of the intelligentsia'. There Mannheim[56] emphasizes 'that the intelligentsia is by no

means a class, that it cannot form a party, and that it is incapable of concerted action' because 'political action depends primarily on common interests which the intelligentsia lacks more than any other group':

> The only concern which this stratum has in common is the intellectual process: the continuing endeavour to take stock, to diagnose and prognosticate, to discover choices when they arise, and to understand and locate the various points of view rather than to reject or assimilate them.[57]

Being in a unique free-floating position enabling an overview of society, the intelligentsia cannot 'form a special group ideology of its own', nor can 'any political programme or economic promise weld it into an action group'.[58] The intellectual cannot set political actions or get involved in party politics, but s/he can be a political person by providing the public interpretation of the political process on which its understanding, according to Mannheim, ultimately depends. Thus the 'apparent lack of social identity is a unique opportunity for the intellectual':[59] it allows him/her to take different perspectives, and to have various experiences, while remaining independent and distant enough to critically analyse society in its totality. Obviously, this total analysis has to include the intelligentsia which therefore 'must remain as critical of itself as of all other groups'. This obligation to self-distance necessary for self-reflection and critique, however, almost condemns the intellectual to self-alienation. The intellectual's particular position as a kind of outsider seems to have an inner equivalent in feelings of self-estrangement.

Conclusion

In an increasingly complex society imposing contradictory claims on the individual, the feelings of alienation and marginality were about to become common phenomena in Mannheim's times. The experience of being a stranger in society was most famously dealt with by Georg Simmel.[60] Mannheim, who had been a refugee twice in his life, proba-

bly experienced being in a marginal position more than most people. However, he tried to ascribe some heuristic value to the ambiguous feeling of being free-floating, containing both the feeling of freedom and the ability to grasp phenomena in a way that is withheld from others on the one hand, and the feeling of being rootless and not belonging anywhere on the other. Emphasizing that social critique and hence social dynamics have always heavily relied on the position of the marginal person, Mannheim was also aware of the fact that the 'existence of the outsider in a highly-institutionalized society such as ours, is more precarious and more trying'[61] than it used to be. Thus free thought seems to be threatened in an increasingly bureaucratised society which leaves almost no room for individual creativity and the development of utopian projects. Mannheim was worried that the lack of the utopian element would lead to the transformation of politics into administration and hence the negation of human will and agency in the creation of history.

At this point, it is necessary to take a more critical perspective on Mannheim's concept of the free-floating intelligentsia. Though some of his concerns with regard to bureaucratisation and the disappearance of the utopian element seem justified, it has to be seriously questioned if bureaucratic involvement necessarily means a threat to freedom of thought. On the contrary, one could claim that it is exactly the institutional framework, i.e. financial and legal security and the protection from arbitrary decisions and censorship which make scientific work possible. If 'free-floating' was to be interpreted as 'free from institutional involvement', the present existence of (mainly young) intellectuals working on a contract basis, lacking financial as well as job security, would have to please Mannheim.

But the concept of the free-floating intelligentsia is in fact weaker than the term suggests: it mainly refers to the position of the intelligentsia in relation to economic production and their resulting classless position, and not to other kinds of social or institutional involvement. Without any doubt, Mannheim would agree on the importance of

financial independence and legal security which I have just pointed to. However, Mannheim's concentration on the Marxist interpretation of society prevented him from taking into account other problems of the intellectual's social position. Though he emphasizes that the intelligentsia is to be recruited from as many different strata as possible, he does not talk about the problems of access to education and thus to the intelligentsia. Indeed Mannheim uncritically adopts an elitist concept of intellectuals, not taking into consideration that probably more, or even all, members of society are or at least could and should have the opportunity to become an intellectual, as Gramsci suggests. Also, Mannheim clearly overemphasizes the possibility to detach oneself from society. Though he leaves room for closeness and mentions the importance of authentic experience, he clearly puts his emphasis on distance: being able to view society in its totality is clearly a flattering image for the intellectual, for equipped with a divine perspective s/he is almost put on a level with God. And as the Frankfurt School's critique shows, the existence of such a total perspective is as questionable in a contradictory society as the existence of God.

However, empirical evidence did not support Mannheim's concept of the intelligentsia as being free from political affiliations. In fact, a large number of intellectuals were strongly aligned to parties at this time. Some of them even joined the fascist movements in Austria, Germany and Italy. Even, if the concept of the free-floating intelligentsia played more a normative than a factual role in Mannheim's thought,[62] he not surprisingly did not persist with it in his following works, in which he turned to issues of social planning. This shift, however, is already anticipated in *Ideologie and Utopie.* The end of utopia stated – though regretted – by Mannheim alludes to Mannheim's later works, in which politics has altogether been resolved to matters of social engineering. Indeed, Mannheim's concept of the sociological expert as cultural arbitrator brings about 'a further erosion of the public sphere and the citizens' right to participation in "discursive will formation"' and is therefore 'internally related to a social-engineering conception of politics'.[63] Ironically, Mannheim's free-floating intelligentsia seems to abolish

utopia by opening the doors for social engineering and thus indicating the path which Mannheim himself follows in his own sociological writings.

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Endtnotes

1. Max Weber, 'The Meaning of Value Freedom in Sociology and Economics' in *Max Weber: The Methodology of the Social Sciences,* Ed. E. A. Shils and H. A. Finch (Glencoe: Free Press), 1949, pp. 1-47.

2. John Heeren, 'Karl Mannheim and the Intellectual Elite' *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (March, 1971), p. 1.

3. Karl Mannheim, *Ideologie und Utopie* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1995).

4. Karl Mannheim, 'The Problem of the Intelligentsia, An Enquiry into its Past and Present Role' in *Essays on the Sociology of Culture*, ed. by Bryan S. Turner (London, New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 91-170.

5. The notion that Mannheim conceives of social knowledge as strictly determined by social factors is mainly due to the English translation of both s*einsgebunden* and s*einsverbunden* as 'existentially bound' or 'existentially determined'. In fact, neither of them means determination. Both address an existential connection which is suggested to be strict and somewhat determined in the first term and somewhat loose and undirected in the second.

6. Mannheim, *Ideologie und Utopie*, p. 230.

7. Ibid. pp. 232ff.

8. Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia, An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, transl. by Louis Wirth and Edward Shils, ed. by Bryan S. Turner (London, New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 254.

9. Mannheim, *Ideologie und Utopie*, pp. 243f.

10. Alan Scott, 'Politics and Method in Mannheim's "Ideology and Utopia"', *Sociology,* Vol. 21, No. 1 (Feb., 1983), p. 50.

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