

The Sociological Imagination Revisited

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Je suis particulièrement heureuse d'inclure l'article de Barry Krisberg dans le présent numéro de la Revue canadienne de Criminologie. A mon avis, les pages qui suivent marquent un tournant important de l'histoire de la criminologie.

Sans adopter une position d'extrême gauche mais tout en laissant voir sa sympathie pour les radicaux, mon collègue de Berkeley ré-examine l'oeuvre de C. W. Mills pour en souligner la grande valeur de critique sociale. Il en note aussi les limites. Mais Barry Krisberg nous donne surtout l'exemple d'une réflexion théorique poussée à son vrai terme; à la différence de la majorité d'entre nous, il ne se refuse pas à faire l'examen de l'idéologie dominante qui conditionne notre démarche scientifique.

La Revue canadienne jusqu'à maintenant a reçu fort peu d'articles dans lesquels les auteurs s'interrogent, au delà d'une honnête analyse des faits sociaux, sur la conjoncture économique, politique et sociale qui non seulement donne naissance à des faits et problèmes sociaux mais *en commande le type d'analyse*.

Prisonniers souvent inconscients de notre type de société, des concepts qui y ont cours et de leur caractère hégémonique, nous n'avons pas été capables d'énoncer des réflexions qui nous libèrent et qui sortent nos institutions de leur cercle vicieux.

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I am particularly pleased to include Barry Krisberg's article in the present issue of the *Canadian Journal of Criminology*. In my opinion, the following pages indicate a significant juncture in the history of criminology.

Without taking an extreme leftist position, whilst expressing sympathy for the radicals, my Berkeley colleague reassesses the work of C. W. Mills in order to emphasize the major value of social criticism. He does not fail to also indicate its limits. Barry Krisberg gives us an example of theoretical indepth thinking brought to its real term. He does not refrain, as most of us would, from examining the major ideology which influences our scientific approach.

Up to the present, *The Canadian Journal of Criminology and Corrections* has received very few articles in which the authors question their own beliefs and go well beyond just an honest analysis of economical,

political and social circumstances, which are not only at the root of social events and problems but influence the type of analysis.

We are often unconscious prisoners of our type of society, of the conflicts occurring in it and of their hegemonic nature; we are not able to articulate and state thoughts which would liberate us and would help our institutions to find the way out of their vicious circle.

Marie-Andrée Bertrand
Éditeur

An important development in modern social science is the increase in researchers who find little or no value in the theory and methodology which they have inherited from their elders and teachers. Although their doubts may frustrate and confuse more seasoned practitioners of social research, this open questioning of the domain assumptions or metatheories which have dominated liberal social science promises to expose hidden bias, to make implicit bias more explicit and perhaps result in a science of human affairs which is both moral and intellectually honest.

The search for a "new" perspective has not proved entirely successful. One obvious reason for this lack of progress is the virtual stranglehold which the guardians of the heritage have over funding sources and publication. In spite of sparse professional resources, some social scientists have performed the extremely necessary task of uncovering and exposing much of the racist, ideological and oppressive work in the disciplines of anthropology ^{Harris, 1968}, economics ^{Gordon, 1971}, sociology ^{Schwendingers, 1973 and Gouldner, 1970}, history ^{Zinn, 1970} and criminology ^{Snodgrass, 1972}. In so doing they have cleared the path to what C. Wright Mills called "The Sociological Imagination"; these scholars have looked carefully and proclaimed loudly that "The Emperor Has No Clothes".

This critical exegesis must continue but we must build upon its interpretations by doing and not merely talking about the hard work of empirical research and theory building. New paradigms need to be closely scrutinized and subjected to the test of praxis-informed empirical investigation. However, getting down to work is not so simple for those who have learned to be skeptical of the "tools" of their craft. If there is to be a new methodology where or who will provide its starting point? It is our contention that we need to look at some current practitioners of the sociological imagination and we need to read closely the works of C. Wright Mills who clearly practiced and described the components of moral and potentially liberating social science.

The Legacy of C. Wright Mills

The words "hero", "courage" and "magic" abound in the several attempts to capture and express the humanistic meaning of C. Wright Mills.*

* See attempts by Horowitz 1967, Gerth 1962, Domhoff 1968.

Often the eulogizers make reference to the large physical stature of the man in hopes of reconstituting his largeness as an intellectual force in modern social science. Certainly scholars of the new left owe much of the spirit and direction of their work to Mills, and although they have found it a painful truth, younger scholars have learned to disagree with their radical father.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Mills has been embraced by many who continue to represent the mundane and destructive trends which Mills brilliantly unmasked and dissected in *The Sociological Imagination*. At the same time, he has been canonized and shelved. Professional societies use his name to glorify their latest consensus upon scholarship ^{Krisberg, 1972}. In the face of this "liberal plot" to tolerate Mills, there is a real danger that he will be lost. To avoid this, we must first of all *read* Mills; this is a delightful task because he is eminently readable and we need not depend upon "official translations". Our second task is to confront Mills, challenge him, argue with him and bring to this critical dialogue the force of historical events which occurred after his untimely death in 1962. Finally, we need to analyze the method inherent in his scholarly production. We need to discover the analytic strategies and research techniques which Mills employed in his perceptive studies of many aspects of "Power, Politics, and People" ^{Horowitz, 1970}.

Part of that rich legacy left to us by C. Wright Mills is a straightforward and penetrating analysis of the new methodology. In the *Sociological Imagination*, Mills understands and critiques the limits of the "secular" social science of his time but he also offers us several important clues to the sources of a more "sacred" social inquiry. For Mills the more "sacred" social inquiry meant the joining of the moral, and political and the intellectual aspects of all persons. The scientist should focus his work on those powerful forces which contribute to the massive suffering and uneasiness of his fellow mortals. The foremost objective of the sociological imagination was to help "ordinary" men and women develop

a quality of mind that will help them use information and develop reason in order to achieve lucid summations of what is going on in the world and of what may be happening within themselves ^{Mills, 1959:5}.

The scholar should assist others and not make monopolistic claims upon the "gift" of interpretation. The scientific task is one of clarification not mystification, relevance not neutrality and theoretically informed action rather than pure reflection.

It was the fate of C. Wright Mills to die prematurely in April 1962 and thus to miss (or be spared) one of the most tumultuous decades in world history. Speculations can run unbounded as to the impact which world events might have had upon the perspectives and theories of the great radical sociologist. The agony of the Viet Nam War, which energized much

of the attack upon the complacent liberal academy, certainly would have touched his life. The murders of the Kennedy's, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X might have prompted changes in the intensity of his vision. The race riots of the 1960s would have caused Mills to study the issue of racism. One wonders about the Mills who might have emerged as students were beaten by police on the Columbia University campus. Some might cynically respond that our "hero" might have disappointed us. This is possible but there is no evidence of lack of courage in Mills' life. It is interesting to speculate if the Third World Movement both abroad and domestic would have affected Mills' work. Unfortunately, he shared the problems of several of his contemporaries and virtually ignored the subject of race. An engagement between Malcolm X and Mills, Fanon and Mills, George Jackson and Mills – these intellectual unifications might have produced exciting results. Ironically, it is Third World writers who have consistently employed the sociological imagination in the last decade. Why this is so is not the compelling question; more important is the ongoing quest for the spirit of the sociological imagination. Let us explore that spirit and make some practical suggestions about how to achieve its promise in one's own work.

Some Notes on a New Methodology

In our own reading of Mills we have identified five major dimensions of the sociological imagination. Nothing magical adheres to the number five or our selection. We invite our readers to extract from Mills' work their own interpretations of the sociological imagination. Perhaps we may create an interchange which will improve the methodology of critical research. In a sense we are engaged in the difficult process of creating our own philosophy of science. The development of a proper perspective is a prelude to any discussions of technologies or specifics of research. Once we establish the boundaries of the new metatheories we may begin to develop the paradigms and research designs which fit the new orientation. The task is not simple.

History and Biography

The first component of the sociological imagination must be the relationship between biography and history which Mills postulated as the moral task of the social sciences.

Know that many personal troubles cannot be solved merely as troubles, but must be understood in terms of public issues and in terms of the problems of history making. Know that the human meaning of public issues must be revealed by relating them to personal troubles and to the problems of individual life Mills, 1959: 226.

This central element of the sociological imagination was the explicit attempt to connect "Personal problems of milieu and public issues of social

structure". The task of the social sciences was to clarify the link between men suffering and the larger historical forces which created their "personal troubles". Mills argued that social inquiries must ultimately address the *intersections of biography and history* within a given society. The social analyst must work to make his audience "aware of the idea of social structure" Mills, 1959:5.

Mills conceived of "troubles" as threats to values cherished by individuals. These occur within the "character of the individual and within the range of his immediate relations with others" Mills, 1959:8. The study of personal troubles requires that we employ the method of biography in attempting to describe and understand the impact of these troubles upon humans. Issues involve some values which are cherished by publics and these overlap individual milieu. The study of issues requires investigation of how personal networks fit into the institutions of a society. History is meant to express the idea of change in such organizations or institutions, or, more simply, social structures. Mills gave the example of unemployment. If in a city of 100,000, only one man is unemployed, Mills would refer to this as a personal trouble. To find the solution to this trouble is to search the biographic features of the man. However, the case of 15 million workers unemployed in a nation of 50 million employees is an issue, and "we may not hope to find its solution within the range of opportunities open to any one individual" Mills, 1959:9. Mills would direct his study to the collapse of the very structure of opportunities and this would require a consideration of the economic and political institutions of the society.

One could explore issues of war, marriage, and urban problems among others but release of the sociological imagination depended upon the constant analytic interplay of history and biography. Consider Mills' description of the proper study of war:

The personal problem of war, when it occurs, may be how to survive it or how to die in it with honor; how to make money out of it; how to climb into the higher safety of the military apparatus; or how to contribute to the war's termination. In short, according to one's values, to find a set of milieu and within it survive the war or make one's death in it meaningful. But the structural issues of war have to do with its causes; with the types of men it throws up into command; with its effects upon economic, political, family and religious institutions, with the unorganized irresponsibility of a world of nation-states. Mills, 1959:9

It is wishful thinking to argue, as some old guardians may do, that Mills is simply talking about what most social scientists practice when they use "rates" of events and perform statistical analysis. A new group of social scientists is tired of hearing ideology such as Durkheim's study of suicide, passed off as great social science. The classic liberal social thinkers of the late 19th century whom Nisbet calls carriers of the *sociological tradition*

offer us the illusion of history and biography without the change oriented perspective which Mills embodied. Mills reminds us that issues are, in fact, often crises in institutional arrangements; these are what Marxists refer to as internal contradictions or antagonisms. Perhaps Mills may be faulted in not drawing more clearly the distinction between what he meant by the sociological imagination and the traditional social science of the late 19th century. It appears that after he wrote the *Sociological Imagination* Mills moved closer to this rejection.*

Successful examples of the interest of biography and history can be seen in Fanon's work on "Mental Disorders of Colonial Wars" ^{Fanon, 1968}, Mills' *White Collar* ¹⁹⁵⁶ and Ben Tong's recent work on the historical psychology of Asian Americans ^{Tong, 1971}. In each case the author begins with a set of human troubles and expands the scope of the analysis to the realm of public issues. Moreover, historical forces such as racism, imperialism, or exploitation are grounded in the daily problems confronting real human beings. There is no easy answer to the question of how one goes about ensuring the unity of trouble and issue in one's work. A place to start is to consciously employ more human sorts of data in one's studies. We need to consider the scientific value of the life history, the ethnography, and the depth interview approaches, not as they are being practiced but as they should be. A second critical point is to be aware of the pressing social issues, not only in terms of cognitive awareness but also in terms of the way in which those most intimately involved experience such historical movements. The social analyst must experience his data, not simply collect it. To be immersed in the world of human encounters is a partial fulfillment of a method which Mills proposed.

The Sociological Imagination and The New History

Mills' emphasis upon *history as a vital part of social inquiry* should be continued. We should certainly avoid the ahistorical ideology of the corporate liberals. But we do not believe that Mills would make us only historians, for surely historians have perpetuated racist and hegemonic mythologies. Zinn argues that the concern for history must be tied to a commitment to change in the present. Without the critical thrust and the constant interplay with the present, we fear that some radical scholars will conceive that the ultimate revolutionary act will take place in a university library, probably somewhere deep in the stacks. The new history implies that the researcher comes to his data with preconceived questions which will be of significance in on-going struggles. The new history doubts the findings of the establishment historians and is especially alert to "rediscover" the contributions to world history of people of colour, of women, of anyone, bar none.

* See *Listen Yankee* 1960 and *The Marxist* 1962.

The study of history to effect change in the present means avoiding the danger of what Mills referred to as abstracted empiricism. Abstracted empiricism represents the "distortion" of the sociological imagination, which transforms an interest in the study of contemporary social problems to the fetish of a precise methodology. Mills describes the model of this type of research as follows:

In practice the new school usually takes as the basic source of its "data" the more or less set interview with a series of individuals selected by a sampling procedure. Their answers are classified, and, for convenience, punched on Hollerith cards which are then used to make statistical runs by means of which relations are sought. Undoubtedly this fact, and the consequent ease with which the procedure is learned by any fairly intelligent person, accounts for much of its appeal. The results are normally put in the form of statistical assertions; . . . There are several complicated ways of manipulating such data, but these need not concern us here, for regardless of the degree of complication, they are still manipulations of the sort of material indicated.
Mills, 1959:50-51

What is wrong with this mode of research, according to Mills, is that work is guided by the availability of data rather than by theoretical concerns. Abstracted empiricists transform concepts into whatever indicators they have at their disposal. Thus, the study of public opinion becomes the study of responses to polls or surveys. Mills dislikes the ahistorical character of this brand of research. He strongly objects to the tendency of the abstracted empiricist to reduce social realities to psychological variables; these researchers make extensive use of notions like "attitude", "personality", "motivation", or "psychological conflict". Mills most strongly objects to the conception, promoted by the abstracted empiricists, of the sociologist as toolmaker. The core of the problem, according to Mills, is the pretension of natural science methods which 1) does not correctly apply this philosophy of the natural sciences and 2) in fact, substitutes the questionable pursuit of the perfect method for the important goal of interpreting social life. Mills cites George Lundberg, Samuel Stouffer, Stuart Dodd and Paul Lazerfeld as the theoreticians of this ethic of scientism.

Mills does not provide us with a satisfying understanding of the emergence of abstracted empiricism. This is partially excusable because a critical history of the rise of quantitative social research has not been written. If such a history were available we might be able to provide a more compelling explanation for the emergence of this "methodological inhibition" For example we would probably learn that the abstracted empiricists were the very opposite of abstract. It can be shown that the development of most research tools is linked to direct service to business and political elites. Consider the first psychological "experiments" conducted by Wundt ¹⁸⁸⁶ which sought to determine if men worked more productively in group

settings. Many of the earliest works in social psychology had direct industrial uses and this tradition has remained strong throughout the history of that discipline. The famous applied statistician Karl Pearson (developed the Pearsonian “r” or correlation coefficient) employed mathematical arguments to defend the use of child labour in English factories. The development of measures of intelligence was directly related to efforts to preserve race and class distinctions and privileges. Similarly, the survey or poll has its origins in the oldest of human history as an instrument by which sovereigns could assess and control their domains.

Current critics of American social science have commented upon the prostitution of social science to the service of military, political and economic elites. Whereas the grand theorists such as Parsons have fostered and disseminated the hegemonic concepts of the ruling class, the empiricists have supplied the technology of social control which has been employed in both domestic and foreign spheres.† Perhaps the most dangerous aspect of work of some influential social scientists is their efforts to export American ideas on social problems to nations of the Third World. Under the guise of the prestige of American science, the executives of the social science centers justify and extend policies and programs which have failed at home to countries which can ill afford the American solutions to the problems of disorder. Such international training efforts need to be investigated and challenged by scholars who reject the imperialist thrust of these “scientific” efforts. Mills of the 1970s would have used the term “technocrat” to describe the abstracted empiricists and he probably would have taken their potential danger more seriously. Mills did understand a fundamental fact about the “political economy” of research:

One thing, moreover, is surely clear: because of the expensiveness of the method, its practitioners have more often become involved in the commercial and bureaucratic uses of their work and this often has affected their style Mills, 1959:65.*

The “trivial” nature of some of the research serves as a cover for the more directly oppressive work and allows social scientists a way of avoiding moral issues. Zinn writes

† See Janowitz 1968 or Schwitzgebel 1971.

* If we apply the sociological imagination to the ideology of abstracted empiricism, then we might be led to consider the relationship of social science and social service technology to the development of capitalist economies. The emergence of imperialism and the welfare state required the development of socio-political as well as military forms of domination. Influentials in such societies reward the tool-makers and in turn the tool-makers make prestige claims and mask their ideology under the pretense of the natural science method. Although this argument needs further research support, it seems a fruitful line of inquiry into the emergence of the abstracted empiricism trend in social science at the close of the 19th century.

Most knowledge is not directly bought, however, it can also serve the purpose of social stability in another way — by being squandered on trivia Zinn, 1970:7.

Recently a prominent criminologist received a grant to evaluate his discipline. This, on the surface, sounds like an exciting opportunity to explore the reasons for the failure of this particular discipline to provide coherent answers to a social problem of considerable public interest. Moreover, the charges of racism and counterinsurgency bias in this area of research could be examined and clarified during this massive research venture. Instead, and typically, the project aims more precisely and trivially at affixing a number to every article or book written on the subject matter since 1945; the significance of the number will presumably have something to do with the methodological value or worth of the work. “We are interested in how well we know things, not what we know”, asserted the head of the research team. The triumph of method over substance has clear political and moral meaning in this case and in countless other examples of contemporary social science.

Research oriented toward change and rooted in history can avoid a concentration on trivia as well as a technocratic perspective. Younger scholars need not become historians so much as they should be aware of the method and substance of the new history. For instance, Third World people have had to rescue their own history from the oppressive ignorance of white scholars and thus have a more intuitive sense of the struggle value of history. Marvin Harris’ *Rise of Anthropological Theory* and Thomas Gossett’s *Race: The History of An Idea in America* are both good examples of the application of perspective of the new history.

Compassion, Commitment and Imagination

The sociological imagination *thrives because of its humanistic impulses*. Mills meant his work to serve humans and to alleviate part of their malaise. His was the sociology of compassion not the more vulgar form of hip sociology which presently dominates the study of social problems in America. The hip sociologist is usually appreciative of the “deviance” which he studies, but rarely does he reach the level of compassion, which means, literally, co-suffering. Under the guise of the language of the theatre, the hipsters such as Erving Goffman, Howard Becker, Bennett Berger and others tell us that life is less real than a set of appearances. In the world of appearances all is leveled including the hierarchy of values which is, after all, what motivates political struggle. The sociologist who can see through the world of everyday life can triumph as the cynical, liberal (very liberal) defender of the underdog; at the same time he can preserve his sensibilities and his firm academic position. To be compassionate is to break with the colonialist mode of research — the superior-subordinate relationship of the researcher and his subject. Perhaps we need to think

about social research which rewards the studied at least as much as those who do the investigation. The research process needs to be democratized. *Subject and researcher need to share feelings, needs, rewards and plans.* A direct movement towards these principles could be accomplished if the researcher and his subject attempt to share the social meanings of diverse racial, sexual, class and personal histories. Identification and communication might flow more naturally between those who exchange elements of their distinctiveness and accord mutual respect to one another.

To be compassionate is to recognize that the essential fate of men is tragic, that suffering is enormous but that the human spirit is strong and vibrant. Thus, the compassionate scholar studies not for himself entirely, but for others. His work does deal with life and death issues and cannot be taken lightly. The other side of this point is that the researcher should not see himself as the sole spokesman for those who never had a chance to select him. Academic humility is surely a component of the compassionate mode.

Another dimension of the sociological imagination is the crucial interrelation between one's active life and one's intellectual life. Our interpretation of Mills suggests that the release of the sociological imagination demands that the social analyst take positions with respect to issues of political significance. To have bias is to be possessed of a commitment, but from where does this commitment flow except from the individual's participation in some form of action? Mao has described this process as follows:

The discovery of truths through practice; and through practice the verification and development of them; the active development of perceptual knowledge into rational knowledge, and by means of rationale knowledge, the active direction of revolutionary practice and the reconstruction of the subjective and external world; practice, knowledge, more practice, more knowledge, the repetition ad infinitum of this cyclic pattern and with each cycle, the elevation of the content of practice and knowledge to a higher level: such is the whole epistemology of dialectical materialism, such is its theory of the unity of knowledge and action. Mao, 1967

This statement on the philosophy of revolutionary science may help us explain why the most significant insights into our society have come from Malcolm X, Eldridge Cleaver, George Jackson and others immersed in practice. Those social scientists who have most closely approximated the sociological imagination have a history of praxis (e.g. Robert Blauner or Howard Zinn), or are currently engaged in change directed practice (e.g., Ben Tong, Paul Sweezy, or Paul Takagi).

To take this stance is to reject what Mills refers to as "liberal" practicality". "The confusion in the social sciences is moral as well as 'scientific', political as well as intellectual" writes Mills ^{1959: 76}. In the section on

types of practicality, Mills points to the moral dilemmas which he sees in liberal social science. Practicality always means some avoidance of the *political and moral commitments* which are important to the sociological imagination. As in the case of other issues, Mills conceived of the problem as a distortion of an older and presumably more desirable sociological tradition.*

We need to look closely at the elements of liberal practicality to help define an alternate posture. The first issue that Mills discusses is the claim of certain social scientists to value neutrality. While Mills agrees that we ought to strive to use conceptions which are not value-heavy, he places emphasis upon making bias more explicit; this is in contrast to the fashionable stance of denying its existence. Mills cannot accept the role of “cheerful idiot” that would be placed upon the social researchers by some of the “value neutral” groups. He reminds us that Max Weber’s edict about neutrality concerns the uses of the lecture podium and not the absence of passion in scholarship. Mills raises the serious question as to whether the flight from stating values reveals a deeper fear of any passionate commitment among social scientists.

As we all know, . . . much of the jargon of the social science, and especially of sociology, results from the curious passion for the mannerism of the uncommitted Mills, 1959:79.

The neutral conception of social science resonates with the second aspect of liberal practicality, namely the tendency to support authority and to serve bureaucratic interests.

The claim of neutrality becomes important to the degree that social science is a source of legitimation of those in power. In order for science to serve those who rule it must approximate the objectivity or unbiased character of other systems of legitimation such as religion, tradition or charisma. Mills acknowledges that there has been a tremendous growth in new institutions, and, therefore, a resultant need for additional ideological support. The state has become an ever more important part of the professional life of the social scientist. Mills noted,

Nowadays social research is often in direct service to army generals and social workers, corporation managers and prison wardens Mills, 1959:80.

Every society, as Mills points out, holds views of itself, images of its own nature. Control of these master images and slogans has been increasingly important to the modern State Miliband, 1969.

* We would argue that the forms of practicality are not distortions and that they are certainly not accidental departures from the right path.

The word hegemony is an important concept among left scholars. It means that one class or ruling elite controls the mechanisms which affect popular conceptions of common values and norms, and thus the dominated partially believe the legitimacy of their subordinate status. If we accept the idea that social science holds enormous potential power in terms of the process of legitimation, then three types of responses can be expected in the works of social researchers. First there will be those who justify the arrangement of power, using images and ideas to transform power into authority. Second, there will be those who through claims of moral neutrality or some other devices will distract attention away from issues of power and authority. In so doing they lead us away from "the structural realities of society itself" Mills, 1959:80. The third alternative is to adopt a critical and debunking stance relative to prevailing arrangements of power and those who rule. Mills' work most closely fits this last posture, but sadly the bulk of social science production is similar to Houghton's description of U.S. research on international relations: ". . . little more than footnoted rationalizations and huckstering of these policies" Mills, 1959:84. We are reminded that social science is "inevitably relevant to bureaucratic routines and ideological issues" Mills, 1959:84, and that political meanings are best exposed rather than allowed to remain hidden.

The last two forms of practicality which Mills dissects are very much related. These are the "pluralistic" or scatter approach to causality and the concept of personal adjustment. Mills indicts social science for its fear of discovering one or two major casual elements, particularly if these include political and economic dimensions. Instead we are treated to a buffet table of causes described as "multiple factor approaches". In many social problem areas it is not uncommon to hear scientists plead for an end to the search for causes.

The notion of a municipality of causes, each of equal significance and none of primary importance, has fitted well with liberal approaches to piecemeal social reform. Multi-causality is a powerful justification for an endless string of demonstration projects to be "carefully evaluated". Such approaches to social issues like crime, racism, poverty, or war provide us with the myth that progress and improvement can occur without major restructuring of the social order. An explanation which poses issues of self-determination or redistribution of societal resources is not permissible by liberal standards and is often rejected as *impractical*. Note that the standards of practicality are always taken from those who rule and wish to preserve their status quo.

The lack of political education among social scientists, or perhaps their inability to see an issue of political import unless pounded over the head, is consistent with the concept of adjustment which completes the types of liberal practicality. The concept of adjustment may take on either

a personal or group meaning but in either case the problem is always located in milieu. Various studies conclude that the solution for the deviant or criminal, the impoverished or mentally ill is their successful reintegration into the mainstream of their society. For racial and ethnic groups the white solution is assimilation and integration ^{Takagi, 1973}. There is no room in the concept of adjustment for challenging the pathology of the mainstream. Liberal scholars may cynically admit that there are structural inequities (although such admissions are sufficiently rare as to become collector's items) but their paternalistic advice offered to the poor, the people of colour, women, and the young is to adjust, play within the system and hope for the best. Their message is practical in terms of the interests of those who gather privileges from the exploitation of others. Fortunately many of those who are oppressed are formulating new conceptions of *practical social changes that link individual success to the fate of the group*. In the interim apologists for the state will issue their justifications for "benign neglect" of our most burning social issues.*

By now it should be obvious that we feel that the older heritage of theory and research must be rejected. Clearly we do not wish to abandon all of the classic social thinkers. The sociological imagination, as we envision it, will draw heavily upon the words of important but often neglected authors such as W. E. B. DuBois, Charles Beard and Emma Goldman. Moreover, we do not argue for sociological or "liberal illiteracy". Quite the opposite, Mills tells us to read the works of our antagonists, so that we may understand their metatheories and avoid some historical errors in our research. In the process of the intellectual part of the struggle, it will be of strategic value to know the core of the sociological tradition in greater detail than the current keepers of the castle. The debunking of the old masters must continue and we suspect that the scholarship of reinterpretation, (often referred to as the new history, the new economics, the new philosophy, etc.) will remain the sustaining element of critical social science for some time to come.

To join the unhooked generation is to cast off the educational indoctrination which has been our experience in programs of professional training. When one realizes that the material which he or she learned in order to pass exams, get good grades or to butter powerful professors is of little or no value in attacking problems of real human concern, then the first

* There is an important reason for the absence of passion from social science and this is the process of academic repression. It is the case that the liberal shield of academic freedom has not always been applied to Third World and radical scholars. In fact, we have been treated to the rather absurd logic that the free expression of critical ideas is itself a threat to academic freedom. Critical scholars do get fired but less dramatically they are not hired, or promoted, or given salary increases so as to punish them for their deviant ideas and actions. The Academy is structured as Veblin and others have argued to ensure compliance with the existing ideology, and in this epoch it is the ideology of state domination.

steps toward the integration of one's political, moral and intellectual life can be successfully accomplished. Although many have made the rejection without having to confront the "literature", the completion of the break with the white liberal tradition is somewhat more satisfying.

To position oneself in the world of political issues and to apply this experience of practice to social inquiry is a demanding requirement of the sociological imagination. For some, especially those scholars from oppressed groups, there is little choice in the matter; their fate is related to the fate of their fellows by history and the current structure of domination. This category, like it or not, most probably applies to all of us and we need not look too far or into other people's troubles, to locate a meaningful point of action in our own lives.

The stating of bias becomes not a chore but an integral part of the work of the active social analyst. Mills proclaimed

My biases are, of course, no more or less biased than those I am going to examine. Let those who do not care for mine use their rejections to make their own as explicit and as acknowledged as I am going to make mine! Then the moral problem of social study – the problem of social science as a public issue will be recognized and discussion will become possible Mills, 1959:21

Communicating the Sociological Imagination

One might take the importance of stating one's bias one step further; that is, by clarifying the audience which the researcher would like to reach by his writing (or teaching). Mills often abandoned the "scholarly" journals even though he did not have the tremendous variety of publication media available to the current left scholar.* Scientists who today practice the sociological imagination are, or should be, communicating their ideas to the community of people engaged in social change. This implies that disciplinary jargon should be eliminated and that we should pay more attention to clarity of expression, but beyond writing more clearly, we should learn to write to sympathetic audiences. We need to listen to the criticisms of our work from the liberal audience but this sensitivity should help us improve our ideas, not inhibit the production of new ideas. Radical ideas will be attacked by liberal scholars according to their own conceptual and methodological standards. These hostile inhibitions can be partially ignored so long as the social scientist is constantly engaged in the process of self and comrade criticism.

We do not advocate a heroic "write for the people" approach. Few of us are so gifted and besides we each have special constituencies which

* Works by Mills which were pitched to a mass audience such as *Listen Yankee* and *The Causes of W.W. III*, have been dismissed by liberal scholars as "polemics".

command our strongest dictated commitment. The choice of the format or the expression of our ideas ought to be dictated by the relationship of those ideas to practice. Certainly the written word, let alone scholarly journals, does not exhaust the possible mode of effective communication.

A related matter is the very decision to communicate through some formal medium such as writing. The sociological imagination leaves no room for publications meant solely to advance one's career, in liberal academia. Marlene Dixon suggests that

Publication occurs when errors need to be corrected, when a fuller education of participants becomes mandatory, when changes are demanded in strategy and tactics, or when theoretical and practical debates within social movements are the most urgent and immediate struggle Dixon, 1972:14.

Such an approach to academic production runs counter to the "publish or perish" ethos of the liberal university but for those who take up the tradition of Mills the reality may be more like "publish *and* perish." An implicit assumption in this discussion of the selection of the audience is that the social scientist is capable of resisting the temptation to impress his liberal peers.

Summary

In this paper we have argued for a rediscovery of C. Wright Mills and his conception of the sociological imagination. In its essence the sociological imagination consists of images of social science as a potentially liberating force in world history. A crucial issue remains as to how liberating insights can be translated into meaningful action.

In reviewing Mills' critique of the major tendencies of social science, we noted that Mills gives us useful categories with which we may define an alternative methodology for research and theory development. Moreover Mills provides us with practical suggestions which will allow us to work towards the promise of social science as he envisioned it. These include:

- 1) The relating of private troubles to public issues.
- 2) The use of the perspective and substance of the new history.
- 3) The use of a compassionate as opposed to an appreciative mode in research.
- 4) Relating one's intellectual work to a change oriented practice and refining one's theories from the experience of that practice.
- 5) The careful selection of an audience to whom one wishes to communicate the results of social research and presumably a focus to the choice of the medium of expression.

Adopting the five suggestions above does not guarantee the release of the sociological imagination, but authors who do exhibit the Millsian perspective such as Ben Tong, Franz Fanon, Ralph Miliband, Robert Blauner and C. Wright Mills himself, incorporate most of these elements in their work. The sociological imagination may yet become the dominant cultural dynamic, as Mills hoped it would, but the success of the sociological imagination is intimately wrapped up in the struggles of oppressed people for equality, self-determination and social justice because it is these groups which are actively seeking liberation intellectually and politically. To stand for the sociological imagination is not a fashion or an aesthetic choice, but ultimately it commits one to social change.

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PROJECT DIRECTOR

Immediate requirement for a Project Director to administrate and coordinate the development and implementation of a corrections data system in the Province of Manitoba. The position requires a substantive knowledge of the criminal justice system as well as administrative capabilities.

This project, supported by both federal and provincial authorities, is concerned with the definition of the correctional environment, evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of the correctional agencies, and analysis of the relationships among correctional agencies. The data system shall be developed in such a manner as to meld the fragmented information needs and sources into a coordinated system affording an ongoing basis for evaluation.

Development of this project will be coordinated with current efforts of the Department of the Solicitor-General, Statistics Canada, and other provinces and agencies throughout Canada.

Applicants should possess a post-graduate degree from a university with recognized standing in sociology, criminal justice studies, political science, or related discipline. The applicant should exhibit successful research experience with major contributions in the corrections and/or criminal justice field, at least two years of which include supervision and/or independent functioning. Knowledge of evaluation research and computerized data systems would be desirable.

Salary range: 18,000 to 21,000, negotiable.

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