SOCIOLOGICALLY IMAGINED: THE DECENTERING OF C. WRIGHT MILLS,

THE POSTMODERN COWBOY

A Dissertation

by

KEITH KERR

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2007

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Approved by:

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ABSTRACT

Sociologically Imagined: The Decentering of C. Wright Mills, The Postmodern Cowboy.

(May 2007)

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Examining early biographical events in C. Wright Mills' life, along with his relationships to his family, some of whom he denied as even being family later in his life, the following study demonstrates a link between the early psychological traumas of a young Mills and the strong impact these had on his later intellectual thought. Such an approach looms as potentially important and beneficial in gaining insight into Mills' theoretical positions when we turn to academics such as Alice Miller, Sigmund Freud and C.G. Jung who demonstrate the lasting and shaping impact that early psychological development has on the thoughts, ideas and expressions of older adults. Even for empirical-based sociologists who may be hesitant to accept psychoanalytic explanations, it is difficult to reject this position outright. Even within sociology's own house, Max Weber, Talcott Parsons, David Riesman and C. Wright Mills also utilize basic psychoanalytic insights in their sociological writings. Using Mills' psychological development as an entry point, this work demonstrates the similarities between Mills' early biographical trajectory and its psychological impact on his later life as compared to very similar developments in the lives of Friedrich Nietzsche, Thorstein Veblen and

Weber. Ultimately, we come to see that not only is Mills' early psychological development similar to these earlier thinkers, but his intellectual thought later in his life is similar as well.

DEDICATION

The following project is dedicated to Xi Chen, a loving wife; Tommy and Debbie

Kerr, caring and devoted parents; and my friend John Emerson- a born troublemaker.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The following passage is a re-print of my 2003 eulogy given at his funeral:

My friend died too young; he was 56. Call it irony or fate, or whatever you like, but I somehow believe that there may be some appropriateness in such an early passing. Let me explain myself. I started graduate school at Southwest Texas State as John was nearing graduation. It was a low point emotionally for me. Isolated, alone, and unprepared for the expected rigor, I retreated into my 2nd floor office in the Evans Liberal Arts building, hoping that in the solitude of a windowless office I would manage to find the will to plow through the expected readings and write the expected papers; there, I found no reprieve. "Caused any trouble lately?" were the first words that I remember this chubby man with an odd-looking hat and even funnier looking boots, saying to me from my partially-opened office door. He was old enough to be my dad. The appearance of John that day, as I would later find out was always the case with John, was the appearance of trouble.

For all of us that know John, and I say "know" rather than "knew" because of my strong conviction that relationships supersede any finalities of death, he prevented me from getting much work done that day, or the following day, or even the day after that. It seemed that every time I tried to lock myself away in my office, away from people, away from the world, John appeared with his simple query, "Causin' any trouble?"

John was a people person and a true Renaissance man in an age of absurdly and dangerously increasing specialization. Perhaps because of this, John ultimately was a storyteller. Not storyteller as in one who makes things up, but in the sense that he soaked up so much of the places that he traveled, of the people he met and the ideas that he read, that he always seemed about to burst at the chest as he waited to share with you what new things he had experienced. What was unique about him, however, was that he was just as equally excited to learn what you had to share with him.

Needless to say, looking back at our friendship, I learned more from John than I could ever hope to teach another. Unable to get work done because of the regular and frequent queries about trouble from this strange man next door, I finally gave in. We began to have regular lunches where we would talk about good books we had read, papers we had written or someday hoped to write and we discussed what wonderful feelings we would get when we were first addressed as "Doctor" after so many years as "student." Somewhere in that first semester, John taught me one of the more valuable lessons that I have ever learned: *To be a good sociologist, one must first strive to be a good person*. The answers aren't all in the books or the lectures notes- but in the true understanding and relating to those people around you. It starts on an emotional level.

Statistics can tell us nothing about a person unless we first have an emotive sense of who that person is. And perhaps that is why eulogies and obituaries are so difficult to write. We can list all of a person's accomplishments- in John's case he was the recipient of the Distinguished Flying Cross, he held a B.A., two M.A.'s and credit towards a Ph.D. He could make a set of cabinets, speak Vietnamese, play guitar, discuss in detail the Durkheimian Collective Conscience in relation to the postmodern problem of order; he was a husband, a son, a father. And yet these fail to capture the larger than life spirit of my friend. Through him I learned that to connect emotionally to another individual was the magical elixir needed to breathe life into an otherwise dead list of statistics and accomplishments.

At some point I also learned of John's affinity for his friend C. Wright Mills. I say friend in a loose sense. John, as far as I know, never met Mills. For those of you who are unfamiliar with Mills, he was and remains today, an important figure in sociology. Despite his intellectual impact, Mills is perhaps best remembered as the "James Dean of Sociology." Mills was seen as the consummate rebel; in a word- a troublemaker. He constantly questioned, criticized, organized, and exposed injustices wherever he found them. For whatever reason, John was attracted to Mills. Be it speaking at city council meetings, participating in school board meetings or local civic action groups, or giving interviews to national newspapers where he criticized his then boss and soon to be president, George W. Bush, John seemed always and forever to be following in the spirit of his hero, C Wright Mills.

I can't help but remember when John had his stroke in 2001- the very day he and his wife Natalie were to move to College Station, TX to pursue his long dreamed of Ph.D. at Texas A&M University. Upon hearing the sad news, I went to visit him in the hospital. Asleep when I arrived, he was not looking like his old self. In his limbs he had limited mobility as well as slurred speech. When he opened his eyes and smiled, though, I knew John would be okay. There was something mischievous about his smile. His lips would slowly part, with the left side moving slightly higher than the right as if to tell you, "watch this" and soon a great story about trouble was to follow. This time, through his slurred speech he told me how unconvinced of how much the M.D.s could help him, John, against the hospital staff's initial objections, managed to get his acupuncturist and herbalist into the hospital to treat him. I can only imagine what John and his wife Natalie had to say to a strict and disciplined M.D. to convince him that he could not provide the same level of treatment as John's beloved alternative medicines. I suspect, in the tradition of C Wright Mills, the small amount of trouble John caused at the hospital that day was better for him than all the medicines in the world that the hospital could have prescribed.

Over the years, John and I had many discussions about Mills and his intellectual work. The reason that I bring Mills up is because of the parallels that I can't help but draw between their two lives. Both Mills and John spent a considerable amount of time living in both Texas and New York; both attended Texas A&M- of which both were less than pleased with; both were convinced of wood-working's therapeutic nature; both were concerned with injustice; and both saw sociology as a call to activism; both lived

life large and both were consummate but fun-loving rebel rousers. And in the end, both died too young. And while it is never fair when someone we love dies at such a young age, I can't help but note the poetic justice in how much Professor John Emerson mirrored his hero, Professor Mills in both his life and early death.

I miss you John. You taught me how to love what it is I do and in doing that, how to love other people. Where people we love go when they die is a question I'm not equipped to answer. But I can't help but imagine that wherever that place is, John is there with his mischievous grin ready to shake things up and cause a little bit of trouble of his own- and that place will be all the much better because of it.

This following project my friend, is for you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

Perhaps more today than at any other time in the short history of our discipline, sociology needs a radical like C. Wright Mills. His ideas are important- as are the ideas of all radicals. For whether we agree with Mills' ideas are not, they at the very least show us alternate ways out of the traps that control our rational perceptions of social reality and the increasing control of our irrational, willful, emotional responses to these milieus. How appropriate that the opening line to Mills' most widely read book, *The Sociological Imagination* reads, "Nowadays men often feel their lives are a series of traps" ([1959]1967:2).

In light of contemporary cultural shifts, however, the character of C. Wright Mills offers as much promise as the radical ideas that his character produced. Increasingly, American culture has shifted from David Riesman's ([1950]1961) other-directed character type, to Christopher Lasch's (1979) narcissistic type, to Stjepan Mestrovic's (1997) postemotional character type, and now to the postmodern, Disneyesque character-type (Bryman 2004) centered on all-consuming entertainment. From the classroom, to the news media, within the family, and politics, the American flocks to those institutions, groups and individuals that provide instant gratification in the form of entertainment. Be they brand names or celebrities, Americans demand to be entertained by the people and products they consume. This is not to make a value judgment on this shift. It is what it is, and for better or worse, it is the cultural landscape within which the contemporary sociologist must work. Such a trend has been noted by theorists as diverse as Herbert Marcuse ([1964]1991) and his "happy consciousness,"

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This dissertation follows the style of *Sociological Theory.*

Riesman's other-directed individual concerned with control of emotional display, Mills' ([1959]1967) post-modern man as the "Cheerful Robot," and Jean Baudrillard's ([1986]1999) postmodern American whose only unifying and conforming aspect is the always present but meaningless smile.

Existing beside this Disneyfication process is a cultural landscape eliciting more and more control over individuals and the environment they inhabit. Increasingly, the American political right decries the stifling effects of "Big Government" while the left reacts to what it sees as the stifling influence of "Big Business." While there seems to be two separate movements within American culture, there is good reason to believe that both the right and the left are reacting to the same cultural trend. Mills ([1956]2000) was one of the first to note this, linking both the corporate and political realm under the power elite umbrella. William Domhoff (1983,1998) has taken this notion further in examining the contemporary structure of the power elite, and recently George Ritzer (1993, 2003) and Anthony Giddens (1979,1984,1990) have advanced descriptions of the juggernaut known as modern society. While much has been done to explain increasing rationalized control, more work still needs to be done in examining the existential, emotional effects of individuals living under such systems. This is all to say that cultural aspects of this shift need alarmingly more focus. Arlie Hochschild's landmark work, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Emotions* (1983), drawing on Mills' social psychology (Gerth and Mills 1953) and his version of a "post-modern" society (Mills [1959]1967), has taken an important step in this direction. Much more needs be

done to give the public a better grasp in understanding their personal trials within the context of a quickly transforming social milieu.

The alarming realization at the end of the 20th century and now at the start of the 21st, is that sociology, despite its initial trajectory and promise at mid-century, is woefully unprepared for such a task. Originating from an array of different sociological perspectives and academic disciplines, sociology's obituary has been written many times over the last several decades. Mills was one of the first, launching a polemical attack on sociology in *The Sociological Imagination*; Alvin Gouldner pondered sociology's demise in *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* (1971) Alan Wolfe lamented the development of a "sociology without society" in *Whose Keeper? Social Science and Moral Obligation* (1989*)*; the postmodern left within sociology has made popular the idea that sociology is dead (Rosenau 1992)- seemingly collateral damage in the war on truth. Even those outside of sociology have recognized the crisis within the discipline. Historian John H. Summers has argued that the discipline has "degenerated into a kind of narcissism that accompanies plummeting prestige…[T]he end-of-sociology literature [has] supplied evidence for the main allegation against the field, that it ha[s] retreated into parochialism" (Summers 2003).

Instead of the narrowly focused, often atheoretical statistical studies written to a handful of specialists (now commonplace within the discipline), Summers argues that if sociology is to rescue itself, it must turn back to the rare examples supplied by Alex de Tocqueville, David Riesman, Christopher Lasch and Robert Bellah. As Summers writes of these authors' studies, "[they] commend themselves to us today because they solicit

our attention as members of the commonwealth…What sort of people are Americans? No question could be more romantic to a 'sociology without society.' In these days of worldwide confusion and distress, however, no question could possibly me more urgent." He succinctly summarizes this now dying breed of sociologist, "They make us part of something bigger than ourselves" (Summers 2003).

It is in this landscape that C. Wright Mills and his work, famous for his proclamation to "Take it big!" (Mills and Mills 2000) still holds the promise to propel the discipline of sociology out of its hidden and forgotten backroom of academia. A small group of sociologists, recognizing the urgent crisis within the discipline have recently turned to Mills in the hopes of finding a means to revive what is hoped not to be an already deceased discipline. Reacting against the splintering of the American Sociology Association into 43 specialized sections, Bernard Phillips, utilizing Mills as an access point, is hoping to bring the discipline back into a common dialogue, and to "promote a social science that intimately links theory and evidence, follows Gouldner's call for a 'reflexive sociology,' and integrates knowledge across our many specialized fields so that we can address the full complexity of human behavior" (Phillips 2005:email).

In "taking it big" Phillip's project recognizes Mills' promise of an integrative and meaning-centered sociology. Mills offers a compelling and dynamic picture of contemporary society that speaks to the growing concerns of both the political left and political right in describing both the structural landscape and the existential dilemmas existing alongside it. More than this however, Mills offers a now unique approach

within the social sciences in utilizing sociology as a tool to help the "common man," the politician and the scientist alike, to negotiate solutions to the radical post-modernity that we now confront. Mills, despite lamenting methodological "fetishism" ([1959]1967:224) offered a methodology of his own- a radical methodology housed in pragmatic approaches utilizing scientific methodology, linking this to the inherent personal meaning that is housed within the arena ([1959]1967).

But perhaps just as important in today's Disneyfied, postmodern landscape is Mills' character- both professional and personal (see Horowitz 1983, the only published full-length Mills biography). Both paint a tantalizing and entertaining picture that can be consumed as an emotional commodity, both informing and capturing the attention of today's post-other-directed social character type.

While this last statement may be shocking and irreverent to pure academics, the fact of the matter is that academia cannot separate itself from the larger cultural context of the societies and cultures in which it operates. While it is easy to fall into the trap of believing that academics and intellectuals stand as detached objective observers of social reality, such observers also stand as affected subjective agents of the very mechanisms they attempt to understand. Further, any findings that they produce must be relayed to the general public which is also embedded in cultural environments. Therefore, it would seem evident that relays of information should be made in manners that are most conducive to capturing the attention and informing the public in a manner that is culturally aware of the audience it is communicating with and in a manner that is aware of the importance of subjective understanding. Mills, perhaps because he was one of the

first English-speaking intellectuals to translate Max Weber[1] (1946), recognized very early the importance of meaningful experience (despite sociology's infatuation with Weber's "value-free" proclamation, he also wrote that understanding subjective states of individuals was just as important).

Mills was working as early as the 1950s to develop a methodological and written form of "sociological poetry" which he hoped would capture not only the structure of society, but the inherent subjective meaning of experience for those individuals making-up this structure (Mills and Mills 2000). Mills recognized what Texas A&M professor Stjepan Mestrovic recently wrote, "To wait for some magical, pure moment of objectivity is to preclude the possibility of meaningful discourse" (1996:10).

This line of reasoning is obviously not new. This was C. Wright Mills' critique in the first half of *The Sociological Imagination* wherein he attacked Talcott Parsons and sociology in general for ignoring the cultural divide that he felt existed between the general public and the sociologist as technician- a divide that he ultimately argues was one of subjective meaning. And despite the continuing success of the *Sociological Imagination* and the continuing popularity of Mills, sociology and academia seems to have taken little advice from the book or the man.

At the opening of the 21st Century we are witnessing the results of an isolated academic community detached from the general public. Nearly 100 years after the Scopes trials, we are seeing the re-introduction of Creationism into American classrooms

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[1] Hans Gerth and Mills co-edited the Weber translation. Gerth, a native German speaker, appears to have been the primary translator and Mills was in charge of the arrangement and formulation of the English versioned text.

and a retreat of evolutionary teachings. Talking heads such as Bill O'Reilly, Rush Limbaugh, Jon Stewart and Al Franken are increasingly looked to as experts on all manners of social science subjects. One need simply take a trip to the local bookstore, library or Internet to see the wide range of non-academic celebrities standing in as experts in science and social science subjects. Part of the blame is likely due to the self-marginalized place and segregated space of academia. Russell Jacoby has previously explored this trend in depth with his convincing book, *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the age of Academe* (1987) wherein he decries the loss of the public intellectual. Interestingly, he names Mills as one of the last of this group. Jacoby argues in part, not that we have seen a loss of the intellectual, but simply a loss of intellectualism that the general public is attracted to, much less can understand. Today's intellectual, he argues, is spatially isolated on the college campus and has little communication with those not occupying the same space. Not only are the intellectuals, and specifically sociologists, spatially isolated, but their communications from the university nether regions are culturally isolated as well. Perhaps it is true that the general public is much more intelligent than academics think: recognizing the "objective treatises" issued from the Academy for what they sometimes really are: sometimes archaic and subjective power statements that have lost their power and meaning in contemporary times and thus are things to ignore.

C. Wright Mills, very conscious of this emerging development, understood that *how* things are communicated is just as important, and oftentimes *is the same thing as what is communicated*. In turning this insight into action, Mills responded with a series

of "pamphlets" which generated a large readership outside of the university (1958,1960,1962). It was his hope that public sociology, the one which he was pioneering, could provide the "common man" with a set of "tools" to understand the problems facing each of us in the then emerging post-modern culture and the existential dilemmas which he rightly saw as inseparable from this landscape. In this regard, and as we will explore further below, Mills was in line with the works and concerns of both Thorstein Veblen and David Riesman.

As will be explored throughout the following pages, Mills' relevance continues today for a multitude of reasons: For one, and as rarely recognized, he predates many recent developments in the social sciences from intellectuals as diverse and Ritzer, Giddens and Baudrillard. Secondly, and as I have previously discussed in "The Intersection of Neglected Ideas: Durkheim, Mead and the Postmodernists" (Kerr, forthcoming) Mills offers an anchor point from which diverse and seemingly contradictory statements from competing camps of sociology (i.e.- modernist and postmodernist) can be understood in the context of each other- including Veblen, Weber, William James, Baudrillard and Riesman- just to mention a few. Finally, Mills' biography- inseparable from his academic work- offers a vehicle to turn academic into celebrity, and thus turn intellectual into public intellectual. In short, an examination of Mills' work and eccentric life offers an opportunity and roadmap to repackage the communiqués from the isolated classrooms and offices of the university into a viable commodity that has a greater chance to be consumed in today's Disneyfied,

entertainment, cultural landscape. In short, Mills as legend provides a vehicle for non-sociologists into the world of sociology.

The following pages will take many twists and turns, examining here and there aspects of Mills' biography- his relationships with family and friends, his eccentric behaviors and the myth-like legend that he has now become; it will take a journey into the world of postmodernity as Mills saw it; and along the way, a wide range of other important theorists will make appearances in their intellectual (if not real) relationships with Mills' ideas. In line with sociology as Mills practiced it, and in contradiction to the specialized and splintered discipline that sociology has become, the following pages will draw on psychoanalysis, sociology, literature and philosophy in an exploration of the relationship between Mills the man, Mills the legend, and Mills the intellectual.

One should hesitate to go into too much detail in an introduction, summarizing exactly what is to follow. Foreshadowing (as I have attempted to do here) is productive. Intro summarizations are not. Summarizations seem to preclude the ability of the reader to critically engage the text and draw-out arguments and conclusions that the author may not have explicitly or even consciously recognized him or herself. Summarizations tell the reader how and what it is they should understand by offering pre-formed and easily digested (shall we say McDonaldized?) arguments. For better or worse, I prefer to avoid summarizing my work, and instead, hope to engage the reader in the text as it progresses.

2. HOROWITZ AND THE INCOMPLETE BIOGRAPHY

Undoubtedly, C. Wright Mills is one of the most well-known American sociologists of the 20th Century. From his exploration into what he saw as a power-elite at the helm of American decision-making to his methodological statements in *The Sociological Imagination* ([1959]1967)*,* Mills' intellectual impact is still felt within the discipline. The fact that he died at the early age of 45 makes this all the more impressive. Perhaps just as important to his continuing legacy, however, is the persistent image of a larger than life embodiment; the rebel from Texas who with a zeal and passion conspicuously missing in the archaic and dry academic arena, set out to remake the discipline though an all out attack on power elites, be they in the public or within sociology's own ranks.

Bernard Phillips, a former undergraduate in Mills' introduction to sociology course at Columbia University, tells a story highlighting Mills' propensity for challenging authority. His story revolves around an encounter between Mills and the then Columbia University President, Dwight D. Eisenhower- the soon to be President of the United States. While Eisenhower and Mills shared similar concerns, (Eisenhower warning the American public of the dangers posed by the "Military-Industrial Complex" and Mills' very similar concerns regarding the growing power elite) Eisenhower during his time at Columbia was far from trusted by those on the left such as Mills. Amidst the Red Scare sweeping the United States, Eisenhower, while he did accept a gift from Poland's Communist Party to establish a chair of Polish studies at Columbia University, also served on a commission that concluded that communists should be barred from

teaching in the classroom, and he also supported the dismissal of a left-leaning member of the Teachers College at Columbia (Columbia University 2007).

Perhaps this is part of the motivation behind Mills' actions toward Eisenhower. Regardless, the story goes that Eisenhower, unannounced, walked into Mills' undergraduate lecture one afternoon, taking a seat near the back. Recognizing the former Allied Commander and soon to be President of the United States sitting in his classroom, Mills stops mid-sentence in lecture to launch into a diatribe on how one could mount a violent revolution against the United States government- using the college classroom as the initial cell to command the operations. Mills continued along this radical line, all the while Eisenhower was growing more and more angry; until Eisenhower abruptly rose from his seat and stormed out the back of the lecture hall. Mills, once again in mid-sentence, stopped the lecture, and returned to his original topic (Phillips 2006: Personal Conversation).

Yet another story told of Mills while at Columbia revolves around his casual dress. Amidst America's mid-century conservative attire Mills was fond of wearing his "riding gear" while at Columbia (riding goggles, boots, gloves, etc.) Concerned with his unprofessional dress, the story goes that several faculty members approached Mills. Mills, in quintessential fashion, cursed at them and threw them out of his office. Several hours later, after a meeting with the faculty members, the Department Chair arrived at Mills' office, telling Mills, "If you are to continue working here, you will- starting tomorrow- show-up in a suit and tie." The following day, and atop his BMW motorcycle, Mills arrived to his first lecture wearing a suit and tie…..but no shirt.

Undoubtedly, Mills was an eccentric before the 1960s made eccentricity a norm (how much of that eccentrics remains or is even allowed within society or the academy is questionable). Even today, decades after his death, stories of Mills' supposed outrageous behaviors are passed down to incoming generations of sociology students almost as a form of urban legend. Any truth to these stories may forever be lost. Mills, like an early postmodern caricature, reveled in these outrageous stories and falsehoods, refusing to dismiss any untruthfulness in them. To the contrary, and according to his colleagues' accounts, Mills simply "exaggerated [these] reports to the point of disbelief" (Horowitz 1983:5).

A towering presence at well over six-feet tall and over 200 lbs, Mills refused to follow the norms of the academy which supported his work; refusing at all opportunities, as the above story indicates, to wear suit and tie to work and instead often dressing in riding boots and flannel shirts (Mills and Mills 2000). Further, Mills saw the promise in sociology as a tool to help an ailing society, while at the same time launching vicious and sometimes personal attacks against many within its ranks. In contemporary times where information is passed increasingly through the image as symbol as opposed to language, perhaps the most enduring and aptly appropriate image of Mills is that of him in leather jacket and gloves, donning riding boots and riding-goggles, helmetless on his BMW motorcycle with the wind blowing through his hair. If an image were ever to wholly capture a popular (but not necessarily true) perception, this enduring snapshot does.

Yet, despite his continuing place within the sociological canopy, the impact that he had on American culture (especially that of the New Left and the associated liberal culture of the 1960s) and the contradictory and hurried life he lived, Mills has been the subject of only one published full-length biography: *C. Wright Mills: An American Utopian* (1983) by Irving Louis Horowitz; and within this biography- *less than one page* of this 330 page biographical account of Mills' life is devoted to Mills' first 18 years of existence! It is in effect, only half of a biography. Considering Mills' continuing popularity, all of this is difficult to imagine. In both the extreme and hurried life he lived, as well as in the challenging and sometimes irreverent intellectual work he produced, Mills seemed to embody the rebel.

While disappointing that Horowitz fails to make these points, this is not meant as an attack, and it appears that the lack of an early biographical account of Mills was largely excluded in Horowitz's study out of respect for Mills. "In the main, Mills' personal relationships with his wives and friends were not part of his public or professional world. He had a keen disdain for 'gossip,' for those who converted private ills into public discourse. Insofar as possible, I have respected these feelings in the making of this book" (Horowitz 1983:5).

This noted, however, in the context of Mills' famous formulation of the sociological imagination as the linking of "public issues" to "private troubles," Horowitz's above-quoted recollection of Mills seems to offer the reader an opposing and contradictory picture of Mills, and interestingly uses very similar language as Mills in denying exploration into the link between public and private arenas. And yet, Mills was

very explicit about the relation of the public and private, leading one to wonder what Mills would have thought of his own biographical account by Horowitz.

As Mills wrote "No social study that does not come back to the problem of biography, of history and of their intersection within a society has completed its intellectual journey" (Mills [1959]1967:6). Horowitz's account gives great and deep treatment to the historical and institutional environments in which Mills was operating. However, more exploration into Mills' biographical, and especially early biographical trajectory is needed to give us a fuller and more accurate picture of the complete Mills.

Much like the life, legacy and ideas of its subject matter Horowitz's biographical study, *C. Wright Mills: An American Utopian* (1983*)*, proved to be a lightening rod for controversy and contentious debate. While the book was initially well accepted, receiving favorable reviews such as Steven Lukes' 1983 laudatory piece in *The New York Times* and Lewis Coser's 1984 review in *The American Journal of Sociology*, subsequent reviews and comments in the years following the book's release subsided in their praise. For a man who was as much legend as intellectual, the substance and storyline of what created the legend of C. Wright Mills, was for the most part missing from Horowitz's account, leaving some feeling that Horowitz short changed both Mills and those interested in his life. Many found Horowitz's intellectual biography disappointing because of its focus on Mills' ideas and their developments while giving only slight treatment to biographical events that helped shape these (see Coser 1984 and Lemert 1986).

To be fair, Horowitz made very clear in the biography's introduction, that what he attempted was a sociological or intellectual biography more so than a life biography. The result was a study in C. Wright Mills' ideas and their development, rather than a study of the controversial and often larger than life character of the man. As Horowitz aptly demonstrated, though, even in ignoring many of Mills' eccentric and controversial behaviors, there was much controversy to be found in Mills' ideas; so much so that toward the end of his life, Mills fell under the FBI's gaze (Keen 1999).

As further evidenced and documented by Horowitz (1983), Mills' ideas also eventually led to his estrangement from academic sociology and many of his professional colleagues. While Horowitz's account does not explicitly focus on, or at least dwell deeply into Mills' character, relationships, alleged alcoholism or sometimes deviant behaviors, brief hints of these inevitably come out as we see Mills reacting to negative reviews from his peers, and his eventual deep and troubling differences that develop between himself and others such as Hans Gerth. And while the focus of the study is again, not on Mills' personal relations, the reader is left with the feeling that s/he is standing in a graveyard of friendships and professional ties- all destroyed by Mills' corrosive personality.

Fairly or unfairly, the picture that slowly emerges is that of a disagreeable and toxic man. Stories and brief references are made throughout Horowitz's biographical account of Mills' persisting troubles with interpersonal relationships, implicitly noting Mills' cold relationship with his family, Mills' first open revolt against authority while a freshman undergraduate at Texas Agriculture and Mechanical College; the "air of

cockiness" (1983:23) that "aroused hostility from the [professors] he criticized" (1983: 21) while a student at The University of Texas; Mills' open hostility and disdain toward his superiors while a Ph.D. student at Wisconsin- especially toward Howard Becker; finally the more widely known disputes Mills had with Hans Gerth and Talcott Parsons- and all of this to just name a few examples found within Horowitz's account.

What is missing here amongst the scatterings of almost asides to Mills' relational troubles, is the "legend" that many now know Mills as, and a legend which allows us to look back upon the life and work of this intellectual and overlook some of the more negative and corrosive aspects. For it was this very aspect of Mills, described in slightly troubling terms within Horowitz's book, that attracted many to Mills in the first place- a radical sociologist who was not afraid to question and attack those people and ideas that he found harmful and dangerous. Yet, I think it not too bold to suggest that most look upon Mills and prefer to think of his life and work as "eccentric." This, however, is not the picture Horowitz paints for us. Toxic and corrosive may be a better set of words.

Undoubtedly, though, Mills' personality as legend is and was as fundamental to his fame as were his ideas. This is not to say that Mills was not accomplished; he certainly was, as demonstrated by *The Sociological Imagination's* 1998 selection as the 20th century's second most influential sociology book by a poll conducted by the International Sociological Association (2006). One must wonder, however, that if not for the "legend" of the man, would his ideas still have a vehicle into the sociological canopy of today, nearly half a century after his death? If one is to consider other deceased, yet still well-read sociologists, schools of thought have formed around these

(Durkheimians, Weberians, Marxists, Parsonians, etc.). Yet, Mills, apart from the idea of sociologist as social critic, leaves no living body of thought which others have constructed schools of sociology around, and he left no disciples. Edward Tiryakian (1979) has previously argued that for schools to arise from sociology as an institution, the first step is that a theorist must have a small core of disciples closely aligned to a master. Tiryakian writes of a school's formation:

> The school is comparable in its formative stages, at least, to a religious community, a sect, or a brotherhood. It usually provides an intellectual sense of mission to its members. They are drawn together by a set if ideas, techniques, and normative dispositions expressed by the founder-leader which at the time of the school's beginning are at odds with prevailing views in the wider profession. The school may have a tacit sense of bringing salvation to the profession, that is, rescuing it from a state of stagnation and/or degradation; the school seeks to "put new clothes" on the profession…to renovate it, to give it a new beginning. The school may be looked down upon by the larger scientific community,…ignored for being nonscientific (which may mean no more than not doing what the majority of the members of the profession believe constitutes the activities of scientists in that profession). The school, in its debut, is denied entrance into the temple; its expressions and products are kept apart from the official organs of the profession, thereby leading the school to seek its own organs of public diffusion. (P. 317)

With this description, we see a statement that speaks very closely to sociology's perception of Mills and Mills' perception of mid-century sociology. Yet, Mills, unlike theorists who succeeded in leaving behind a school, was unable to make this leap into sociological immortality in large part because first, he was too far outside sociology's mainstream, and second, because his corrosive personality kept him there. While Mills made headway as a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin at Madison and eventually found a position at Columbia University, Mills' open attacks against his colleagues there along with his famous classroom tirades against the discipline and department, resulted in the department assigning Mills no graduate-level classes (Horowitz 1983). Hence he never achieved an institutional position that would afford a cadre of disciples to form around him.

The result was that apart from his still well-known and widely read *The Sociological Imagination* (at least amongst sociology circles) many of Mills' major published studies, *The New Men of Power* (1948)*, White Collar* ([1951]2002)*,* and *The Power Elite* ([1956]2000) are now read as dated and time-specific pieces and largely for this reason, do not receive the same wide readership as they did at mid-century. Likewise, Mills' published "pamphlets," despite selling very well upon their release, are rarely read today, and are somewhat difficult to even find in some cases. The end result has been Mills' achievement of a legend status within the discipline, but a more lasting impact of a Millsion school or even approach within sociology, has yet to form.

And yet, Mills' impact on and appeal to sociologists does not seem to be waning. In fact, sociology appears to be in midst of a Mills revival. Mills' major works,

including *The Power Elite, White Collar* and *The Sociological Imagination* were reissued starting in 2000, with new afterwards from such academics as Allan Wolfe, Tom Gitlin and Russell Jacoby. Likewise, Stanley Aronowitz (ed. 2004) recently oversaw a major three-volume series, exploring the life and writings of Mills. Further, an edited volume of Mills' correspondence was recently released (Mills and Mills 2000). William Domhoff (1983, 1998) and others such as Lasch (1996) have extended Mills' theories in exploring its relevancy in contemporary times. Even more recently we can turn to *Contemporary Sociology*'s November 2006 issue that explored the impact of Mills' work 50 years after his death.

Despite all of this, one wonders, however, how important Mills' ideas are to his continuing place in the sociological canopy in comparison to the role his legend has played in his contemporary fame. If Tiryakian's analysis of "schools" is correct, it seems that Mills' continuing popularity has at least as much to do with his now entertaining character as much as his often misunderstood ideas. Yet, this important aspect of the interplay and relationship between Mills the celebrity (known possibly as much in infamy as fame) and Mills the intellectual is never really explored in Horowitz's account, and when it is, Horowitz denies the connection- treating the former simply as myth.

In part for these reasons, and despite the initially favorable reviews of Horowitz's book, by the mid-1980s less favorable reviews began to appear. In a 1986 review published in the influential *Theory and Society*, Charles C. Lemert wrote of Horowitz's biographical account, "…his book is a ghost of what might have been. Horowitz instead

tells us of a big thinker who lived in relatively little places, and, after a good show, died. There is a bigger story there…" (p. 437).

More than just quiet grumblings about the scope of the book, serious questions concerning the book's factual accuracy also emerged. Upon its release in 1983, and despite an initially favorable review by *The New York Times*, heralding the book as "excellent" and an "invaluable guide" to Mills' life and work (Lukes 1983:BR11), its initial shine quickly wore off.

In response to the book's publication and Lukes' review, Mills' family published a letter in the *New York Times*- the first salvo in a war between the family and Horowitz that would be played out in the paper's public space. Written by Kathryn Mills (1984) (daughter of C. Wright Mills) on behalf of Mills' widow Yaroslava Mills, his first wife Freya James, and Mills' two other children, the family alleged gross factual inaccuracies in Horowitz's biographical account which the family claimed ultimately portrayed a "distorted view" of Mills (p. 7:35). While a few of the 50 alleged inaccuracies and an uncounted "misrepresentations" were pointed out (such as disputes as to when or if Mills read Tocqueville) the majority went unstated, leaving us only to speculate as to their significance and importance.

As to whether or not the family was correct in its allegations of factual inaccuracies or if their response was more of an emotional outrage at a picture of Mills which they read as less than fair, the current manuscript does provide evidence that seems to contradict some of Horowitz's statements and claims toward Mills' high school and early college years. We will get to that in future sections.

Regardless, and in response to the family's public attack, Horowitz quickly responded with a veiled attack of his own, defending his book and questioning the family's motives. In his letter, Horowitz waved off discussion of many of the claims of factual inaccuracies, dismissing them as not "particularly significant" (Horowitz 1984: 7:42).

In the months following this debate, other reviews began to appear in academic journals. In November of 1984, Lewis Coser published his already mentioned favorable review in *The American Journal of Sociology*, where he heralded Horowitz's book as an "intellectual history of high order…help[ing] illuminate the work of a contradictory and enigmatic figure in American cultural history" (Coser 1984:658). Such accolades from Coser came in spite of *several more factual inaccuracies documented by Coser* but which Coser ultimately dismissed as minor, unimportant, and expected in such a large biographical account. One of the several alleged factual inaccuracies revolved around Horowitz's claim that Mills was unfamiliar with guns. Coser writes:

> Not so. Early in 1949 Mills and his wife Ruth moved into the house
> owned by David Riesman in Chicago, where my wife and I also lived
> while Riesman worked at Yale to complete *The Lonely Crowd*. On the
> day of Mills' arrival, we were shocked to hear gunshots suddenly coming
> from his apartment. Frantically rushing upstairs, we found that Mills had
> installed a cardboard target over the mantelpiece and was happily
> shooting at it. By his own account and that of his then wife Ruth, he had
> several guns in the workshop of his home (Coser 1984:658)

While Coser saw no significance in Horowitz's false claim that Mills was unfamiliar with guns, in the context of Horowitz's conclusions on Mills, such a discrepancy looms large. In *C. Wright Mills: an American Utopian* (1983), Horowitz attempted to separate Mills from what he saw as the myth and legend that surrounded him; most notably the idea of Mills as a gun carrying cowboy from the heart of Texas, fighting his way through the urbanized elites of sociology. Yet, in a brief discussion of some of Horowitz's inaccuracies, specifically his claim that Mills did not have "the vaguest idea of what to do with a gun" (1983:244), questions of Horowitz's concluding portrayal of Mills begin to emerge. In the introduction to Mills' published letters and autobiographical writings, Mills' daughters recall a Mills very different from that depicted by Horowitz; a Mills very much tied to and infatuated by the cowboy culture of his Texas roots, describing their father as a "feisty Texan" with the psychology of the "outlander" (Mills and Mills 2000:21). Further, in Mills' unpublished letters to Tovarich, an imaginary Russian colleague, we further see demonstrated Mills' long musings and reflections on his Texas upbringing. And while these letters were written in a somewhat ironical tone, there are clearly deep and passionate sentiments toward the Texas culture of his youth to be found in these writings (Mills and Mills 2000).

Whether acting in accordance with or in response too, Mills as the gunslinger from Texas does seem to be a role that he took on to a large degree- at least to a strong enough degree that he fired guns inside David Riesman's home, and later took to carrying a pistol for protection near the end of his life (Keen 1999). Perhaps a more accurate description of Mills, however, is not one of the gunslinger, but of a Don

Quixote like figure- a larger than life embodiment, known as much by his work's accomplishments, if not more for the spirit and zeal of which defined the ethos of his life.

Ultimately, as an *intellectual biography*, Horowitz's accounting of Mills' thought is solid. As a pure biography, however, my reading as I have alluded to thus far in this section, finds it lacking in at least two primary areas: (1) It's attempt to distance Mills from the mythical legend of a crazy-eyed cowboy- a caricature of Mills which appears in fact to be far from mythical and (2) the lack of much discussion on Mills' first 18 years of his life- a critical time period that could help us better understand the life and work of an older Mills.

Despite its shortcomings and controversies, *C. Wright Mills: An American Utopian* did offer a compelling and complicated look into the intellectual life of perhaps American sociology's most controversial thinker in the last 50 years. The book traced the influence of what Horowitz argued was the eventual breaking with American pragmatism in Mills' thought, as well as his estrangement but strong and longing belief in the potential benefits of sociology for the "common man." Perhaps for these reasons, and despite the tempting subject matter Mills' life seems to offer, Horowitz's biographical study has remained the only published biographical exploration into Mills' life in the 20 plus years since its release. Others have given passing treatment to Mills' biographical trajectory (see Eldridge, 1983; Press 1978; Tilman 1984 and 2004) but none as extensively as Horowitz's work.

Of late however, and in correspondence with what appears to be a Mills revival within sociology, calls for a new and more complete biographical account of Mills are getting louder. Stanley Aronowitz has recently attacked Horowitz's biographical study as "showing us more about (its author) than about Mills," (Aronowitz ed. 2004) and has lamented this need for another Mills biography "…more than 40 years after his death, Mills awaits a major critical study, let alone a full-length biography" (2004:2).

Aronowitz will not have to wait very long for such a work. John Summers, a Harvard trained historian, will be releasing his long researched Mills biography in 2007. As to whether or not Aronowitz will be pleased, or as to how similar or dissimilar it will be to Horowitz's account, we will have to wait and see. In email correspondences with Summers, he is keeping mum about the direction and scope of his work. "Wait and see" is his tantalizing response (Summers 2006).

With this treatment of past biographical studies now stated, our present project is not a biographical account of Mills' life- although the project is biographical in nature. Instead, the following sections utilize biographical snapshots of Mills as a vehicle into his intellectual thought- most notably his early recognition of an emerging post-modern era. More to the point though, the current project will demonstrate how the enduring and sometimes controversial eccentricities of Mills' personality act as powerful tools in giving insight into his just as controversial and challenging intellectual thought. In short, this project examines how Mills' intellectual thought mirrored his life's eccentrisms.

3. PRIVATE TROUBLES AND PUBLIC ISSUES: SIGMUND FREUD, ALICE

MILLER AND MILLS AS THE 'FEMININE-SENSITIVE BOY'

Literature within the social sciences has demonstrated the important link between childhood and subsequent life events. Alice Miller ([1979]1997, 1991, 1986) has written extensively on the influence of early experiences on subsequent life developments, and also on the biographical experiences of famous intellectuals and the subsequent impact on their work. It is interesting to note that despite the knowledge and influence of Freudian and post-Freudian thought on sociology in the 20th century, psychoanalytical insights have rarely been applied to sociologists themselves- this despite the fact that even literary criticism has increasingly began to argue that at best, the text can provide significant insight only into the psyche of its author (see Mestrovic [1988]1993 and Lasch [1979]1991).

Further, it is a taken-for-granted fact within the social sciences that early childhood experiences greatly influence subsequent character formations and life outcomes (Erickson [1950]1986 and Riesman [1950]1961). What insights could be gleamed regarding some of social science's greatest thinkers and their theories, including Mills, if more effort was placed into uncovering their biographical and especially early biographical trajectories? Mills ([1959]1967) seems to give weight to this insight with the positing of "biography" into his holy trinity of the sociological imagination.

And yet, detailed biographical accounts of nearly all of sociology's greatest minds are difficult to come by- especially our more contemporary thinkers. To find

biographical accounts including details of early childhood developments and experiences is nearly impossible. As previously noted in earlier sections, even within Horowitz's Mills biography, less than one page is spent on his first 18 years of life- a study that in effect, stands only halfway complete. Mills clearly saw an importance, however, between the private lives of individuals and their public performances. In his oft overlooked appendix to *The Sociological Imagination*, "On Intellectual Craftmanship, however, Mills more specifically points the tie-in between the public life of the intellectual and the private,

> …the most admirable thinkers within the scholarly community you have
> chosen to join do not split their work from their lives. They seem to not
> allow such dissociation, and they want to use each for the enrichment of
> the other. (Mills [1959]1967: 195)

He goes on to say:

> [Y]ou must learn to use your life experiences in your intellectual
> work…To say that you can have 'past experience' means, for one thing,
> that your past plays into and affects your present, and that it defines your
> capacity for future experience. As a social scientist, you have to control
> this rather elaborate interplay, to capture what you experience and sort it
> out… (P.196)

While my research is focusing on this interplay between Mills' early life and his later work, some intuitively noted this connection half a century ago- and severely

criticized Mills for it. In a 1952 letter to Mills, Richard Hofstadter attacked Mills for allowing the psychological baggage of his biography to seep into academic analysis,

> My primary feeling about the book…is that this book is an excessively projective book, in the psychological meaning of the word…You detest white collar people too much, altogether too much, perhaps because in some intense way you identify with them. (reprinted in part in Horowitz 1983:250-1).

3.1   Mills: The Forgotten Years

My current research is not an attempt to write another Mills biography- I will leave that to historians and biographers. What I attempt is to simply account for some major events in the first half of his life- an area of inquiry that few have yet explored and none have seemingly published on.

It need be noted here, however, that I am not the first to recognize this gap in the literature. Richard Gillam (1966) previously researched Mills' life, including those years prior to 1934 for his thesis work at Columbia University. Unfortunately, the work was never published; and while it is on file at Columbia University's main library, it was not used for this present study due to the disappointing fact that the Columbia Library does not release copies to requesting research libraries or researchers- allowing only in-person access to the document.

While I have read second and third-hand accounts of his research, it appears that Gillam discovers a Mills similar to the Mills I have found within what I call the "forgotten years" of Mills' life. The young Mills that is revealed is (1) a young man that

few would recognize as the antagonistic rebel we now know him as, and (2) a lonely boy whose early experiences and relationships eerily mirror the post-modern and white-collared landscape that he depicted in his later theoretical and cultural work.

My research into Mills' early life and his later sociological work primarily utilized email and mail correspondences with his only son Nik Mills and his widow, Yaraslava Mills; some of Mills' private papers housed at The University of Texas (these papers are not publicly available and I had to seek written permission from Mills' widow Yaraslava Mills; unfortunately I was granted access only to one of the two files); I also utilized Mills' high school transcripts; letters written between Mills' mother and Texas A&M College; essays and application papers from Mills' freshman year of college; Mills' freshman college transcripts; the limited number of recently released Mills letters; email and personal conversations with Mills' students and Mills scholars; and finally, various secondary sources.

While we have previously discussed Horowitz's book-length Mills biography, there have been several other published biographical accounts of Mills- admittedly, however, none were as extensive as Horowitz's treatment. In fact, the vast majority have given only brief and cursory treatment to Mills' life-trajectory, and like Horowitz's more detailed account, none dwell deeply into Mills' early years. (see *C. Wright Mills: A Native Radical and his American Intellectual Roots* (Tilman 1984); *Thorstein Veblen, John Dewey, C. Wright Mills and the Generic Ends of Life* (Tilman 2004); *C. Wright Mills* - both Howard Press's (1978) and John Eldridge's (1983) version of the same-titled book); (for a rare example of a more detailed piece that explores the importance of

Mills' formative years on his later intellectual work, see Bernard Phillips' (2004) entry on Mills in the *Dictionary of Modern American Philosophers*).

Many of these listed books which devote a few pages to Mills' biography and even fewer to his early biography, seem to rely very heavily on Horowitz's study- this despite the already discussed criticisms levied at the study and the inaccuracies within it (see Section 2 for an more in-depth treatment of these). Despite including a biographical sketch, what importance these authors find of Mills' early life is unclear, for why they all briefly touch upon it, none attempt to link it to later developments in his intellectual work. Perhaps part of the reason for this is that most all of the above listed biographical accounts fail to provide fertile ground in linking Mills' formative years to his later life and intellectual developments- all lacking depth, substance and accuracy from which they could make this connection. If one were to accept the "standard" biography found within these accounts- we see that they read much as an obituary printed everyday in numerous newspapers across America.

Previous biographical accounts become nothing more than listings of brute facts that tell us nothing of the boy, much less the man Mills would become. In the context of the social sciences and the taken-for-granted knowledge on the impact that early socialization has in influencing later life developments, Mills' often repeated early biography is somewhat perplexing. There is no emotion, no conflict, or listed data that gives much indication that the man Mills ultimately "became" had any relation to the boy he once was. Instead, what we have is thin treatment of the "facts" surrounding Mills' early life, and no narrative that indicates any direction into how these link to his

later years. The addition of some pertinent facts, context and narrative, and the deletion of some oft repeated inaccuracies within Mills' biography, however, offer tantalizing hints of strong psychological predispositions that would later manifest themselves into the "Legend of C. Wright Mills" and shed light onto the development of Mills' radical sociology.

Even today, almost half a century after his death, Mills is known as the "James Dean of Sociology." Many speak of Mills' domineering presence, his disdain for authority and tradition, his unabashed and personalized attacks on Talcott Parsons, and ultimately his radicalness in both his intellectual and personal life (see Tillman 1984 and Horowitz 1983). And yet, the standard biographical treatment of Mills' early years gives no foreshadowing of these later developments. Almost 25 years after Horowitz's biographical study, however, more information is becoming public that adds to the above skeleton of Mills' early biography, especially to that of his early, "forgotten years."

3.2   The Feminine-Sensitive Boy

C. Wright Mills, born just outside of Waco, Texas August 28, 1916 was a third generation Texan born into a family of mixed Irish, Scottish and French ancestry. It need be noted here that despite Mills' larger than life persona as the gunslinger from Texas, Mills' biographer, Horowitz attempted to distance Mills from the context of a mythical Texas, calling Mills a "new Texan" raised in an urbanized environment by "pious, middle-class" parents (Horowitz 1983:14). Horowitz writes of Mills and Texas: "There are several myths involved…Mills never rode a horse and never cared to, and

except for two lecture engagements he never even returned to Texas once he left…" (1983:14). Mills' biography goes further in later claiming that he did not even have "the vaguest idea what to do with a gun" (p. 244).

Mills may or may not have ever ridden a horse, but he was famously fond of riding his BMW motorcycle, eerily analogous to a modern day version of the horse and how well Mills could use a gun is uncertain, but if we are to believe Professor Lewis Coser's published accounts of his first meeting of Mills, Mills could handle a gun well enough to target practice with his pistol inside David Riesman's Chicago apartment. Further, as recalled by Mills' two daughters, "a feisty Texas emphasis on individual autonomy remained in him, along with the psychology of the outlander" (Mills and Mills 2000:21). It appears that despite Horowitz's claims to the contrary, like much of Texas that Mills was born into during the early part of the 20th century, he was not far removed from the cowboy culture that lingered (and still does to a large extent) within the psyche and imagination of Anglo Texans.

Mills' early years can best be described as "lonely" (Phillips 2004)- an adjective that even Mills himself utilized to describe that time between his birth and admittance to The University of Texas. Speaking to this, recently published writings from Mills' family (Mills and Mills 2000) indicate that as a young child, perhaps Mills' only enduring relationship was with his grandfather, Braxton Bragg Wright- a true Texas cowboy and rancher epitomizing the rough and rugged Texan of American frontier myth. Braxton Wright, in more ways than one, stood in opposition to the specialized white-collar American that C. Wright Mills' father mirrored and that Mills later railed

against in his book *White Collar* ([1951]2002*).* Mills' father- a man with whom Mills seemed to have never developed a consciously strong emotional tie- was often away from the home pursuing his career in the urbanized, white-collared insurance industry. In opposition to the specialized and non-autonomous existence of the father, the grandfather held a law degree, practiced medicine (although he never finished medical school) and oversaw a family ranch in South Central Texas.

C. Wright Mills' mother, in a letter addressed to Mills' children shortly after his death, described Mills' grandfather as having "a brilliant and inquisitive mind and studied and read constantly. He was considered to be an intellectual in matters of law and politics" (Mills and Mills 2000: 23). Further, the grandfather was married several times, accused of adultery, engaged in bootlegging and was ultimately murdered while Mills was a young boy- shot in the back by a trusted ranch hand, as Mills would revealing note many years later- the grandfather was apparently caught in a compromising position with the "trusted" ranch hand's wife. As a young boy, though and before the murder, Mills found much enjoyment sitting in his grandfather's lap hearing stories of the free and unrestrained cowboy life (Mills and Mills 2000).

Despite his death early in Mills' life, the six years Mills had with his grandfather seemed to have a strong and lasting impact on the growing boy. Written sometime during the fall of 1957, Mills produced a psychologically revealing passage where he explored his "cowboy roots" in the somewhat mythical culture surrounding the untamed Texas of the early 20th century. Mills, well into his intellectual career, writes in the quasi-autobiographical passage, "I grew up in Texas, curiously enough on no

ranch…The reason I was not stabilized on a ranch is that my grandfather had lost my ranch. He was shot in the back with a .30-30 rifle, always it's in the back," (Mills and Mills 2000:25). Mills follows this quote with a passage describing cowboys as larger than life embodiments, with steely eyes, unafraid, caring "less for women than women cared for them" (Mills and Mills 2000:26). As we will explore further in upcoming pages, it may be more than coincidence that Mills' sentimental and ironic musings on his grandfather as cowboy, mirrored his own biography.

Regardless, forty-one years into his life, almost four decades after his grandfather's murder, and far removed from the "cowboy culture" of his native Texas, and Mills still seems to feel a longing for such a life, maintaining, according to his daughters a love for novels and movies depicting the "Wild West" (Mills and Mills 2000). In fact, in a letter to his mother many years later, Mills sentimentally remarks that he often yearns to reside on the family ranch that never became his (Mills and Mills 2000).

Despite what his biographer Horowitz had to say, these descriptions of Mills, paired with his deep family roots in the Texas ranching culture, and the seemingly extreme individualistic and unorthodox behavior of especially his grandfather (Mills and Mills 2000: 21-6)- all seem to indicate that Mills was born into an environment uniquely equipped to produce the archetypical "psychology of the outlander." It is from the motif of such ontological agency as the "outlander" or "rugged individual" (both poetically and importantly analogous to Thorstein Veblen's ([1899]1953) "self-made man") that

we can begin to develop a sense of the contextual fabric operating within Mills' early years.

Standing in contrast to the machismo that seemed to irradiate from Mills' grandfather, and a machismo that would come to epitomize other's perception of an older Mills and his later work, as a young child and an adolescent, Mills was often alone in a house full of women- developing what some commentators have described as a "feminine sensitivity" within the boy (Press 1978, Tillman 1984). With his father often away from the home on business for long stretches of time- a casualty of the white-collar transformation, Mills was left to the company of his mother, grandmother and older sister; an extended family that Mills had much trouble relating too. Mills later wrote on this time period.

> …I never really lived in an extended family. There was just my father, who traveled much of the time, my mother, and one sister three years older than I, whom I've not seen in years. (There was also grandmother Biggy; who seem always to have been around.) The social point is this: I didn't really know the experience of "human relations" within a solid, intimate family setup, certainly not continuously…So you see, quite apart from my prior inclination, by virtue of occupational and family fact, I was thrown as a very young child with my mother, and at quite an early age this tie was also broken and I was alone. (Mills and Mills 2000:27-28)

This statement is striking on at least two levels. Note first the interesting choice of the phrase, "I was thrown as a very young child with my mother." Normally, we are

"thrown to the lions," "thrown to the wolves," "thrown to the curb," "thrown in jail," or thrown with or into any number of situations which (1) are generally always negative, and (2) are situations over which we are powerless in. Mills, in shocking terms states that he was "thrown with his mother."

The above quoted passage is also striking in its contradiction and seeming disregard for the facts. Mills claims to never have really lived in an extended family, only to tell us that he lived with his mother, sister and grandmother. In fact, despite a living in a house full of women, Mills later described these years as isolating (Mills and Mills 2000).

Despite the striking contradictions and seeming disregard for the facts, when read in context with the rest of the passage from where this quote comes from, an interesting development emerges. The above passage comes from a long letter Mills writes about his grandfather, the murder, growing-up in Texas and cowboys. Recall that Mills' grandfather was married several times (and one version of his murder revolved around him caught in a sexual act with another man's wife) and that Mills, writing about cowboys (seemingly modeled on his grandfather and the stories he heard from him) described them as "caring less for women that women cared for them"- a phrase that also seems to be directly applicable to Mills' own view of his relationship with the all-female extended family that he resided with. Despite a living in a house full of women, Mills would come to see these years as the some of the loneliest of his life (Mills and Mills 2000).

In attempts to console himself and to find companionship in a home where Mills indicates he felt none, by his high school years. Mills began to increasingly turn toward books and ultimately away from the technical career that his parents seemed to be preparing him for. According to Mills' later reflections on this time period, feeling emotionally distant from the women around him, missing his dad who was on the road for weeks at a time, and having few friends- quite possibly the result of the moves that Mills' family made throughout his life following the father's career path, a young Mills in his absent father's bedroom, stumbles across a series of books titled *The Psychology of Success*[2]. Such a discovery would prove to have a strong emotional and fateful impact on the growing, lonely boy.

In Horowitz's biographical account of this time period in Mills' life, such a pivot point is missing. Instead Horowitz and subsequent biographical accounts maintain that during high school Mills was readying himself for a technical career in architecture: attending Dallas Technical High School and then enrolling into Texas Agricultural and Mechanical College. In defense of this narrative, Horowitz tells us, "Beyond required courses in civics and history, Mills took no social sciences courses…and [his] interest in a technical career did not cease when he left for college" (Horowitz 1983: 14).

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[2] Mills is likely referring here to multiple books published in 1910 by Atkinson William- all with the same publisher, but listed under four separate titles: *Mind and body; Or Mental states and physical conditions* (Williams 1910a); *Psychology of Salesmanship* (Williams 1910b); *Art of Expression and Principles of Discourse* (Williams 1910c) and *Psychology of Success; or Mental paths to power* (Williams 1910d). While this is only speculative in nature, it may be possible that these books were available publicly as a set since they were all published in the same year by the same publishing company. Mills refers to them as a "series" of books that he thought were titled "The Psychology of Success." A search of the Library of Congress database has determined that these books listed here were the only books that included such a title prior to 1934 and that may have been issued as a set. If this is the case, then we may see in these some of Mills' early influences on what he later called the "Great Salesroom" in regards to post-modern America.

Yet, Mills' transcripts from high school and his application to Texas Agriculture and Mechanical College indicate something altogether different. Despite Horowitz's claims, according to his high school transcripts, Mills in fact did take social science classes during high school- making a 79 in Social Science his sophomore year and a 97 in Beginning (or Basic) Psychology his senior year- interestingly, the same year he recalls becoming aware of his distant relationship to his mother, and the same year that he stumbled upon his absent father's psychology books.

His last years of high school were undoubtedly pivotal ones in his life. His family had been preparing him for a technical career and seemed to have a strong interest in pushing the young Mills into the military, attempting to send him to the New Mexico Military Institute for his last year of high school and then on to Texas Agriculture and Mechanical College, now known as Texas A&M University- at the time an all-male military academy. In striking contrast to the machismo often associated with the adult Mills, it appears his family's plans for his life were in hopes to relieve their boy of his overly feminine leanings (Mills and Mills 2000).

While Mills never did attend the New Mexico Military Institute while in high school (it appears that due to the school's credit structure, Mills would have had to stay for an extra year in order to complete his high school diploma- a delay his mother was unwilling to accept), he did enroll as a freshman into the all-male military college Texas A&M. Mills later claimed that his enrollment at Texas Agriculture and Mechanical College was "to make a man of him"- a reaction by his father to the "feminine sensitivity" which seemed to mark the young boy. (Mills and Mills 2000).

Regardless, and once again in contradiction to Horowitz's claims that Mills attended Texas Agriculture and Mechanical College to pursue a technical career, Mills had in fact decided prior to his acceptance to the college that he would not follow his parent's plan for his life, but instead, would follow in the footsteps of his murdered grandfather. In comparing a passage from his mother's 1933 letter of interest to the A&M college, to Mills' application essay one year later, we vividly see Mills' emerging rebellion:

In July 1933, Mills' mother writes to A&M

> We are planning on sending our son to A&M for his college work. He has been attending Dallas Technical High School here at home. He is very interested in architecture and *plans to make architecture his life work*. (Mills 1933) *emphasis added*

One year later in July of 1934, Mills submits his application letter to the college, Adjoined to the application is an essay. Mills writes in part:

> You will also note that much time, prior to this year has been spent in architectural training- not only in theory but in practical work. *I will not go into my reasons for not choosing Arch. as a life work*. I do not however, consider these years wasted. I am sure I learned much that will be useful to me later. (Mills 1933) *emphasis added*[3]

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[3] Maybe not surprisingly, but as Mills predicted, later in his life he did return to architectural endeavors-designing and constructing his own home and some of his own furniture. In the psychological context of this development, it looms as potentially important. Mills develops a "cold" and distant relationship with his mother, by his senior year he breaks from the career that she has planned for him in architecture, and by mid-life, despite no thawing of his maternal relations, an older Mills returns to the very career his mother planned for him and that he ultimately rejected, and takes it willingly on as a hobby. It is possible

It is interesting to note that both Mills and his mother employ the same phrase, "Architecture as life work" in relaying completely opposite information. Perhaps this is the "break" with his family during his senior year of high school that Mills later refers too- changing interests in his career path. Regardless, we see here a boy who through high school is emotionally pulling away from his parents and their formulaic plan for his life; and finally, caught in this letter to Texas A&M, informing the College that he would not pursue a technical degree, we see the act of Mills breaking from his family and their plans for his life, and attempting to fashion a life of his own doing.

Further to the point in speaking to Horowitz's factually dubious claim that Mills took no social science courses in high school or at A&M; and speaking to Horowitz's inaccurate claim that Mills was attending A&M to pursue a technical career; and again, showing Mills' rebellion to his parent's plans for his life- as listed on his college application to Texas Agriculture and Mechanical College (Mills 1933), Mills listed psychology as the first among his favorite high school subjects and in fact, according to his Texas A&M freshman-year transcripts, he enrolled in a psychology course his first year of college. Even harder evidence exists, however, indicating the changing interest of the growing Mills and hinting at the break he was experiencing from his mother's care and the life direction his parent's had planned for him.

Despite his parent's beliefs and the many accounts claiming that architecture and/or engineering were Mills' chosen fields while at A&M college, Mills' transcripts

to argue that Mills was working not only at constructing a home and furnishings in his return to architecture, but also working to reconstruct and make again a relationship with his mother that cooled at least in part, over his early rejection of just such a trade. Regardless, we see here a compulsion to repeat.

and the 1934 college catalogue list Mills as an Arts and Science major. Further, as seen on his application to the college, Mills writes that he plans a career in *medicine*- the very vocation his grandfather practiced along with his ranching duties.

It is unknown whether Mills planned to couple his interest in psychology with his medical ambitions, but regardless, within these interests and plans, loose associations to his father and grandfather are evident. Both males were missing from his life- one because of a sudden and violent murder, and the other due to shifting structural economic necessities in a rapidly urbanizing America- and Mills seems to be chasing after both of them, pursing the interests and careers of the very people who left him "alone and isolated" in the company of a family of women that he later even denies as his family. In his pursuance of medicine, his grandfather's trade, the attending of A&M College to "make a man of him" and the lasting and shaping impact of his absent father's psychology books, we see a Mills whose relationships with the important but absent males in his life, and the relations with the always physically present but emotionally distant women in his immediate family, are driving the growing boy.

This point was not lost on Professor Hofstatder who's earlier quoted review of Mills' *White Collar* was overly critical due to what he concluded was a projection of Mills' psyche into the study. Hofstadter was likely correct in that *White Collar* and its reaction against the declining ownership society of the mid-20th century appears to be the blossoming of seed planted in the psyche of a young Mills after his father was recruited into the white-collar ranks and out of the home and everyday life of the young boy. We can get some insight into how Mills perceived his father if we turn to the

introduction of *White Collar* where Mills gives us a description of the white collar
American.

> [The white collar man] is more often pitiful than tragic, as he is seen
> collectively, fighting impersonal inflation, living out in slow misery his
> yearning for the quick American climb. He is pushed by forces beyond
> his control, pulled into movements he does not understand; he gets into
> situations in which he is in the most helpless position. The white-collar
> man is the hero as victim, the small creature who is acted upon but who
> does not act, who works along unnoticed in somebody's office or store,
> never talking loud, never talking back, never taking a stand. (Mills
> [1951]2002: xii)

Mills' extended definition of the white-collar man, read as his father, can be
summed-up in one word: impotent.

Living in an extended family firmly secured in this new white-collar world,
Mills was confronted with a rapidly changing world in which the idolized cowboy life of
his free and unrestrained grandfather seemed forever gone- transformed into the
urbanized and formulaic post-modern world where the power elite dominated, in Mills'
words "the new little man."

However, and just as importantly, in context of Mills' later intellectual interests,
and specifically his interest in sociology as activism, Mills' early personality and
interests seem revealing in their stubborn refusal to let go of the "feminine sensitivity"
found there. Be it aiding and repairing a sick mind as indicated by his early interest in

psychology, aiding and repairing a sick body in his plans for medical school or aiding and repairing a sick social system via his final career choice as a radical and activist-centered sociologist, a striking thread exists here in the persisting archetype of the feminine-sensitive boy as "healer" of all things broken.

3.3   Mills the Freshman

If ever there existed an entire society in which Mills felt needed healing, he first encountered it (at least consciously) his freshman year at Texas Agriculture and Mechanical College. The school, located in College Station, Texas approximately 180 miles to the southeast of Dallas, Texas was and remains a bedlam of conservatism. At the time of Mills' one year at the college, fall of 1934 thru May of 1935, the school was an all-male military compulsory institution of just under 3,000 students (Dethloff 1976). Mills entered toward the ending of a politically tumultuous time for the institution.

While the school was considered all-male (and officially remained that way until the 1960s) in the months preceding Mills' arrival, local females petitioned the courts for official acceptance to the college. A small handful of females had previously attended the college- daughters and wives of administrators and later, wives of returning soldiers from World War I. While some of these females were allowed to attend class, most were not officially recognized as students. Local women, however, wanted the same opportunity. By the time of Mills' arrival, the local courts had ruled that as a military institution, females could in fact be barred from admittance. While this remains only speculation, the one picture of Mills at the institution reveals him in full military dress, with his "cover" (hat) noticeably cocked to the left- possibly a political statement in

support of the banning of women from the institution. While I have been unable to uncover any official documentation at Texas A&M that such a grassroots movement was afoot, conversations with several of my students who were in the Corp of Cadets in recent years reveal a persisting story that cocked hats worn early to mid-century were political statements against female inclusion.

Despite this, and further speaking to the conservative environment that Mills was entering, despite Texas A&M's isolation- inconveniently located in East Texas- the administration was concerned about the growing popularity of cars and the ill-effects on college students that such freedom-giving technology could have. In fact, when Mills arrived in 1934 via railcar, students were banned from bringing automobiles with them to school. In a handful of "exceptional" cases where students were allowed to posses these, students were forced to turn their keys over to the administration and seek advanced approval to retrieve them (Dethloff 1976).

Regardless, the school was undoubtedly a military institution. From dress codes, to compulsory religious attendance and a strong history of hazing, the "fish" as the freshman were called, were at the behest of the upperclassmen- none more so than the sophomores- that group of students who having just undergone the maltreatment themselves, were now in a position to pay unto others exactly what had been paid unto them. And if Mills needed any warning about the new life he was entering upon his arrival by train to the college, he received it in a newspaper article appearing in the first fall semester issue of *The Battalion*- the college-run newspaper. In a September 19th column titled "Advice to Freshmen"- prominently placed on page one as the lead story,

the article prophetically warned in its opening paragraph, "The freshman class this year expects to be the largest in the history of the institution. A certain number of this class will be sent here by their parents with their own grudging consent. They won't survive." (Anonymous 1934: 1). Mills didn't.

If any comfort was to be found at Texas A&M for Mills, it was in the familiarity of the isolation and loneliness that he experienced in his only year at the college- things in this regard did not seem to be all that different from his high school years spent with his extended family. As would be the pattern for the rest of his life, much of this isolation and loneliness would be at the fruition of his own doings. Just as he had rebelled against his parent's overt plans for his life, this rebellious streak followed him into his freshman year.

Amidst the extreme discipline, tradition and hazing he encountered as a cadet at Texas A&M, Mills at over six feet tall and nearly 200 pounds stood out in more ways than one- not something you want to do as a freshman cadet at a military college. Confronted with a stifling and strict structure, and in open revolt to the school, its administrators and the upper-class cadets whose job it was to train and discipline Mills, Mills penned two anonymous letters to the college newspaper *The Battalion*. The first, published on April 3, 1935 was an opening shot at all the military school stood for:

To *The Battalion*, published in the issue dated April 3, 1935

STUDENT FORUM

Digressions on College Life

There are some vital questions which are always a point of issue in every place where men live together. Discontent and unrest can be found wherever society is found. No matter how good, how fair, and how just a group of people may be as a whole, there will always be some individuals in it who feel themselves slighted and maltreated by the rest. Usually these people have only themselves and their incapacity for adjustment to blame; but once in a while we come across a society which has sprung up on a false basis and is sustained on false principles of human conduct justified only by ignorance and narrow thinking. It is just this kind of society that exists at A and M College and will continue to exist as long as there are not enough of its members who dare to change it.

Observation and experience have led me to believe that the influence of living social conditions on the campus upon the students is more harmful than beneficial. I do not aim to take the pessimistic point of view and say that these conditions cannot be changed and so we may as well get used to them. Nor am I going to follow the suggestion to get out since the climate here does not suit me. I propose rather to write down my thoughts on what goes on around me in the hope that they may in some way help to bring about the change which is so necessary for the welfare of the student body.

What effect has the overbearing attitude of the upperclassman on the mind of the freshman? Does it make the freshman more of a man? Most assuredly not, for there can be no friendship born out of fear, hatred or contempt; and no one is a better man who submits passively to the slavery of his mind and body by one who is less of a man than he. Since when has it been true that oppression and the suppression of free thinking have become acceptable to the American youth? Can it be that he accepts these because he has grown indifferent to the problems facing him and takes the easiest way out? It would be hard to believe that this should be the case, in fact. I am sure it is not. The freshman submits to the will of the upperclassman only because he has been led to conceive a distorted idea of sportsmanship and true manhood. He is afraid to defy them and stand alone not so much because of what they might do to him but because of what they might think of him. And so we have the freshman living a life of mental unrest and stress, unwilling to do that which he believes is wrong, and yet forced to do it by his fear of public opinion.

College students are supposed to become leaders of thought and action in later life. It is expected they will profit from a college education by developing an open and alert mind to be able to cope boldly with everyday problems in economics and politics. They cannot do this unless they learn to think independently for themselves and to stand fast for their convictions. Is the student at A and M encouraged to do this? Is he

permitted to do it? The answer is sadly in the negative. Indeed, it is established law among upperclassmen that freshmen should not be allowed to think. As soon as one shows signs of rebellion against the feudal autocracy at college, he is forced back into the folds of automats from which he tried to escape. His spirit is crushed, his heart embittered, and his mind molded in a standard pattern. Of course not all freshmen are affected in the same way. Some, the privileged few, may go through it all and come out unchanged. Others, weaker than the former, come out as human robots with shattered spirit, no will power, no self-confidence and no self-respect. Still there are others who become cynics losing faith in man and society. Whoever is in either of these three groups could have been in the class of the energetic, the independent, and the optimistic, if conditions affecting his early life in college had been otherwise.

On the student alone rests the responsibility of making A and M free from sham, hypocrisy and feudalistic customs which can bring harm only upon themselves.

By a Freshman. (Mills 1935a)

This letter is striking in not only its boldness, but in the foreshadowing we see of Mills' later intellectual thought. As we will discuss in later sections, at the age of 18, we can already see intimations of Mills' biting style and criticism, of which he would come to be known for. Likewise, and just as importantly, the themes Mills dealt with in this

letter are themes which for the remainder of his intellectual life, he would work to develop more thoroughly.

And as if this first letter was not enough to stir-up a hornets nest of controversy around campus, Mills followed this letter with a second one on May 8th of that same year. Writing in response to an upper-classmen's published letter accusing Mills of having "no-guts," Mills responds with the following reply:

To *The Battalion*, published in the issue dated May 8, 1935

STUDENT FORUM

 Another Viewpoint

Recently there appeared in these columns the most delicate and subtle of satires. I have no doubt that it was written in an inspired moment of a great thinker's life. So beautifully subtle was it and so diligently at study (and busy disciplining the men who have been here only seven months or so) are the great majority of our student body that the thought has occurred to me that perhaps this bit of everlasting though subtle truth was read in much too hasty a manner.

And so assuming that some of the more rapid readers took this thing literally in case they did not see the obvious weakness (I am sure it was intended to be obvious) of its arguments, I am going to be a bit more blunt in expressing my opinion of the juvenile techniques in which the

majority of our students indulge. (And if you don't care to hear my opinion this Bat has many other interesting things which you may read. So go read them and don't ask me why I came here, or if I don't like A and M, why don't I go to another school. Such questions are obviously insane, for the highest form of patriotism is criticism. I am interested in the potentialities of this institution and I intend to do my small share toward their development.)

In none of these controversies of principle do the writers seem to pierce the root of our problem. The effect of our system is not so detrimental during our first year as it is during the other three. Outside of taking his time from study or creative leisure, the character of the freshman is not to any extent negatively changed (assuming, of course, that he is not influenced by "the men who have guts"—as last week's writer so artistically labeled our rougher element). And then he trades one for three. For three years he shouts and feet hit dormitory floors; for three years his room is cleaned up and his laundry taken and got by other men. For three years he can, if he wishes, use his class distinction to satisfy his individual prejudices; can force his ego and will upon other men. For three years we run his errands, carry his cigarettes.

And the excuse for all this is that it develops leadership.

If this is leadership then my sociology text is very wrong—because this sort of control is based on nothing save force. Any social control which rests on force is wrong. When paddles and muscles rule, ignorance also reigns.

No one with common "horse sense" can stand on the two feet of the genus Homo and distinctly say that three years of being waited on does not affect an individual ... true one finds it hard to think of any good effect.

And so if it's good enough for ole pappie, it's good enough for us! What wonderful irony ... nothing could be more obviously leaky. Then why, my old traditionalist, do you not ride in buggies? Your granddad did. The more intelligent students here are not content with our present system. And tomorrow A and M shall also rise slowly from its foolish buggy and enter a streamlined roadster.

Just because a thing has been done by a number of people over a number of years does not make that thing necessarily good. The hand of the past has its functions; it stabilizes; it held conquered territory. But with it alone there can be no progress, no advancement toward sane and more rational techniques. We must criticize and change.

Lots of verbiage has been slung about men with "guts." Before we use a term, let's put Plato on it. Just who are the men with guts? They are the

men who have the ability and the brains to see this institution's faults, who are brittle enough not to adapt themselves to its erroneous order— and plastic enough to change if they are already adapted; the men who have the imagination and the intelligence to formulate their own codes; the men who have the courage and the stamina to live their own lives in spite of social pressure and isolation. These my friends, are the men with "guts."

By a Freshman. (Mills 1935b)

If the situation at the all-military college could get no worse for Mills, amidst everything else, Mills was involved with a physical confrontation with an upper-class cadet. The details of this altercation have since been lost. Some accounts indicate that Mills intentionally injured another cadet during a wrestling match (Horowitz 1983; Scimecca 1977). Through my research at Texas A&M University, however, I was unable to find any evidence that Mills wrestled and there is some question as to whether or not such a team existed. While there were intramural wrestling matches in the spring, the yearbook does not list a school wrestling team. Regardless, it does appear that some form of altercation occurred with another student in which Mills was blamed as the aggressor. His punishment was that no one was to speak to him- he was "silenced" (Horowitz 1983). The fallout from this event, coupled with his penned revolt led to Mills' transfer to The University of Texas for his second year of his undergraduate work.

Despite what his biographer, Horowitz described as a "fiasco" (1983:14) in regards to Mills' freshman year at Texas A&M College, the year would prove to be instrumental to the development of a soon to blossom intellectual life. It was at Texas A&M that Mills was introduced to the writings and thought of G.H. Mead and Thomas Cooley, and it was at Texas A&M, in reaction to his first extended exposure to sociology, that Mills writes he first began to "seriously analyze himself" (Mills and Mills 2000:58).

While it is perhaps impossible to know for certain, it is likely that Mills was first introduced to Thorstein Veblen's writings at Texas A&M, taking both a currently unknown course requiring a sociology text, as well as an agriculture economics course (Mills and Mills 2000)[4]. In Mills' publicly released letters, he makes at least two references to a sociology professor whom he struck-up relations with. During the 1930s, at Texas A&M, sociology was taught out of the Agriculture Economics Department, leading me to speculate that Mills could have been exposed to the economist Veblen in either Mills' sociology or economics courses. Regardless, as we shall see in the proceeding sections, Mead, Cooley and Veblen would re-appear in Mills' later professional and academic life as important influences; albeit less so in Cooley's case.

This all becomes important because Mills' parents, in an attempt to prepare Mills for the white collar-world America was becoming, attempted to prepare him for this new era with their plans to send him to a military school to receive training as an

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[4]What is known for certain, is that at The University of Texas Mills studied under Clarence Ayers, a then leading Veblen scholar (Tilman 2004). While it is *possible* that Mills was first exposed to Veblen while at Texas A&M, any penetrating or influential exposure is almost certain to have occurred at The University of Texas.

engineer or architect. Mills would have nothing to do with it. In open revolt, Mills, unbeknownst to his parent's had different plans for his own life. Likewise, and again in opposition to the authority and control acting against him, Mills, as he would do in his later life and his later writings, attacked (both metaphorically and literally) the people, culture and structures at Texas A&M from where he had diagnosed as the location of the power and control pressing in on him. Mills, as he would do with many of his relationships to people and institutions throughout his life, left on bad terms.

3.4 Mills and His Family Relations

It is difficult to say for certain how much of the loneliness and perceived isolation that Mills experienced in his early years could be attributed to normal adolescent angst, or to more troubling and persisting psychological trauma early in his life. I tend to lean more to the latter.

If what Mills experienced up until his freshman year of college was in fact "normal" adolescence angst, it is an angst that he never seemed to overcome. Experiencing his grandfather's murder, the eventual "loss" of his dad to the white-collar workforce, the numerous moves he and his family experienced while Mills was still in his formative years, his enrollment at Texas Agricultural and Mechanical College to "make a man of him," and most importantly, Mills' later treatment of these experiences in his personal letters and autobiographical writings as an adult, would indicate that Mills, even in middle-age, was attempting to process a set of events that certainly had to seem for a young boy experiencing them, like a chaotic, unpredictable, and in Mills' word, "isolating" set of circumstances.

Further, despite the evident fact of living in an extended family, as an adult Mills denies this- a seeming denial not of the fact of his living arrangement but a denial of a family in the emotional sense of the word. It is quite a striking and bold statement when understood in the context of the facts of his upbringing. And yet, Mills' actions seem to indicate that he truly felt that he did not belong to a family. As an adult, Mills returned to Texas only twice, and both times not for family visits- but for lecture engagements (Horowitz 1983).

In discussing this persistent sense of isolation, we have previously addressed the unpublished letters between Mills' mother and Texas A&M, as well as the previously unpublished Mills writings in his file at Texas A&M; no other Mills letters prior to the mid 1930s have been made public. With this stated, we still can gain some insight into Mills' early years by examining publicly available letters written only several years after Mills leaves Texas A&M College.

The extent of his isolation and separation from his family is strikingly revealed in Mills' correspondences with his mother and father in the late 1930s and into the 1940s- sometimes addressing them in letters as "C.G. and Fannye," rather than the expected and emotionally endearing "Mother and Father" or "Mom and Dad." While the entire set of Mills' correspondence to colleagues as well as family has yet to be released, Mills' daughters along with Dan Wakefield did release a limited number of these letters and

autobiographical writings in 2000.[5] This edited volume offers valuable and new insight into Mills' relationship with his parents.

A striking passage is found in a November 1939 letter. The letter, a response to his parent's inquiries into whether or not Mills needed anything that they could provide, poignantly reveals Mills' sense of an almost heroic isolation. More to the point, however, is the letter's revealing undercurrent of a man who feels cut-off emotionally from a family that he later in his life openly denied as even being family. In this letter to his mother and father, he interestingly refers to his father in the third person. Opening with "Dear C.G. and Fannye," the letter reads in part:

Dear C.G. and Fannye…

…My father asks, do we need anything. Does a man ever really need anything but what is in him? *The things I need no one else can give me*: such things as a warm sun and lazy afternoons and leisure to think things through. There is a certain type of man who spends his life finding and refinding what is within him, and I suppose I am of that type. *No: there is nothing that I need that can be given to me by others. In the end a man must go to bat alone*. (Mills and Mills 2000:40) *emphasis added*

Of Mills' published writings to his parents, this is perhaps the most introspective, authentic and emotionally revealing.

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[5] An undetermined number of unpublished personal letters are housed at The University of Texas and Columbia University- but access to these papers are controlled by Mills' last wife, Yaroslava Mills. I was able to gain limited access to some of the papers housed at The University of Texas, but was unable to receive permission to access the personal letters.

Mills, however, follows this letter with another in December of 1939. The December letter becomes interesting on several levels. First, in contradiction to the above quoted letter that Mills penned only one month before, in his December correspondence to his parents, he contradicts his November letter by in fact thanking his parents for what they have given him in his life. Second, the December letter again appears on the surface to be introspective and emotionally charged (at least in relative terms to most of the other letters he writes to his parents). This letter, however, ultimately proves deceptive. Again, refusing to address his parent's with the emotionally endearing "Mother and Father", Mills writes:

> Dear C.G. & Fannye,
>
> The lean years of my marriage have been enriched by several felicitous features; but no one of them has been as heartening to me nor as concretely helpful as your constant attention and aid. We [referring to he and his first wife Freya] still stand between childhood and independence. There are still lean months ahead. But I can look forward now and catch glimpses of a personal security. I want you both to know that my confidence and work in the past, and now, have drawn no little of their strength from the exemplary pattern that your lives have traced through long, devoted years.
>
> From my mother I have gotten a sense of color and air. She showed me the tang and feel of a room properly appointed, and the drama

about flowers. She gave me feel. She also tried to teach me manners, but I fear I have forgotten many of them.

From my father I absorbed the gospel and character of work, determination with both eyes always ahead. That is part of the America he knows, and it is part of him too…Looking back, I see he always did a good job, that he never quit until it was finished. So from both of you I have gotten a living craftsmanship.

The physical distances that have separated us since the fall have with startling clarity shown me how much I have gained from being your child. And I now want to thank you for that.

C. Wright   (Mills and Mills 2000:40-41)

Despite this December of 1939 proclamation of marital and personal security to his parents, Mills' marriage was already in deep trouble. Six months later Mills and his wife would separate (Mills and Mills 2000). It appears that Mills had much trouble in dealing with his wife's assertiveness (Phillips 2004).   In August of that same year they divorced.

In this context, Mills' penned words to his parents (interestingly, again addressing them partly in the third person) ring hollow and untrue. The supposed "strength from the exemplary pattern that" their lives for Mills, "traced through long, devoted years" ultimately proves a farce. While writing these lines, Mills must have known that his marriage was crumbling around him. With this opening deception, one wonders as to the authenticity of the remaining passages.

In any regards, Mills' tone in the letters following this one greatly changed. Perhaps feeling the stress of his divorce in August of 1940[6] Mills writes a response to his mother's inquiries into his well-being and her seeming concern for her military-aged son and the quickening events drawing the United States closer and closer into World War II. In this 1940 letter responding to his mother's worries, Mills makes a foretelling and startling "slip"- opening the letter with "Dear Fannie" as opposed to his usual "Dear Fannye." *He misspelled his own mothers (nik)name*! In this particular letter, Mills reveals as much through what he does not write as through what he does.

Dear Fannie:

I have just now received and read with interest your nice long letter, for which thanks. I must get on with a book review I am doing tonight but will attempt to answer your questions and get this letter right back to you.

1st I do not need pajamas or cover or anything at all…I do not work at the Bureau anymore because I finished the job for which I was employed. Besides, governmental service does not exclude one from the conscription…I shall send you 2 articles that are being published this fall.

…To get back to the war…I see nothing that can be done that I am not doing. I am taking note of your suggestions, and please know that I am and will continue to use them. I am no longer the half wild,

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[6] Mills eventually convinced his first wife to remarry him in March of 1941- an ill-fated move that eventually also ended in their second divorce.

argumentative fool. In any event, if I am called, it will be as an officer because of my A&M work and because of my education.

David did not stay too long. We are still the best of friends. I do not know why he has not contacted you. But I suppose he has his own troubles. He does not like you both very much I know...

[unsigned copy]. (Mills and Mills 2000:42-43)

We see in the above letter Mills begins by telling his mother that he is busy but will "attempt" to answer her questions[7]. He follows with brief, bullet-like sentences informing her of a job change and pending academic articles accepted for publication. By the end of the letter, however, there is a subtle change in tone. The first ¾'s of the letter reveals nothing of the emotional, introspective or grateful son that marked his letters in the prior year. And in fact, by the closing of the letter, Mills reveals a side of himself that appears as anything but grateful- taking what can be arguably read as emotional shots at his mother.

Writing in response to his mother's apparent concern that he may be drafted, Mills writes, "To get back to the war…I see nothing that can be done that I am not doing…In any event, if I am called, it will be as an officer because of my A&M work and because of my education" (Mills and Mills 2000:42). With no attempt at consoling

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[7] Many of Mills' published letters to his parents indicate a strong reluctance to write to them. Many start off by apologies for the length of time between letters (sometimes several months with no contact) and in many more, Mills writes as if responding to his parent's inquiries is very burdensome for him- he often writes that he is too busy for a long reply and in several other places, tells them he is just too tired for a long or detailed response..

his apparently concerned mother, Mills instead seems to throw her worries back at her- making an aside regarding his short stay at the military college that his parents likely chose for him, and from which he ultimately withdrew. Further, in examining Mills' explication on the white-collar individual as being one with no autonomy, controlled by the handful of "captains of industry" in the elite spheres, an officer's position within the military's ranks is in a sense, the white-collar equivalent in the military- a social class that Mills clearly despised.

It appears here that his animosity is bubbling to the surface. Mills follows this passage however, with what appears to be a more outright disregard if not outward attack against his mother's feelings. Responding to apparent questions from his mother about a visit Mills had from his Texas friend David Rose, Mills writes, "David did not stay too long. We are still the best of friends. I do not know why he has not contacted you…He does not like you both very much I know" (Mills and Mills 2000:42). In the context of Mills' later writings on the strained and cold relationship he shared with his family, it sounds as if this final phrase, "He does not like both of you very much…," odd in its utter lack of context and complete disregard for his mother's feelings, is less a comment on David Rose's feelings toward Mills' parents, than a reflection of Mills' own sentiments. Mills sends the letter to his mother *unsigned*.

In context of Freudian insights (Freud [1920]1943; 1965) into slips of the pen, much can be read into Mills' use of proper names in place of mother and father[8], the

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[8] Of the published letters to his parents, the use of "C.G." and "Fannye" in place of father and mother, primarily occurs between 1939 and 1940. After this time period, Mills predominantly does address his letters to "Dear Mother and Father."

misspelling of his mother's name in the Fall of 1940 letter, and in the same letter, his failure to attach his name, much less signature, to the end of the page. First, both words Fannye and Fannie, regardless of the spelling, strongly suggest the synonymous word "butt" or "ass," such as giving someone "a slap on the fanny." In the Freudian sense of the word, Mills may very well have been on some level associating both his mother's name and its synonymous association with "ass," in his addressing her as such. Second, and in line with this interpretation, the word as associated with "but" or "ass" is also infantile in its usage, as in a small child being threatened with a "slap on the fanny."

Regardless of this link, however, the mere fact that Mills chose to address his parents by proper and/or nicknames as opposed to mother and father, is a tale-tell sign of Mills' relationship with them at this time. In Freudian terms (Freud 1965a), he is very much refusing to play the role of the son- and even more sinisterly, it gives indication that Mills is in fact trying to be the parent of his own parents- a naïve grab at omnipotence in a relationship in which he possibly feels humiliated and powerless- perhaps harkening back to his earlier years of his absent dad, the decision that he should attend a military school and pursue a career not of Mills' choosing.

There is further support for this in the manner in which Mills closes his letters. In those instances where Mills addresses his parents by their common names, he closes his letters with simply "Mills" or "C. Wright"- a stubborn refusal in disallowing the use of his own common or first name in communications to his parents, all the while insisting on using formal and first names in addressing *them*. Not only does this indicate a shocking level of formality and distance in his refusal to write under his first and

common name, but also a bold attempt at a power grab by the use of his parent's first names instead of mother and father; once again speaking to the control and power issues that seem to plague Mills throughout his life and work.

Interestingly, and in line with this trend are those letters originating from 1942 onward where Mills predominantly addresses letters to his parents with "Dear Mother and Father." In the instances where he opens with this phrase, Mills *also* closes by signing "Your son, Charles M. Jr." thus indicating consistency in the salutation and closing as far as he and his parent's roles are concerned.

There are variations on how he closes letters during this time period, but for the most part, when addressing letters to "Dear Mother and Father" Mills almost always indicates his status as child or son; either by directly stating it, or at the least, applying the suffix Jr., or utilizing the child-like name Charlie as opposed to Charles. Quite interestingly, an exception to this are the few times he writes only to his mother and addresses it "Dear Mother." In these cases (only two in his published letters), Mills reverts back to simply "Mills"- once again deleting any indication in the closing that he is the child and once again hinting at a strained relationship, especially with his mom.

Perhaps the best example of Mills' relationship toward his parents being played out in the letters to them, is a January 1946 letter that begins with a Freudian slip- a slip of the pen classified by Freud simply as "forgetting" (Freud 1965a). Writing to his mother in response to an earlier letter he had received from her, Mills forgets to include a salutation and instead, begins full-paragraph. Mills begins the letter in typical fashion when penning communication with his parents- he is too busy to really bother with it,

"Just got your letter and before I start the mad rush will drop you a quick answer" (Mills and Mills 2000:95). Shortly after this line, Mills writes seemingly in response to a question from his mother, "Yes, I remember how we used to roam around in architecture and I still spend a good deal of time thinking about interior decorating and odd things" (Mills and Mills 2000:96). He closes the brief letter to his mother with no words of love or even "your son," but by simply writing, "Got to go to work now. Good bye. *Mills*" (Mills and Mills 2000:95).

This letter offers a good example of the manner in which Mills' slips shed light into his psyche. Note first that Mills "forgets" to begin the letter with a salutation- a forgetting of a name and action that Freudian insights would indicate offers a clue into how Mills regarded the addressee- his mother in this case (Freud 1965a). Secondly, we see in the closing Mills reverting back to the dropping of his first name, the suffix Jr., or any indication that he is the son and she the mother.

Finally, the middle part of the letter gives some indication as to the seeming unconscious hostility indicated by these just mentioned slips. In the letter Mills is responding too, it appears that his mother is still prodding him with questions regarding that sore, but pivotal moment in his early life. Mills is trained through high school and sent to an all-military college by his parents for what appears to be their desire that he become an architect- a training and job that is to rid the boy of his "overly-feminine" leanings (to "make a man of him" is what Mills says was his father's hope of Texas A&M College). Mills' mother even writes to A&M College that this is what her son is to become. Mills, in open defiance, writes that he has other plans. He breaks from his

parents' plans, and in a pivotal moment, chooses another career. Well over a decade later and in the above letter, Mills' mother dredges-up this memory once again with a probing question apparently asking what his relationship to architecture currently is (interestingly she does this through the more feminine usage of "interior design" rather than structural architecture). Mills, in defiance, just as he defied her 13 years earlier, asserts his dominance over his mother, and responds by one, forgetting to address her in the opening, and two, reverting back to his stubborn refusal to allow the use of son, Jr. or even his first name in the closing manner in which he addresses her.

Mills quite simply did not like to be controlled nor did he like being in a position of powerlessness; he protected his autonomy at all costs. As already discussed, his only enduring relationship was with that of his grandfather, the autonomous ranching cowboy, murdered while Mills was a young boy. Juxtapose Mills' idolization of the man and his life against Mills' own father- a white-collar insurance salesman, often gone from the home for long periods, unable and unwilling to spend time with his son and his family. Interestingly, while Mills clearly had a cold relationship with his habitually absent father, it is toward his mother that Mills seems to take out much of his aggression and animosity. As already discussed, Mills openly admits he experienced a "break" with her during high school, describes the time he spent with her as some of the "loneliest" years of his life, and then denies that the matriarch as even family. For all practical purposes abandoned by his father, Mills on some level, seems to be blaming the mother for the father's absence- the mother murdered by an Oedipus complex run amok.

Perhaps the best evidence concerning Mills' relationship with his parents however, comes not from Mills' own writings to or about his parents, but from Mills' biographical essay on Weber in the introduction to *From Max Weber* (Weber 1946). Horowitz, not one to delve deeply into the psychological side of Mills, argues in *C. Wright Mills: An American Utopian* (1983), that Mills was likely drawn to Weber's work first and foremost because of his intense identification with Weber's life, especially Weber's strained relationship to his parents. We thus can read the following passage written by Mills about Max Weber, as being a passage about Mills himself.

> With reference to his personal relations, we may recall that Weber was a quiet, observant, and a prematurely intelligent boy, who must have been worried under the strain of the increasingly bad relation between his father and mother. His strong sense of chivalry was, in part, a response to the *patriarchal and domineering attitude of his father*, who understood his wife's love as a willingness to serve and to allow herself to be exploited and controlled by him…One may imply an inordinately strong Oedipus situation.
>
> Throughout his life, Weber maintained a full correspondence with his mother, who once referred to him as 'an older daughter.' She eagerly sought counsel with him, her first-born, rather than with her husband…One should also pay heed to what was, to be sure, a passing phase of young Weber's aspiration: *his desire to become a real he-man at the University*. After only three semesters, he succeeded in changing

externally from a slender mother's boy to a massive, beer-drinking, duel-marked, cigar puffing student…whom his mother greeted with a slap in the face. Clearly, this was the father's son. *The two models of identification and their associated values, rooted in the mother and father*, never disappeared from Max Weber's inner life. (Weber 1946:28-29) *emphasis added*

It appears here, that Mills' early life, in a somewhat accurate if not overly simplified metaphor, was haunted by the struggle between this dualistic and seemingly Jungian, as well as Freudian construction that he also identifies with or perhaps even projects onto his biographical exploration of Weber: the feminine need to heal and repair coupled with a driving need to achieve the masculine and sometimes corrosive ideal of the machismo-filled cowboy. It appears that for Mills, and just as he identified the case to be for Weber, much pain and suffering resulted from the attempt at assimilation of these seemingly opposite parts of his self. For all the suffering this caused, however, it is likely from this very place of tension that the rudimentary workings of Mills' theories on agency within the formulaic post-modern world found their berth. If one were to need any more evidence on the link between the personal life of Mills' early years and his later theoretical/political intellectualism, Mills gives it to us in the closing passage of his Weberian biographical essay, "Surely Weber's life illuminates the manner in which a man's relation to political authority may be modeled upon his relation to family disciplines" (Weber 1946: 31).

In fact, if we turn to Alice Miller, and specifically her work in *The Untouched Key* (1991), we find her thesis falls much in line with Mills' own position. Miller argues that the works of great intellectuals (as well as artists) tell the unconscious and symbolic story of childhood traumas. Thus, Miller argued as Mills did in his Weber biography, that the major themes and issues found in the works of such great intellectuals as Friedrich Nietzsche "reflect the unlived feelings, needs and tragedy of his childhood…" (Miller 1991:76).

Miller's analysis of Nietzsche's early life and work is important here because it bears a striking resemblance to Mills' own life in the traumas they experienced and the relations both he and Nietzsche had with their parents. Miller tells us of a young philosopher who lived in a house full of women (mother, grandmother, sister and two aunts) and who was trained from a very young age to be a "strong' man" (p. 76). Further, Nietzsche's only enduring relationship was with his father who lost his mind and then died while Nietzsche was not yet five years old- the result of a likely brain tumor. Miller locates this close relationship as the nexus for Nietzsche's strong emotions that break through his prose in later life. Miller, however, goes on to place great importance on the fact that the young philosopher was not told the truth regarding the cause of his father's death due to the stigma placed on brain disease during the time period (Miller 1991).

After the father's death, Nietzsche was unable to find a close connection with the women in the household to whom he was left. Miller tells us of this arrangement, "The originality of his imagination and the honesty of his questions were too much for their

sense of morality, and so they attempted to silence the child's curiosity…by strict supervision and a stern upbringing," (p. 81). Brought up amidst the morality of Protestant teachings, something always present in the house, Miller argues that Nietzsche could not help but feel perplexed by a morality teaching pity, justice for the weak, neighborly love and compassion, and yet no one took pity on him, came to his rescue when he was unjustly and harshly punished by his perceived omnipotent female caretakers. and none showed him compassion for the tragic events he faced during his early years (Miller 1991).

As an adult, Nietzsche's life only became worse. As is well known, by his early forties, he spiraled out of control, eventually ending-up in an insane asylum and ultimately passing away without ever breaking free of his mental illness. But even before the illness, suffering was as present in his life as it was in his writings. Miller tells us that Nietzsche found no enduring female relationships, calling him a "woman hater." Further, in patterned behavior, he struck up non-sexual relationships (both real and imagined) with men only to turn against them. We thus have his initial love for Arthur Schopenhauer's work, only to attack it later in his life; and his real friendship with Richard Wagner whom, after Nietzsche's idolization wore off, was devoured by Nietzsche in personal and devastating critiques (Miller 1991).

It is in this brief biographical sketch that Miller tells us we can learn much about Nietzsche's intellectual thought. For all of his criticisms, ideas, and yes…even his rage at the world, at society, at women and at his fellow men, including Schopenhauer and Wagner, this was all ultimately psychic energies directed at ersatz objects that gained

social legitimacy and confirmation for his true rage- that rage unconsciously directed at his all-female family, the Protestant morality preached around him and yet never practiced, and his father's abandonment of him (Miller 1991). True, the abandonment was due to the father's death, but for a young child of nearly five, a primary object who leaves and never returns has the same devastating repercussions despite the cause of the abandonment; the child only knows that the object has left, the reason for which the child could not care. In fact, the male child likely feels responsible for the father's abandonment/demise since the child secretly sought to rid himself of the father's rival desires for the mother in the first place (Freud [1920]1943; 1965a; 1965b). Miller (1991) states it this way:

> [As an adult] he could direct his criticism against abstract concepts such as culture, Christianity, philistinism, and middle-class values without having to worry that someone might die as a result (all well-brought up children are afraid that their angry words might kill those they love). Compared with this danger, criticism of society in the abstract is harmless for an adult, even if society's representations are outraged by it. An adult is not facing them like a helpless child, guilty child; an adult can use intellectual arguments to defend himself and even to make attacks- methods not usually available to a child and not available to Nietzsche as a child.
>
> And yet Nietzsche's accurate observations concerning Western culture…as well has the vehement indignation they aroused in him do not

date from the period of his philosophical analysis but from his first years of his life. It was then that he perceived the system and suffered under it; simultaneously as slave and devotee; it was then that he was chained to a morality he despised and was tormented by the people whose love he needed. Because of his brilliant intellect, the perceptions he stored up at an early age have helped many people see things they have never seen before. The experience of one individual, despite their subjectivity, can have universal validity because the family and the child-rearing methods minutely observed at an early age represent society as a whole. (P. 85)

As previously quoted above, Mills, in complete agreement with Miller in terms of early familial relationship and later world views, stated it this way, "Surely [a man's] life illuminates the manner in which a man's relation to political authority may be modeled upon his relation to family disciplines," (Weber 1946: 31).

What is of interest at this point in our discussion, however, is the striking similarities between Nietzsche's early biography and Mills'. Like Nietzsche, Mills experienced the death of his only enduring parental figure around the age of five, and likewise, was left to the company of women who he despised. Further, we can imagine that Mills like Nietzsche, was not initially told the truth that the grandfather was murdered by the husband of the woman with whom he was sleeping with (Mills and Mills 2000). And while the father was still alive, gone from the house for weeks at a time, Mills on some level must have grappled with abandonment issues here as well.

In line with the hypocritical morality taught to Nietzsche, Mills too was brought up amidst religious teachings. As a child, Mills was an alter boy for the Catholic Church- something his mother likely pushed him into, for it appears that his father was likely a non-believer (Mills and Mills 2000). In writing on his childhood relations with religion Mills writes as an adult, "I never revolted from it; I never had to. For some reason, it never took. It was all a bit too tangible and bloody" (Mills and Mills 2000: 313).

In addition to the religious teachings and associated morality within Mills' early environment, within the context of 1920s and 1930s America, the contradictions in the secular religion to which he was exposed to must have been just as pronounced: learning of equal opportunity all the while living within a segregated state; learning of human and natural rights amidst a clan-based region; hearing of things such as equality being preached in the face of the massive inequality brought on by the Great Depression, and finally learning of the mythical and moral roadmap known as the American Dream, which for a young boy who was abandoned by his father's pursuit of just such a dream, had to have seemed more like a nightmare. These contradictions plagued Mills throughout his adult life. In 1960, Mills was still trying to make sense of them:

> I wasn't really aware of any differences between Jews and Gentiles and
> Mexican and Irishmen and Negroes until I was well into my teens. Then
> it came as a shock to me…I was driving a truck that summer- I was under
> twenty- hauling collapsible houses in the East Texas oil fields. I came to
> the lumberyard where I was to be loaded; two Negroes started to load my

truck and I jumped out to help them. A white man came up and hit one of them on the head with a two-by-four. "Don't you be getting that white boy to work alongside you, you black bastard," he said. The other Negro ran; the one hit lay on the ground, blood on his scalp; I was up on the tail of the truck when it happened; I did not think, I just jumped, booted feet first, into the silly man's face…As it was, he stayed down, and I got out of there with the hit Negro groaning on the passenger seat, holding his head in both hands. I have never forgotten the blood on that man's head… (Mills and Mills 2000: 313)

Faced with such striking contradictions in morality surrounding his mother's religious world and the secular morality in his father's American Dream, the result for Mills was similar to that of Nietzsche. Mills grew-up having habitual problems in his relationships with women, marrying three different women and divorcing three times which is striking in the context of mid-century America. Horowitz (1983) tells us of Mills and his first wife Freya, that their troubles began when she, like the women in Mills' younger life, tried to exert control over him. In fact, in one of Mills' only specific pieces on women in his writing, he referred to them in the title of an essay as such: "Women: The Darling Little Slaves" (Mills 1963: 339).

Likewise, in patterned behaviors of idolization and then vehement devaluation of a father head, Mills habitually broke nearly all relational ties with the male colleagues with whom he associated. From the sociological god of his time, Parsons, to his once close friend, Hans Gerth, his department head at Wisconsin, John Trillin, his friendship

with David Riesman and their disagreement over America's power structure (we must not forget the foretelling Freudian act of shooting his pistol while a guest inside Riesman's home) and his dissertation committee member, Howard Becker to whom he reportedly blurted out "Fuck you, Howie!" during his doctoral defense (Sandstrom 2007), Mills seemed to direct his aggression toward everyone else but the true source of his injuries- his mother and father.

In fact, even for those who Mills admired and emulated, his "praise" revealed a damaging psychosis. Writing a laudatory piece on Veblen's life and work, a man and intellectual who greatly influenced Mills' own thinking, Mills both praised and viscously attacked him within the same passage, "…Veblen's virtue is not alienation; it is failure. Modern intellectuals have made a success of 'alienation,' but Veblen was a natural-born loser" (Veblen [1899]1953:viii). This comment is written amidst a laudatory introduction to Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* ([1899]1953)- a work that Mills both admired and emulated in content and style.

Interestingly, in briefly examining Veblen's life we once again find similarities with Mills', perhaps once again accounting for the similarities in their concerns, style and troubled relationships. If we turn to Riesman's ([1953]1960) psychoanalytic explication, we see that Veblen like Mills entered academia after upbringing in rural America- far removed from the East coast power centers of the late 1800s. Both men saw the loss of their family's land, a farm in Veblen's case and the family ranch in Mills'. Both lived with father's to whom they had no strong attachment and to whom both commented taught them more than anyone else- "hard work" in both Mills' and

Veblen's words. Both were ultimately raised by their mother's direct care while the father's were off pursuing work. Finally, both Mills and Veblen were ultimately shipped off to school by their father's without any say-so in the decision.

Juxtapose his relationship to the father against his relationship with the mother, and we find that Veblen as well as Mills, had more interactions and contacts with their female family members. And while the parents held high expectations for both boys, it was verbalized by their mothers to who's care the boys had been entrusted. As we have already discussed in terms of Mills, the result was in part a Jungian split which emerges in terms of the masculine and feminine aspects that appear in their lives. Riesman ([1953]1960), however, diagnosis a congruent phenomenon within Veblen's work, telling us perhaps more eloquently than I previously stated it in terms of Mills of an emerging Jungian theme of the feminine and masculine:

> Much of Veblen's work may be read as an internalized colloquy between
>
> his parents: between the one who calls for a hard, matter-of-fact,
>
> "Darwinian," appraisal of all phenomena and the one who espouses the
>
> woman qualities of peaceableness, uncompetiveness, regard for the
>
> weak…Like many bright boys, he seems to have been impressed by the
>
> male who had the power and authority in his home to give commands,
>
> while at the same time developing unexpressed resentments against
>
> power and command of any sort. (Riesman [1953]1960: 6-7)

While we will go into more detail on the intellectual congruencies between Veblen and Mills in the next section, it is enough to say here, that both boys (and

Nietzsche as well) lived with hard-working, working-class parents who had high expectations for them which worked as a constraint against the playful idleness which resides in the young. As Riesman ([1953]1960) tells us, these sorts of parents, those that display little affection, are intense and have high ideals for their children, tend to produce children who as adults, suffer from "emotional claustrophobia" which is their response to perceived restraints. The result is a lexicon of writing from all three men (Nietzsche, Veblen and Mills) that attack any notions of constraint which they see in society; and in their personal lives, all three men follow patterns of sabotage in regards to their love interests and professional relationships. All leave behind them a scattered sea of broken and destroyed personal and professional connections. Freudian psychology would diagnose such habitual patterns of emulation and then destruction in terms of compulsions to repeat (Freud [1920]1943; 1965b).

Returning once again to our comparison between Nietzsche and Mills, though, as was the case with the opposite lives of his grandfather and parents, Mills, in parallel once again with Nietzsche, directed his aggressive Thanatos in the safest way possible-toward attacking and criticizing Texas A&M College, sociology, capitalism, the power elite, the white-collar culture and American culture at large. Mills, as his early childhood traumas would dictate, seemed to diagnose a dualistic existence in the world around him. The controlled and controlling father was the "Cheerful Robot" caught up amidst a stifling white-collar world (a technocrat controlled at the behest of a power elite), who stood in opposition to the autonomy and freedom of the murdered grandfather's life. Likewise, Mills' mother, in a sense facilitated Mills' abandonment by

his grandfather *and* father, through (1) her unwavering support of the father's career decisions- never leaving him despite he abandoning both her and Mills for weeks at a time, and (2) her insistence that Mills chase not after the life and man that he really wanted to find reconnection with- his grandfather- but instead the mother insisted he chase after the still alive father who had left him- pushing Mills toward military schools for the discipline and masculinity they could provide for Mills' eventual entry into his father's white-collared world. Mills' early life and later works never seem to overcome this early tension. As Mills himself tells us, "[Perhaps] everything you write…isn't about anything at all but your own god damned self…" (quoted from Gillam 1981).

4. MILLS THE INTELLECTUAL

While painted in admittedly broad strokes, Mills' intellectual thought may best be understood as a lashing out against controlling and stifling social forces that were in effect, quickly reigning in the "rugged individual" and "outlander" which is how Mills saw himself. Or, put into the academic jargon that Mills so despised, Mills' intellectual thought may best be understood as a revolt against the pragmatic need to "re-embed" into the "juggernaut" that was quickly transforming the mythical landscape of the free and unrestrained cowboy into a formulaic and stifling "post-modern" machine. *The Sociological Imagination* ([1959]1967), is at its base, a damning attack on the deterministic model of social life made infamous by Talcott Parsons (1961) that left little room of creative, existential agency. In a metaphorical sense, Parsons and his controlling structures mirrored the father as well as the urbanizing, formulaic, white collar world of Mills' early psychological development.

Ultimately, Mills' postmodern world mirrored Max Weber's bureaucratized world ([1904]2001; [1921]1978) and foreshadowed George Ritzer's McDonaldized society (1993), in that Mills' landscape was dominated by bureaucratic structures of rationality that starved the will to reason. According to Mills, 'It is not too much to say that in the extreme development the chance to reason of most men is destroyed, as rationality increases and its locus, its control, is moved from the individual to the big-scale organization. There is then rationality without reason. Such rationality is not commensurate with freedom but the destroyer of it' (Mills [1959]1967:170). While this statement, written by an adult Mills, was intended as a diagnosis of the post-modern

world of his sociological work, it could just as easily and accurately be read as a diagnosis of his own psyche.

This quote becomes all the more important when placed into the context of a young Mills' worship of his grandfather's unrestrained life and Mills' resentment of the changing structures and character-types he saw sweeping the quickly urbanizing era of he and his white-collar father. For Mills then, the critical question was not only the nature of human existence this new era produced but the impact on agency that such changes afforded- an impact that as a young boy he intimately felt, and yet could not verbalize.

Yet, it was exactly this impact that Mills did verbalize, and eloquently so, in both *White Collar* ([1951]2002) and *The Power Elite* ([1956]2000). As noted by contemporary sociologists such as William Domhoff (1983), these books were structural investigations (albeit a more accurate read finds them more of a cultural investigation), documenting the factual state of American society. Yet, even in these seemingly macro-level sociological accounts, the role of agency was vital. These books, written several years prior to *The Sociological Imagination*, document, borrowing a phrase from Anthony Giddens (1990), the forming "juggernaut" of the emerging post-modern era that Mills lucidly ties to human nature in 1959 with *The Sociological Imagination*. Yet, even in establishing the empirical foundation with these books from which he later springboards into more direct treatments of autonomous agency in *The Sociological Imagination*, Mills ultimately is concerned in *White Collar* with the impact on individual agency that the decline in an ownership society produces. Likewise, in *The Power Elite*,

Mills seems most concerned with the impact on individual agency that a consolidation of power within a democracy produces. This deep and longing concern with autonomous agency can clearly be *felt* in Mills' introduction to *White Collar*: What is perhaps just as evident is how much *White Collar* seems to once again speak to Mills' early personal life:

> The uneasiness, the malaise of our time, is due to this root fact: in our politics and economy, in family life and religion- in practically every sphere of our existence- certainties have…disintegrated or been destroyed and, at the same time, no new sanctions of justifications for the new routines we live, and must live, have taken hold. So there is no acceptance and there is no rejection, no sweeping hope and no sweeping rebellion. There is no plan of life. Among white-collar people, the malaise is deep-rooted…For security's sake, he must strain to attach himself somewhere, but no communities…seem to be thoroughly his.
> (Mills [1951]2002:xvi)

When read in context of his biography, and especially his early biographical trajectory, we see Mills' treatment of agency, trust and the associated sense of security on an intellectual level, mirroring Mills' treatment of these issues in his personal life. Just as in his major writings, in is life, Mills habitually rebelled against the stifling forces that seemed to always be attempting to rein him into conformity. Be it his revolt against his parent's life plans, his anonymous letters to the editor of *The Battalion* at Texas A&M College (attacking the tradition and outwardly imposed discipline), Mills'

multiple marriages, his habitual breaks with intellectual partners and mentors (most notably Hans Gerth), or his vocal attacks against his day's sociological deities (the attack on Parsons in *The Sociological Imagination* being the most (in)famous of these), Mills seemed to always have a need to assert autonomous agency through rebellion as opposed to embedding; just as his writings focused on the nature of human agency in an age of hyperationality. Note the importance Mills places an autonomous agency and his nod to Veblen when Mills writes in a 1957 quasi-autobiographical essay, "Thus intellectually and culturally I am as 'self-made' as it is possible to be" (Mills and Mills 2000:29). To say that the spirit of his 1957 essay focused on his tyrannical protection of his autonomy would be an understatement.

As his psychological traumas would dictate, Mills saw such autonomy under threat from the controlling machine- which is a metaphor he used to describe mid-Century America's social structure (1959, 1951) and the traumatizing change it was bringing about- and on an unconscious level the trauma it had already wrought within his own early years. The result was a Mills and his writings that, as Richard Gillam described it, "manifest[ed] the sensibility of a 'survivor'…" (1981: 2).

In harkening back to his experiences as a cadet and confronted with yet another controlling and stifling machine- Texas A&M College military bureaucracy- Mills throughout his intellectual life, continued to diagnose many of the same problems in society that he first encountered as a freshman. In fact, his first letter to *The Battalion*, re-printed in full in Section 3, stands as an early roadmap to his later intellectual journeys.

From the perspective of an 18-year old boy, Mills speaking of his military school is, unbeknownst to Mills himself, foreshadowing his later concerns and exploration into Karl Marx's (1983) false consciousness. Mills writes to the school newspaper, "…once in a while we come across a society which has sprung up on a false basis and it sustained on false principles of human conduct" (Mills 1935a).

Likewise, confronted with the stifling military control at his school, we see a young Mills turning toward autonomous action to correct the ill he had diagnosed in his local society- again, a hallmark of Mills' later intellectual leanings which are very evident in the perspective of the 18-year old feminine-sensitive cadet seeking a larger audience to share his concerns with- this time in the college newspaper. "It is just this kind of society that exists at A and M College and will continue to exist as long as there are not enough of its members who dare to change it…I propose rather to write down my thoughts on what goes on around me in the hope that they may in some way help to bring about the change which is so necessary for the welfare of the student body" (Mills 1935a).

Ultimately, Mills concludes that the school around him was best characterized as a "feudal autocracy at college" brimming with "human robots" practicing "hypocrisy and feudalistic customs" (Mills 1935a). Of course Mills later famously calls the contemporary American the "Cheerful Robot" in *The Sociological Imagination* ([1959]1967) and in *White Collar* ([1951]2002), accuses not his military school, but instead *all* of American graduate schools of being "organized as a 'feudal' system" (p. 130).

Likewise, the young Mills, off at college for the first time, ultimately places the responsibility for the social problems he perceives at the feet of the upper-classmen. In writing on this concern to the school newspaper, if we replace "upper-classmen" with "power elites" and "freshmen" with "little men" we are confronted with a striking passage that Mills could have just as easily written from his desk at Columbia University as from his dormitory room at Texas A&M College where it was actually penned:

> What effect has the overhearing attitude of the [power elite] on the mind of the ['little man']? Does it make him more of a man? Most assuredly not, for…no one is a better man who submits passively to the slavery of his mind and body by one who is less of a man than he. Since when has it been true that oppression and suppression of free thinking have become acceptable…? Could it be that he accepts these because he has grown indifferent to the problems facing him and takes the easiest way out?...I am sure it is not. The ['little man'] submits to the will of the ['power elite'] only because he has been led to conceive a distorted idea of…true manhood. He is afraid to defy them and stand alone not so much because of what they might do to him but because of what they might think of him. And so we have ['little men'] living a life of mental unrest and stress, unwilling to do that which he believes is wrong, and yet forced to do it by his fear of public opinion. (Mills 1935a)

Note Mills' warning 16 years later in *White Collar*- his audience is different, teachers and intellectuals, but his warnings are the same:

Yet the deepest problem of freedom for teachers is not the occasional ousting of a professor, but a vague general fear- sometimes called 'discretion' and 'good judgment' – which leads to self-intimidation and finally becomes so habitual that the scholar is unaware of it. The real restraints are not so much external prohibitions as manipulative control of the insurgent by the agreements of…gentlemen. ([1951]2002:151)

More than just influencing his intellectual concerns, Mills' traumatic year at Texas A&M College also had a profound impact on his writing style. We have already turned to Gillam (1981) to see the "survivor" mentality Mills possessed; but Gillam also points to the language Mills uses throughout his career, struck by the military illusions that Mills habitually called upon to describe the social landscape of his adult life. In pushing this metaphor, Gillam points out that in *White Collar*, as well as in most of Mills' other major writings, "Mills's obsession with massive force and size becomes inescapably apparent in [his] pages" (1981: 2).

His prose trades in mechanical and military allusions, in metaphors of death and termination: the 'enemy' is 'big,' 'giant,' or 'mighty,' while victims are 'small,' little,' 'weak,' or 'dwarfish,' Modern business enterprises, the adversary of democracy, is a 'cadre' with a 'military-like' shape…War is not only the 'health of the state'…it is now, for Mills 'the health of the expert'…Such central concepts of *White Collar* as the 'slump-war-boom' cycle and the 'garrison state' are also expressive of the violent context… (Gillam 1981:2)

Gillam's point is well-taken, but in the context of a our discussion on Mills' early psychological development, we can also read this passage as an explication on Mills' parental relationships- the white-collar father and mother (C.G. and Fannye) as being the "enemy," "big," "giant" and "mighty;" while Mills stands as the "small," "little," "weak," or "dwarfish" boy.

Likewise, this could also be accurately read not as a statement about Mills' unconscious associations to his parental relations, but as about his perceptions of his white-collared father's relationship to the emerging society around him. In this view Mills sees not himself but his father as "weak" and "little"- which is to say impotent. Regardless of the dual interpretations here, the single strand linking these is the unconscious but still clear Oedipus complex playing itself out in Mills' intellectual work.

4.1   Veblen and Mills

I have suggested throughout our discussion that much more can be understood about Mills if we better understand Veblen. As previously discussed at various points thus far, Veblen came to have a long and lasting impact on Mills. From their similar life-histories, to their intellectual interests and even their biting literary style, Mills appears to be almost a reincarnation of Veblen at mid-century. In addition to possibly being exposed to Veblen while a freshman at Texas A&M College, Mills studied Veblen extensively at The University of Texas and later wrote an introduction to the 1953 edition of Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. This strong connection between their lives. discussed in previous sections, and more importantly their intellectual thought, becomes altogether clear if we turn more specifically to Veblen's essay "The

Higher Learning" (Veblen 2003). What we find in this oft overlooked Veblenian piece, is a critique of higher learning in America which extends his more widely known critiques on America's leisure class to other social institutions and seems to be an almost identical critique of culture and education that Mills avowed several decades later. Utilizing many of the same themes developed in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* ([1899]1953), Veblen demonstrates the virus-like spread of pecuniary efficiency, the decline of idle curiosity, and conspicuous wastefulness and its top-down effects on learners and teachers in American higher education. Above all, Veblen indicts schools for suffocating "idle curiosity," which he regards as the ultimate motivator for learning.

Veblen's critique seems prophetic when we turn to Mills' own critiques of higher education in his own day. Several decades before Mills makes similar observations and accusation, however, Veblen tells us that higher education and learning are the products of larger cultural aims and hence, American academia specifically, are the habituation of that specialized knowledge in American culture which in other places and times, has found its home with priests and shamans (Veblen 2003). In other words, he regards higher education, religion and magic as "useless" and "honorific" aspects of predatory culture.

Unique to American manifestations of such specialized knowledge, is the fact that higher learning in this culture is besieged and co-opted by pecuniary and industrial arts housed within the corporate realm via structure and transferred to individuals as the business-minded ethos of the American psyche. Taking advantage of what Veblen calls the "two impulses of human nature; an Idle Curiosity and the instinct of workmanship"

(Veblen 2003:54), American culture has habituated these impulses under its own ill logic. Driven by the post-modern machine and the ascendancy of rationality, technology and specialization, all aimed toward pecuniary ascendancy, the American habituation of idle curiosity and the instinct of workmanship within academia, has driven these benevolent and natural human impulses off-course and toward barbaric ends. The result has been what Mestrovic (2003) has called postmodern America's "split-personality."

When Veblen refers to contemporary society's evolvement into a post-modern machine, in a real sense, he is referring to modernity and its new structure's tendency toward co-opting the psychological pretenses of modern man. Idle curiosity and its natural application via authentic workmanship (strikingly similar to Mills' term "craftmanship" which Mills ([1959]1967) uses several decades later), are no longer enough in and of themselves. Instead, and embedded and manipulated by American culture, Veblen tells us that these become conspicuous means toward what he sees as completely new ends- honorific pretenses, prestigious displays and purely unpractical wastefulness all in the pursuit and display of status; all indicative of a narcissistic culture. And while Veblen does not specifically use the term "narcissistic," he does describe the American culture as such, "The current situation in America is by way of being something of a psychiatric clinic" (Veblen 2003:129). Higher learning, embedded in just such a culture and co-opted by pecuniary ascendancy, is transformed- education becomes a pecuniary, barbaric vocation. In reference to this trend in higher learning, Veblen states it as such:

More particularly, those principles and standards of organization, control and achievement, that have been accepted as an habitual matter of course in the conduct of business will, by force of habit, in good part reassert themselves as indispensable and conclusive affairs of learning. While it remains true that the bias of workmanship continues to guide the quest of knowledge, under the conditions imposed by modern institutions it will not be the naïve conceptions of primitive workmanship that will shape the framework of the modern system of learning; but rather the preconceptions of that disciplined workmanship that has been instructed in the logic of the modern technology and sophisticated with much experience in a civilization in whose scheme of life pecuniary canons are definitive. (Veblen 2003:54-55)

In the end, Veblen's critique is of the co-option of higher learning by the barbaric business culture at the helm of American life and its exploitation of humanity's two most basic "savage" instincts: idle curiosity and its practical application via workmanship.

Rather than being guided by the pursuit of idle curiosity, Veblen acutely bemoans higher education as training specialists in narrowly defined fields of such precision and technical impracticality, that genuine learning and Reason are removed from the equation. Instead, students are taught vocational know-how by specialists who know very little in regards to learning or knowledge outside of their parochial endeavors. Moreover, in attempts to garner the honorific prestige which is now at the root of all "learning" endeavors within American higher education, Veblen implies that the student

gives-up naïve notions of autonomy via pursuit of idle curiosity, and instead emulates and learns the minutia of those people of power who act as gatekeepers to academia's professional posts.   Veblen sums up his position as follows, "The student's relation to his teacher necessarily becomes that of an apprentice to his master, rather than that of a pupil to his schoolmaster" (Veblen 2003:59).

Mills, several decades later, states it this way:

The graduate school is often organized as a 'feudal' system: the student trades his loyalty to one professor for protection against other professors. The personable young man, willing to learn quickly the thought-ways of others, may succeed as readily or even more readily than the truly original mind in intensive contact with the world of learning. The man who is willing to be apprenticed to some professor is more useful to him. (Mills [1951]2002:130)

There remains to be written a *Theory of the Intellectual Class*, which following the theoretical, metaphorical and stylistic leads of Veblen and Mills, could make great satirical literature in examining the conspicuous symbolism, customs and attire of those within higher learning's institutions. Take for an example the pomp and circumstance surrounding graduation, and especially the distinguishing costumes worn by the differing strata of participants. In line with Veblen's satirical look at the leisure class, much of what he wrote applies directly to this intellectual culture within academia. Likewise, in terms of dress, we find that the regalia, in line with Veblen's and Mills' feudalistic metaphors, dates to this very time period.

Returning back to our main line of discussion, though, both Veblen and Mills agree, curiosity is not needed or wanted within higher learning- only submission and emulation. Ultimately, education as the tool for the industrial arts, becomes the early factory where the "cheerful robot" is constructed and programmed to perform the formulaic tasks that will be required of it to progress through its destined pursuit of vocational status- all the while producing as much status for its master as for itself. The job of the cheerful robot is not to think creatively, but to simply do as it is programmed. As Jean Baudrillard remarked nearly a century after Veblen and almost half a century after Mills, "And that smile everyone gives you as they pass…It is the equivalent of the primal scream of man alone in the world…" (Baudrillard [1986]1999:33). The American smiles, but s/he knows not what for.

As stated earlier, to understand Veblen's position here, is to understand Mills' position- they seem to be literally one in the same- both in substance and style. In *The Power Elite*, Mills makes several references to higher education's co-option by political, economic and especially military elites for their own ends- writing that, "In educational institutions the pursuit of knowledge has been linked with the training of men to enact special roles in all areas of modern society" ([1956]2999:218).

For Mills, this is not a good thing. The role of the university was to serve the larger society through its adamant criticism of that society- not as an aperture to reinforce and reinvigorate the power elite whom Mills saw as ultimately directing that society, and who ultimately needed the most critiquing.

While idle curiosity and workmanship are Veblen's terms, Mills has clear affinity for them. As has just been discussed, Veblen sees both of these as natural and intrinsic states. The first leads to the second. Veblen's concern spiked when modern culture began to channel these two inborn tendencies toward pecuniary means and hence toward inauthentic action via cultural manipulation. On a more abstract level, however, what Veblen is talking about here is intellectual and creative powers as internal forces (idle curiosity) and their intrinsic drive to seek authentic expression via external action (workmanship). He identified American culture as a barbaric machine due in large part because it stunted this process and in turn, controlled the individual towards not the individual's authentic expression of idle curiosity through workmanship, but instead directed these towards pecuniary gains, competition, waste and status; all of this to say "barbarism."

While Veblen appears to be locating this process within the individual, it bears striking resemblance to the more metaphysically stated position found in George Simmel's life-forces (1971). Regardless, and perhaps closer in comparison is Veblen's notion of idle curiosity (internal intellectual and creative forces) compelling workmanship (intellectual and creative forces externally expressed) as compared to philosophical pragmatism's maxim of inquiry, doubt, belief and action (Talisse 2002). Inquiry, doubt and belief constitute Veblen's idle curiosity and action constitutes Veblen's workmanship. It is exactly in this comparison that we can begin to see in part, Mills' affinity for Veblen- for if we delve into the dark heart of Mills' intellectual thought, at its bottom, we find pragmatism.

4.2   Mills the Pragmatist

As covered in earlier sections of our present analyses, Mills was trained and heavily influenced by pragmatism. Speaking to how strongly Mills was tied to such a philosophical base is the fact that his doctoral dissertation in sociology was titled *Sociology and Pragmatism: The Higher Learning in America*- the subtitle being added posthumously by Irving Louis Horowitz in recognition to the strong Veblenian influence also found in the study (Mills 1964). The resulting body of work that Mills produces after his doctoral studies, informed by his pragmatic intellectual upbringing, continues to try to introduce notions of authentic and experiential action into sociology, against pre-formulated and stifling structures attempting to reign into conformity just such an autonomy.

While as previously mentioned, authentic and autonomous action was a prime concern throughout Mills' intellectual writings, it is in this understanding of pragmatism's creed of inquiry, doubt, belief and action that we begin to see the foundation for Mills' vehement attacks against existing social structures- especially those within education (also a prime concern for the pragmatists). This is perhaps best demonstrated in *The Sociological Imagination* where Mills calls for reflexivity to be reinstated into sociological studies. Following his pragmatic roots, Mills is in fact arguing for internal and experientially formulated explanations as the driving force for intellectual and sociological "craftsmanship"- not externally derived grand theories.

For Mills, such grand theories sought to shape and control our experiential existence into an inauthentic and formulaic existence. In fact, if we turn to Mills'

explication on "craftsmanship" in *White Collar* ([1951]2002), Mills lays out six key features- all of them implying that it springs from internally located autonomy which shapes the external environment. Mills tells us of craftsmanship- (1) No ulterior motives drive this behavior other than the creative processes from where it springs; (2) the work is meaningful because it is inherent to the creative forces propelling it; (3) the worker controls these forces; (4) the craftsman thus learns from his work in the development of his own capacities; (5) work and play are one in the same; and (6) this process forms the basis for all aspects of his or her authentic life (p. 220). The fact that Mills saw contemporary society turning craftsmanship literally on its head, once again speaks directly to Veblen's criticisms on the loss of "workmanship" in his own time.

It is this very concern that is at the very heart of Mills' intellectual thought. Be it within sociology itself, within the quickly urbanizing white-collar world, or within the power elite, Mills is writing against the co-option of experiential action by what he sees as barbaric external attempts at its control. Again, turning back to Veblen, we see both of their ideas standing on the same pragmatic assumptions: internal and experiential existence willing toward authentic external expression via workmanship in Veblen's term, and craftsmanship in Mills'; and we find both men launching all-out attacks on an American culture which both see as inhibiting this very process.

For both Mills and Veblen (and pragmatists such as Dewey and William James as well), this root theoretical concern can perhaps be most lucidly seen within their writings on education and learning, because ultimately they all understood that education's function was in aiding and encouraging this very process of externalizing

and bringing into action our experiential and internal existence. This is what Mills referred to when he spoke of the link between private troubles and public issues, what he was reacting against when he decried a contemporary social character type which he saw as "trapped," and what he was attempting to achieve within sociology by placing the *internally-located* "imagination" at the very heart of his radical new sociological methodology.

Ultimately, it is education's role to give the person the tools necessary to untrap his or herself. Yet, in this post-modern age, defined by machine-like formulaic control, education itself, has lost this ability. In line with Veblen's critiques in "The Higher Learning," (Veblen 2003) the picture Mills paints in regards to higher learning and the social character type existing within this institution, is one not of a "craftsman" but of the "technocrat"- a far from independent thinker. Instead Mills, like Veblen before him, saw higher learning as an institution housed with spokesmen of God- scholars acting as bureaucratic apertures at the behest of corporate, political and military circles.

Guided by the pecuniary ethos habituated within American culture, Mills, like Veblen, tells us that idle curiosity is a deceased curiosity- now nothing more than a slave to the industrial arts. Mills bemoaned that such a trend was "part of the whole vocationalizing of education- the preparation of people to fulfill technical requirements and skills for immediate adjustment to a job," ([1951]2002:130). Hence, education had become a tool of and for external constraints within society, rather than a tool to break free of just such traps.

Mills tells us that within higher education, and as a result of corporate and military control (one in the same for Mills) that the definitive "pecuniary cannons" are so entrenched that higher learning has even begun to structure itself in a similar fashion to the military, political-economy (the post-modern machine in Veblen's and later Mills' word). Mills, still in line with Veblen's general thesis, pushes the metaphor even further, however.

> …[I]n connection with research, and the money it entails, the professors become more directly an appendage of the larger managerial demiurge, which their professional positions allow them to sanctify as well as to serve in more technical ways. Since knowledge is a commodity that may be sold directly, perhaps it is inevitable that some professors specialize in selling knowledge after others have created it, and that still others shape their intellectual work to meet the market directly. Like the pharmacist who sells packaged drugs with more authority than the ordinary storekeeper, the professor sells packaged knowledge with better effect than laymen. He brings to the market his prestige of his university position and of the ancient academic tradition of disinterestedness. This halo…has more than once been turned to the interests of companies who purchase the professor's knowledge and name of his university. (Mills [1951]2002:132)

Mills goes on to tell us that higher education is now comprised of "producers" who create, test and disseminate ideas to a sector of the market that is able to understand

and consume them. Further, he argues there exists the "wholesalers" who do not produce ideas, but via textbooks, distribute these to other technocrats who are positioned to sell them directly to "student consumers." For the non-researchers, those that only teach, Mills calls them the "retailers"- the better of these consuming directly from the producers, and the lesser consuming from the wholesalers. These all become the "academic entrepreneur" and all, "are becoming dependent upon the traits of the go-getter in business and the manager in the corporation" ([1951]2002:134).

Again mirroring Veblen, and in line with the general aim and scope of nearly everything he wrote, Mills is warning us here that the externalization of our experiential existence (idle curiosity expressed via workmanship) has been diverted by an American culture toward barbaric and pecuniary ends.

As we delve deeper into Mills' thought and its pragmatic underpinnings (more of which will come in the next section), it becomes apparently clear how strongly a link there exists in his thought between the agent's internal existence as linked to reality's external nature (private and public in Mills' own words). For Mills, while there was much to be alarmed about in regards to the stifling control which was growing in lock-step with modernity's evolution, ultimately, it was the internal and hence existential changes within the individual that most concerned Mills. For what he saw was a social-character type akin to Riesman's other-directed which was in effect, controlling *itself*. Again, this social-psychological thread can be found throughout nearly all of Mills' writings, but he is most clear on the matter when speaking about education and learning.

As previously quoted, Mills wrote that the biggest danger in his era was a "vague- general fear sometimes called 'discretion' and 'good judgment'- which leads to self-intimidation and finally becomes so habitual that the scholar is unaware of it. The real restraints are not so much external…" ([1951]2002: 151). He goes onto say, "They find it harder to locate their external enemies than to grapple with their internal conditions. Their seemingly impersonal defeat has spun a personally tragic plot and they are betrayed by what is false within them" (p. 160).

Doing much of the work in controlling ourselves, we willingly enter into what Mills early-on identified as the "personality-market." Here, it is not only our craftsmanship which we profane for a pecuniary culture's use, but our very nature of experiential existence is brought to bear in helping the wheels of the machine-society turn. We are so controlled and dominated by this pecuniary ascendancy that even our most private parts of ourselves- our emotional states- become commodities of which we attempt to maximize via their trade in the white-collar market place. With the selling of the true self, any pragmatic notion of inquiry, doubt, belief and action becomes an impossibility for the resulting Cheerful Robot.

Just as Veblen before him was concerned with idle curiosity's re-routing toward barbaric and pecuniary means, so too was Mills. For faced with the external controls of the post-modern machine, it was not the controls in and of themselves which held the danger, but the means to which we came to internalize these very mechanisms that most alarmed him. Like Eric Erickson and David Riesman of Mills' own generation, and Veblen and Freud of an earlier day, Mills looked into the heart of an ailing American

culture (described by Riesman in *The Lonely Crowd* as being in an "ambulatory state" ([1950]1961:244)) and saw staring back at him our own sick psyche.

5. POST-MODERNITY'S TEXAS ROOTS

Part of Mills' brilliance is likely due to his enigmatic and sometimes contradictory thought. He has been described as "An American Utopian" and "A Native Radical" and yet Mills was also heavily influenced by European sociology and philosophy. Mills was trained in American-born pragmatic philosophy (influenced by Dewey and other pragmatists who focused on subjective experience) and yet also incorporated Marxian critiques into his theorizing (a group who often warned of the power of false experience or "false consciousness"). Mills was one of the first to recognize a then emerging post-modern turn, and yet in complete contradiction to postmodern thought, saw such a postmodern landscape as dominated by stifling and controlling structures- championing a postmodernity minus a post-structuralism. The end result of his unique and original blend of perspectives, has been a set of theoretical statements that stand in opposition to the splintered and parochial endeavors of contemporary sociology's competing camps.

Such is the case with Mills' most definitive theoretical statements, found in *The Sociological Imagination*, where he argues that sociology is best described and practiced through the holistic fashion of the examination of history, biography and structure. In this seemingly simple approach however, we see here in Mills' thought, the far-flung and wide ranging philosophical influences and implications. To a greater or lesser degree, Hegel's historical dialectic, Marx's structural traps, Weber's bureaucratic control, Dewey's experiential human-animal, Veblen's "post-modern" machine as well as his "self-made man", and a varied number of other thinkers' ideas are all implied

here. Mills, we see, was not one to be boxed-in, labeled or tied-down to one perspective or tradition. Instead, as his pragmatic training would seem to dictate, Mills freely moved from perspective to perspective, from philosopher to economist to sociologist- borrowing and re-shaping diverse ideas as his experience and data would dictate. The result, as indicated by his three-tiered approach in his sociological imagination, is an exploration into structural importance, historical processes and existential dilemmas that develop alongside these.

It is in the context of contemporary sociology, a discipline seemingly beset by endemic power struggles between competing and parochial camps (quantitative v. qualitative, structure v. culture, modernism v. postmodernism, social theory v. sociological theory) that we become even more aware of how unique Mills' thought, approach and perspectives were. And while Mills was writing long before postmodernism had entered the scene, Mills was developing methods and ideas that foreshadow at least some of the very issues postmodernists now grapple with and utilize.

Yet, undoubtedly, Mills was also squarely grounded in classical sociological thought- although not in the sense that many have now come to understand that thought. While sociology's gods- Durkheim, Weber, Marx- were heavily rooted in macro-level theory, all three, like Mills who would follow them, paid considerable attention to the impact on individual experiences that macro-structural arrangements created- in a sense, utilizing a sociologically imaginative approach even before Mills formulated it. Durkheim ([1893]1965) lamented the development of anomie- translated from the French to mean "derangement" or "infinity of desires"- created *within individuals* in

contemporary organic societies (Mestrovic 1992). This is in stark contrast to the widely understood Mertonian concept of anomie as a "state of normlessness" –that is as a social fact exerting itself from outside the individual (Merton 1938). Weber dwelled on "verstehen," or understanding subjective human states within an objective system, in exploring the rapid and alarming bureaucratization of Western culture (Weber [1921]1978). Unfortunately, sociologists spend vast amounts of time exploring Weber's "value-free" proclamation and rarely even gloss over his opposite but connected idea that individual's subjective states are too, to be considered. Further, Marx spent considerable space exploring alienation (including alienation from self) occurring under capitalism (Marx 1983). In a sense, these sociological gods seemed well aware of existential (and pragmatic) dilemmas developing along side macro-level transformation of societies. This is all to say that a sociological imaginative stance was a focal point of all three's theories.

Unfortunately, the existential sensibility required for a rich understanding of autonomous agency is conspicuously missing in waning contemporary sociological thinking and such was the reason that Mills felt compelled to pen *The Sociological Imagination* ([1959]1967). The fact that it has been decades since sociology has produced a major American thinker speaks volumes to its declining significance in intellectual circles. Part of this seeming decline in American sociology at least, is likely due to the shift towards studies of quantitative descriptors, and away from treatment of individual experiences within larger social milieus- a shift that places contemporary sociology in direct contrast with its rich historical roots. Reading Mills today, a half-

century after the appearance of his major writings, is to hear cries from the grave of a man who saw the death of sociology long before his contemporaries. Long before quantitative measurements and descriptions of overly cognitive agents (such as those posited by Anthony Giddens) (see Mestrovic 1998) came to replace human experience as the main thrust of sociological inquiries, Mills was rebelling against what he coined "crackpot realism" and "abstracted empiricism."

Due in large part to his graduate training in Pragmatic philosophy from the philosophy department at The University of Texas, Mills was acutely aware that if sociology was to continue speaking to the human experience, sociology would have to understand that experience on its own terms- not in an abstracted statistical sense where a mean average is used to represent all individuals under study and yet- rarely reflects any of the individuals in the study, much less the population. (An interesting side note is psychology's parallel development, a trend Carl Gustav Jung attacked in his insightful manuscript, *The Undiscovered Self* ([1957]1959)). It is in this keen understanding that an existentially sensible understanding of agency played a seemingly major role in Mills' thought.

What is even more unique in the context of contemporary sociology, however, is Mills' dual concern not only with an existential agent, but on the structural arrangements which helped define this agent. The result was a breadth of research and publications that was uncommon during his lifetime, and nearly unheard of today. From social-psychology, to the sociology of knowledge, to stratification and class, politics, fiction

and sociological poetry, Mills was concerned wherever it was found, with the intersection of what he called personal troubles and social issues.

The opening line in Mills' best selling and most widely cited book, *The Sociological Imagination* ([1959]1967), reads as follows, "Nowadays, men often feel that their private lives are a series of *traps*" (p. 3). He continues in the opening chapter to say, "What ordinary men are directly aware of…are bounded by the private orbit in which they live…What they need, and what they feel they need, is 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 what may be happening within themselves. It is this quality, I am going to attend, that journalists and scholars, artists and publics, scientists and editors are coming to expect of what may be called the sociological imagination"(p. 5).

It was Mills' belief that the promise of sociology was in helping the "common man" in gaining a sense of self in a world of traps. Mills' sociology was much in line with John Dewey's statement in "The Need For a Recovery of Philosophy" (1973) where he writes, "[it] recovers itself when it ceases to be a device for dealing with problems of philosophers and becomes a method cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men." Put in other words, Mills saw the promise of sociology in regaining the humanness in sociological statements of the human experience. Thus for Mills, treatments of agency were the anchor point to which all other structural sociological statements must be understood by, and the anchor point from which a damaged society could be fixed and repaired.

5.1   Mills and Postmodernity

It is this structural concern coupled with existential dilemmas of agency that places Mills in a unique position within the contemporary sociological canopy. Quite simply, in contemporary understanding, Mills' structural landscape was built on Weber's bureaucratized foundation, and foreshadowed Ritzer's McDonaldized society and Giddens' radical modernity. And yet, because of Mills' treatment and concern for the agent's emotive…existential dilemmas, he does not completely fit the mold of the modernist. Likewise, Mills' concern with human agency and the related issues of trust, emotions and the agent's creative capacity, foreshadowed many "postmodern" developments within the social sciences- and yet, Mills' ideas do not neatly fit into the postmodern labels- even if he was a forerunner of some of these

But what exactly is meant here by the signifier "post-modern"- be it theory or culture? Depending on one's theoretical leanings, the contemporary world is generally viewed from two admittedly broad positions- increasing chaos or increasing order. Postmodern theory depicts the social world as one of fragmentation, free-floating signifiers, and false order applied to a reality of non-order. Postmodernism is widely admitted to be indefinable (Rosenau 1992:11), and any attempt to describe it is nothing less than messy (see Denzin 1986; Lyotard [1979]1984). There are as many versions of postmodernism as there are postmodern theorists (Rosenau 1992:15). What can be said of postmodernity, however, is that it is a broad theory laced with contradictions and intricacies, and it attacks, turns-over and challenges preconceived notions of truth and reality. Likewise, to discover truth or meaning or solid stances in postmodern reflections

is an unruly affair. It is fluid, fast, non-linear, hard to pin-down, contradictory, and sometimes irreverent. It takes events we think we "know" and experience, and ironically twists them into the unfamiliar. Postmodernists have declared the death of the author, the death of the subject, the end of sociology and the emergence of the fragmented and non-cohesive self, and view everything as texts that should be deconstructed and decentered. Everything is open to interpretation and any interpretation is equally valid because no point of view is privileged. Further, these thinkers deny any existence of truth, and attack any claims to it. Order is seen as a farce and any "evidence" of such order (which postmodernists deny the existence of evidence), is seen as simply a claim of order superimposed on chaos (Schwartz 1998; Rosenau 1992).

Baudrillard is often regarded in academia as the spokesperson for postmodernism, even though he denies this label. Baudrillard derives postmodernism primarily from Nietzsche's asocial and nihilistic anti-Enlightenment philosophy. Baudrillard eschews any notion of truth and argues instead, for the domination of simulacra in the social world, which are copies of copies for which there is no original (Baudrillard 1994). His vision of the "social glue" that holds society together is a kind of self-absorption and narcissism. In a phrase, Baudrillard reduces the social world to an imagined or imaginary sea of rootless, circulating images and fictions without origin or referent. Thus, he and other postmodernists posit many dramatic endgames, from the end of history to the end of sociology and the social. Similarly, he and other postmodernists regards social professions and institutions such as the law, academia and politics as aimless, rootless theater.

Next, if the reader would allow me to insert into our explication on postdmodernism a solidly modernist tool, we can turn to Ritzer's (1997) distinctions between *Postmodernity, Postmodernism*, and *Postmodern social theory* in our attempts to (un)explain the signifier postmodern. Ritzer identifies *postmodernity* as a new historical epoch distinct from modernity (whether it is a break from modernity, has proceeded in conjunction with, or does not even operate in a linear fashion, are all points of contention and debate within postmodern camps).

Likewise, Ritzer distinguishes and locates *postmodernism* within the cultural realm, in that distinctly different products have supplanted modernist products (This is perhaps his weakest definition of the three since he fails to distinguish how cultural change *within* modernity and its subsequently different products was/is any different or distinct from the shift from modern cultural products to postmodern cultural products).

Finally, he defines and labels *Postmodern social theory* as being comprised of five parts: (1) It is critical of modern society's failure to carry through with the Enlightenment promises; (2) it rejects grand narratives and totalizations; (3) it places much more emphasis on pre-modern phenomena such as reflection and personal experience; (4) it rejects modernist tendencies to place boundaries around disciplines sometimes incorporating fiction as theory; and finally (5) it tends to shock the reader rather than be objective and achieves this through a more literary style (Ritzer 1997).

Other theorists, however, and most notably Max Weber ([1904] 2001), Ritzer (1993), and Herbert Marcuse ([1964] 1991) have analyzed an increasingly rational, bureaucratized and ordered world of large structural systems and utilize metahistorical

narratives in explaining and predicting social phenomenon. The modernist camp stands in direct opposition to the positions staked-out by the postmodernists (see above).

Frankly, the two camps hold little in common, including an attempt at dialogue. Mills, however, due to his eclectic blend of modern and postmodern stances, offers a means to open a dialogue between these competing views of contemporary society, creating a means to bridge the divide that now confronts the social sciences in that his theories help establish a point of dialogue where competing theoretical positions can speak *to* each other, rather than talking *past* each other.

In speaking to this divide, scholars such a Stjepan Mestrovic (1992) have previously discussed the limitations and shortcomings of postmodern theory, and surely the current dialogue in postmodern theory is one in which it has managed to buffer itself from all attacks. By contextualizing postmodern ideas vis-à-vis Mills and the pragmatic tradition, we can hopefully see that it becomes possible to rescue postmodern conceptions of reality and integrate these into the rich "traditional" sociological literature on social reality, thus creating a point of dialogue between disparate theoretical stances within the discipline.

Postmodern depictions of reality as well as notions of simulacra can be understood much more thickly by examining currently unrecognized pre-cursors to this school of thought in the anti-Enlightenment movement and the historical lineage we see continued through its congruence and influence through philosophical pragmatism and its subsequent influence on Mills and finally this relationship to others such as Veblen, Simmel and Riesman. With such a linkage it appears postmodern theory is less able to

buffer attacks against itself as it currently does, and more likely to enter into dialogue with mainstream sociological literature.

The second reason for decentering Mills' ideas out of what is widely believed to be his modernist leanings, is to allow (in the context of a divided sociology) for a position where universal origins and referents still exist, even in a world of other-directed, postemotional, postmodern, sociologically imaginative, socially constructed, sea of circulating fictions. Yet these referents are softer, more malleable, and more contingent than Talcott Parsons and the other structuralists that Mills during his time, opposed, while at the same time indicating, contrary to Anthony Giddens, that modernity is in fact not a juggernaut that destroys *all* referents. While Lyotard, Bauman, and other postmodernists appear correct in that Enlightenment narratives have sometimes been used as "totalizing" and oppressive narratives, it seems an overreaction to throw out the baby with the bathwater. Thus, a decentered Mills stakes out a unique position that allows dialogue in finding common ground between the extremism that seems to have a hold on the social sciences.

The current divide, however, is much more than opposing depictions of reality as ordered versus chaotic. A more stubborn philosophical difference separates traditional sociological theory from postmodern theory- namely whether or not truth can be known or whether we can only construct narratives in place of truth. By examining pre-cursors of postmodern theory in the anti-Enlightenment tradition and its subsequent congruence with American pragmatism and on to both of these influences on Mills, we find here a

position in Mills that once again takes on middle ground between truth and fictional narratives; between modernist epistemologies and postmodern ones.

While not commonly recognized, there is a link between the early influences on Mills as well as contemporary postmodernists. Like postmodern social theory, philosophical pragmatism of which heavily influenced Mills, was influenced by the fin-de-siecle nineteenth century anti-Enlightenment movement- comprised of a group of thinkers who wrote in direct contrast to modernist, structuralist views of the human condition. Instead, this tradition from which pragmatism and postmodernism draw heavily from, was concerned with notions of the "will's" dominance over rationalistic and constraining structures.

The historical context from which the anti-Enlightenment movement emerges can be traced at least as far back as the Catholic Church's advent. Human understanding of the world and man's condition was informed by the canopy provided by religious doctrine; as evidenced in the thought of intellectuals such as Descartes ([1647]1979) who despite his Enlightenment leanings, still grounded his Cartesian self and the world it inhabited with the positing of God. Increasingly, however, Enlightenment intellectuals, both in the social and hard sciences, worked to tear down the religious canopy, replacing this with a rationalistic "foundation" of natural and moral laws. It is in direct contrast to the human condition's rationalistic grounding that postmodern theorists as well as anti-Enlightenment intellectuals such as Nietzsche rebelled against with the "will to power" (1967); that Arthur Schopenhauer ([1844]1958) rebelled against with his "will to compassion"; that Freud spoke to with his "libido" and "unconsciousness" (Freud

[1920]1943; 1956b); that Simmel (1971) responded to with his "life" force; and that the American pragmatist William James ([1897]1977a) reacted to with his "will to believe."

From the anti-Enlightenment tradition, and subsequently the pragmatic tradition informing Mills, reality was by no means a foundation to be discovered. Instead, reality and subsequent meaning were things we as social creatures *created* through our subjective experiences. This was James' point when he wrote in "The Sentiment of Rationality", "The inmost nature of the reality is congenial to the powers which you possess," ([1897]1977b:331) and when he wrote in *Pragmatism* ([1907]1947), "The world stands really malleable, waiting to receive its final touches at our hand…Man engenders truth upon it" (p. 256). James moved further in attacking objective truth in "Will to Believe" ([1897]1977a) with his decree that philosophy and science are best understood as a history of "reinterpretable" and "corrigible" truths (p. 725).

> To claim that certain truths now posses it [objective evidence], is simply to say that when you think them true and they *are* true, then their evidence is objective, otherwise it is not. But practically one's conviction that the evidence one goes by is of the real objective brand, is only one more subjective opinion added to the lot…There is this,- there is that; there is indeed nothing which someone has not thought absolutely true, while his neighbor deemed it absolutely false…that the intellect, even with truth directly in its grasp, may have no infallible signal for knowing whether it be truth or no. (P. 725-726)

In this regard we see evidence of pre-cursory treatments of Richard Rorty's (1989) ideas that reality is "language games" and Lyotard's argument in *The Postmodern Condition* ([1979]1984) that scientific truth is not a privileged form of knowledge, and that all social knowledge exists on a level playing field- reducing science to one cultural activity among many. Also found in here are the seeds of a "sociological imagination," based and created on the agent's subjective, experiential biography.

While pragmatic philosophy, perhaps the single greatest influence in Mills' thought (in fact, his doctoral dissertation was titled *Sociology and Pragmatism: The Higher Learning in America* (1964)) anticipates many developments in contemporary postmodern discourse on truth as narratives, it stops short of dismissing truth altogether. James succinctly demonstrates this in *Pragmatism* ([1907]1947) where he writes, "Woe to him whose beliefs play fast and loose with the order which realities follow…" (p. 205). We see demonstrated here a strong reluctance to move toward any sort of nihilistic subjectivism that postmodernists such as Jean Baudrillard seem to gleefully migrate to. Instead, James points to positive attitudes of faith, hope and possibility in engendering pragmatic truths into reality's fabric.

Mills, in quintessential fashion, seems to be thoroughly grounded to his pragmatic roots, mirroring a pragmatic position in *The Sociological Imagination*. Recognizing an emerging "post-modern" era, of which loss of autonomy and loss of reason come to be hallmarks, Mills ([1959]1967) writes, "…perhaps the [social world] is not as 'disorderly' as the mere listing of a small part of it makes it seem;…Order as well

as disorder is relative to viewpoint; to come to an orderly understanding of men and societies requires a set of viewpoints that are simple enough to make understanding possible, yet comprehensive enough to permit us to include our own view the range and depth of human variety. The struggle for such viewpoints is the first and continuing struggle of social science" (p. 133).

Here, and once again, we see Mills straddling both modernist and postmodernist claims, seeming to recognize the postmodern problem of order and self, and yet, he does not abandon the belief that through our own experience, some sense of truth can be created from this.

Likewise, and equally as important, we see strong parallels between Mills' sociologically imaginative methodology, and influences from the earlier works of Max Weber and interesting links between Weberian methodology and American pragmatism. It is widely known that Mills was strongly influenced by Weber's work. Mills and Hans Gerth, in fact, had been in a race with Talcott Parsons to translate and publish Weber's work into English. Parsons ultimately won the race (perhaps accounting for some of the animosity Mills felt towards him) but Mills and Gerth did quickly follow suit with the release of the very successful *From Max Weber* in 1946.

In an accurate, but albeit overly simplified fashion, Weber's methodology rested on a two-pronged approach to social action- his "value-free" proclamation coupled with his often under utilized but equally important "verstehen" doctrine. Easy parallels quickly emerge between Weber's two methodological components and Mills' similarly contingent approach housed within the sociological imagination. Quite simply, or

maybe not so simply for some social scientists, structure and history constitute the objective, "value-free" component of the empirical world, while biography constitutes the subjectively grounded "verstehen" component in Weber's methodology. Yet, a much deeper connection exists here between Weber's two-pronged methodology and the Pragmatically-influenced methodology espoused in Mills' sociological imagination. In a 1977 article exploring Weber's methodology ("The Verstehen Thesis and Max Weber's Methodology") Guy Oakes wrote:

> According to Weber, the construction of a definitive and exhaustive system of concepts is not a possible theoretical goal of the sociocultural sciences. Weber conceives reality as an endless "stream" of events. Reality is both extensively and intensively infinite. Because it is endless, a complete description of the entire stream is impossible. An exhaustive description of any single phenomenon within this stream is also impossible. This is because reality is subject to an infinite number and variety of variations. It is in a state of perpetual flux (P. 12).

With such a description of Weber's methodology, we once again see a striking and deep connection with pragmatism. Weber's conception of reality as an "endless stream of events" is strikingly similar to James' early pragmatic statements on reality as a "stream of consciousness" and further James' statements in the *The Variety of Religious Experiences* ([1905]2000). Here, James argues against a completely object oriented science (including social sciences) due to sciences' inability to account for the infinite number of experiential phenomena related to objects within an empirical reality.

We once again turn to Oakes' discussion on Weber's methodology to see Weber's similarities with pragmatism.

> The sociocultural sciences…only focus upon…those [phenomena] to which "cultural meaning" can be described. The subject matter of the sociocultural sciences is the domain of cultural meanings. The contents of this domain, however, are not invariable either. Since it is part of the endless and perpetual flux of reality, the domain of cultural meanings is also subject to variations and transformation. (Oaks 1977:12)

We thus are presented with a methodology espoused by both Weber and pragmatism which is eerily similar to Mills' methodology several decades later- all being incomplete, imaginative, contingent and focused on the congruent aspects of the empirical *and* experiential. While previously quoted above, it is worth revisiting Mills' statement in *The Sociological Imagination* due to its parallels with our current discussion on Weber, pragmatism and Mills. Mills ([1959]1967) writes, "…perhaps the [social world] is not as 'disorderly' as the mere listing of a small part of it makes it seem;…Order as well as disorder is *relative to viewpoint*; to come to an orderly understanding of men and societies requires a set of viewpoints that are simple enough to make understanding possible, yet comprehensive enough to permit us to include our own view the range and depth of human variety. The struggle for such viewpoints is the first and continuing struggle of social science" (p. 133) *emphasis added*.

Thus we see Weber's similarities to pragmatism and both of these influences on Mills, straddling postmodern and modern theories with the idea that truth and narratives

are inseparable. Mills, through his pragmatic grounding and his Weberian leanings, offers us a metaphorical bridge, linking modern and postmodern theory. In this context, the functionalists and structuralists depict wrongly Mills as a maverick "social critic" whose endeavors were not "objective" enough. Conversely, the postmodernists simply ignore him because he is wrongly perceived to be part of the totalizing, "enemy" camp of the Enlightenment tradition. A more accurate read finds a nuanced, middle ground with regard to opposition to versus submission to the Enlightenment project. Mills certainly agrees that science, rationality, and rational structure increase with modernization. This is very clear with his Marxian influences and his positing of structure and history as important components of his methodology. Likewise, Mills' scientific explorations of these, especially in *White Collar* and *The Power Elite*, seem to make this clear. However, he is also critical of pathological gaps and excesses in these Enlightenment products—most notably, accusing modern society of having "rationality without reason." In a sense, Mills describes a structure that resembles a modernist depiction, while at the same time, maintaining an agent and a methodology that most resembles a postmodern orientation.

Making perhaps his most definitive statements regarding the then emerging post-modern era, Mills publishes in 1959, *The Sociological Imagination,* an important text in its contributions in recognizing some of the salient features of self that would later emerge in contemporary postmodern theory. Mills' "sociological imagination" is a type of "language game" that involves how individuals manage and internalize social symbols, with an outcome that is highly unpredictable. In Rorty's (1989) words, it is

contingent, and Mills does not spell out what constitutes a correct grasp or use of the sociological imagination- it is very much tied to one's subjective (or biographical) experiences.

Mills also recognized the changing nature of society and the implication for the social sciences. Before the postmodernists had declared the death of the author and the subject, and the modernist methodologies of the social sciences as irrelevant, Mills recognized these developments. Mills, realizing the changing nature of American society at the middle of the twentieth century, was one of the first intellectuals to use the term "post-modern," and to recognize the important implications this shift was and would have on society and individuals, "We are at the ending of what is called The Modern Age. Just as Antiquity was followed by several centuries of Oriental ascendancy, which Westerners provincially call The Dark Ages, so now The Modern Age is being succeeded by a post-modern period" (Mills [1959]1967:165-166). One would be hard-pressed to find a postmodernist cite Mills, however. Mills ([1959]1967) used phrases such as "blind drift" (p. 169), "man who is 'with' rationality but without reason" (p. 169), of individuals who could not understand but only "adapt" (p. 170) and spoke of new structures that "resist analysis" (p. 167) in his depiction of the emerging postmodern world.

It is also interesting in the context of our current discussion, that in describing this new postmodern era, Mills gave a nod to one of his contemporaries for the early recognition of the change, "It is the hard meaning of such notions as Riesman's 'other-directed'" ([1959]1967:171). It is important to note here that Riesman's other-directed

character type was very much the forerunner of the postmodern self, confronted with an anomic world offering a "galaxy of choices" to such an individual. Mestrovic pursues this theme regarding Riesman in *Postemotional Society* (1997).

Where Mills (and Riesman as well) differed with current postmodern thinking, however, was in the implication of these shifts. As discussed above, many postmodernists seem to relish the shift as both empowering and liberating (Rosenau 1992:11). Mills, reflecting earlier ideas of Weber ([1904]2001; [1921]1978) and foreshadowing the recent writings of Ritzer (1993), saw the postmodern world as dominated by bureaucratic structures of rationality; structures so controlling and inescapable, they starved the will to reason. However, in staking out such a nuanced position, one seemingly with a foot in postmodernism and a foot in modernity, we see Veblen's strong influence on Mills.

While it appears that Mills was the first social scientist to explore with any depth what he saw as the then emerging post-modern world, Mills borrowed heavily from Veblen. As previously discussed in earlier sections, Veblen was one of the first intellectuals Mills was exposed to- likely reading him as freshman at Texas Agriculture and Mechanical College, and also studying him more in-depth at The University of Texas. The reason that this becomes important is that while Mills was the first to write with any depth on the emerging post-modern world, Veblen, it appears, was one of the first social scientists to use the term, writing in his often overlooked essay "The Instability of Knowledge and Belief" (Veblen 2003).

But it has only been during the later decades of the modern era- during that time interval that might fairly be called the post-modern era- that this mechanistic conception of things has begun seriously to affect the current system of knowledge and belief. (Veblen 2003:33)

While it appears that this is his only specific reference to a post-modern epoch, the formulaic world he goes on to describe as being post-modern, is the same mechanistic and controlling social order that Mills later latches onto and describes in *White Collar, New Men of Power, The Power Elite* and *The Sociological Imagination.* Interestingly, Veblen also had a strong influence on Riesman's thought. What we find in all three of these men's ideas (Riesman, Veblen and Mills) however, is the "split-personality" characteristic of contemporary postmodern ideas and times- and yet Veblen and later Mills and Riesman, recognized this years before most.

Both Veblen and Mills speak of the postmodern machine in terms that allude to it being an extension and trajectory of modernity (Mestrovic 2003). Yet, both also recognize the un-integrative aspects produced from this extension. As such, both Veblen and Mills foreshadowed the narcissistic culture now known as postmodernity (Lasch 1979 and Mestrovic 2003). For Veblen as well as Mills, the unreal or imaginative (simulacra in Baudrillard's terms) was not unrooted, but was the historical and intentional extension of modernity's machine-like control in order to garner honor, prestige, etc, (Mestrovic 2003; Veblen 2003). The outcome is the same for both Veblen's and Mills' post-modern world and contemporary postmodernists: contradiction, ambiguity and moral stasis.

Yet, unlike recent postmodernists such as Baudrillard, this was not something to relish, but was instead, something to fear. For it left, as Mills tells us in *The Sociological Imagination*, individuals "trapped" within these formulaic systems, controlled by the "men of power" and finding no communities with which we could attach ourselves. The result was a social system, according to Mills that produced "rationality without reason" and that "resisted analysis." It is a place of psychological tension with no relief. As Mills writes in *White Collar*, "Man attempts to attach himself somewhere, but no place seems to be thoroughly his" (Mills [1951]2002:xvi).

Yet, speaking even more to this point is Mills' introduction to the 1953 edition of Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. Mills quotes Veblen's 1922 essay "Dementia Praecox." Mills introduces the quote by writing, "Veblen [wrote in 1922] what might with equal truth be written today":

The current situation in America is by way of being something of a psychiatric clinic. In order to come to an understanding of this situation there is doubtless much else to be taken into account, but the case of America is after all not fairly to be understood without making due allowance for a certain prevalent unbalance and derangement of mentality, presumably transient but sufficiently grave for the time being. Perhaps the commonest and plainest evidence of this unbalanced mentality is to be seen in a certain fearsome and feverish credulity with which a large proportion of the Americans are affected. (Veblen [1899] 1953: viii)

Of course, Mills would clearly stake out this same position later on in *White Collar-* lamenting an America no longer grounded to an ownership society, but instead transforming itself into "The Great Salesroom" and the narcissistic turn toward what Mills early-on identified as the "Personality Market" (Mills [1951]2002). We see in both of these thinkers, Mills as well as Veblen, a post-modern machine of formulaic and rational control producing and manipulating a postmodern world of inauthentic, unreal and narcissistic interactions, products and selves- ultimately all one in the same for Veblen and Mills.

In a sense, individuals worked within and by rational means as dictated by the structure, but in doing so, they lost all means to reason to what ends they were behaving in such a manner. They became the mentally and spiritually problematic "Cheerful Robot" in Mills' term ([1959]1967:171), and in doing so become alienated from things that in the past defined the individual. Direct parallels exist in postmodern conceptions of reality. In Mills' terms, one can see a correlation between alienated individuals and the extreme individuality and loss of shared meaning- all hallmarks of contemporary postmodern discourse[9].

While Mills was describing an emerging "post-modern" culture, he also recognized the need for a postmodern theory to replace what he saw as the archaic and

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[9] Both Mills and Baudrillard noted a postmodern world of smiling but alienated selves. Note the similarities between Mills' ([1959]1967) "Cheerful Robot" as a depiction of the alienated postmodern self, and Baudrillard's recognition of the smiling, yet alienated American in his book *America* ([1986] 1999), "…the people smile. Actually they smile more and more, though never to other people, always to themselves," (p. 14); "And that smile everyone gives you as they pass…It is the equivalent of the primal scream of man alone in the world…The smile signifies only the need to smile," (p. 33). Further, for Baudrillard, we see how in Mills' term, the meaningless smile embodies "rationality without reason" ([1959]1967:169) as the "smile signifies only the need to smile" ([1986]1999:33).

static modernist theories of his time. His damning attacks against Parsons and his claim in *The Sociological Imagination* that Marxist theories could not explain the emerging social order of his time, coupled with Mills' recently published autobiographical letters showing Mills struggling as early as the 1940s to create a radically new methodology he tentatively coined "sociological poetry," seems to indicate Mills' skepticism regarding the efficacy of modernist theories. In a 1948 letter to Dwight MacDonald, Mills laments on modernist theory's inability to keep pace with contemporary social changes, and the need for the creation of a new methodology to capture "*apparent* facts" and the full range of human meaning that individuals attached to these (Mills and Mills 2000: 111-113).

Undoubtedly, and despite his early endeavors in exploring the post-modern world, Mills did not see himself, nor do most scholars consider him, to be a post-modernists…then again, neither does Jean Baudrillard include himself in this camp. The closest we can come to finding scholars making the link between Mills and contemporary postmodern thinking are George Ritzer (1997) who briefly argues that there are "intimations" of postmodern ideas in Mills' writings, and Robert Antonio (1991) who tells us that from his Pragmatic roots, Mills' espoused "the bankruptcy of the Enlightenment ideals of reason, freedom, and democracy," (p, 154). In one sense if these people and I are correct in our suggestions that Mills may have been the first postmodernists, and if the reader would allow a play on words- one could argue as Norman Denzin (1989a) does, that there is some interesting and playful connections

between postmodernism and its links to Paris, TX (Mills) as well as Paris, France (Baudrillard).

Interestingly, of past literature, perhaps the best argument for Mills as postmodernist comes from Denzin's (1989) schizoid polemic against Mills, who Denzin argued was a modern theorist. Criticizing *The Sociological Imagination*, Denzin writes, "[Mills'] harangue is cloaked in the languages and grand 'metanarratives' of the classical age: reason, freedom, democracy, enlightenment and positive knowledge about men and their troubles. The dialogue is modernist," (Denzin 1989: 57). Of course, Mestrovic (1992) has previously argued that *contemporary postmodernism* is itself stuck in modernity's masculine rhetoric. The schizophrenic nature of Denzin's argument comes to light, however, when in making his point that Mills was a modernist, Denzin summarizes *The Sociological Imagination*, creating in the reader's mind a wholly postmodern text out of a manuscript the Denzin in fact argues is modernist.

> *The Sociological Imagination* is a work of Mills' imagination. In it he thinks and writes…and constructs images and pictures of society, men and history which are real only in so far as they exist in his text…Textually, we have Mills' personal history with himself as a sociologist and public figure, as well as his interpretations of the texts of his sociological contemporaries, the texts of the classical theorists he emulates, and the text of American society which he is attempting to read and make sense of…here there is a double-play on imagination. (Denzin 1989b: 278-279)

Here there is in fact an "imagined" interpretation of an interpretation of an interpretation- that is if Denzin is correct. In effect, then, through his description of Mills' work as a modernist text, Denzin presents perhaps the best exemplar for Mills' postmodern nature.

While Denzin may be correct that by today's standards, Mills was far from being a postmodernist (by some definitions of this word), it is hopefully clear at this point in the section that Mills undoubtedly foreshadowed some salient postmodern ideas. At a very minimum, Mills' radical and daring move in the *Sociological Imagination* to place "imagination" on equal footing with empiricism reeks of postmodernism!

However, despite his attack against "abstracted empiricism" in *The Sociological Imagination*'s third chapter, Mills undoubtedly understood the pragmatic usefulness of empirical study and the "facts" which it produced. Mills wrote of such inquiry and facts, "The purpose of empirical inquiry is to settle disagreements and doubts about facts, and thus to make arguments more fruitful by basing all sides more substantively. Facts discipline reason; but reason is the advance guard in any field of learning" (1959[1967]: 205).

Yet, Mills was acutely aware of the limitations of such facts. Demonstrating a very postmodern (and pragmatic) streak, Mills held fast to the idea that facts do not speak for themselves no matter the sophistication or precision of the methods used to create them. Mills strongly believed that the most dangerous "facts" were those uncritically accepted and unquestioned (Hartman 2006). Mirroring what might be considered a very Foucault-like position, Mills tells us that, "The very enterprise of

social science, as it determines fact, takes on political meaning. In a world of widely communicated nonsense, any statement of fact is of political and moral significance" (1959[1967]: 178).

Further speaking to Mills' post-modern leanings that this section has thus alluded too, we can also turn to the style of writing Mills began to employ near the end of his life. In addition to his toying with sociological poetry briefly explored above, Mills was bold enough to release in 1960 a sociological analysis of the Cuban Revolution via the utilization of a *fictional* Cuban revolutionary's voice! Utilizing his unique access to Cuban revolutionaries, as well as his unprecedented access to personal interviews with Fidel Castro, in *Listen Yankee* (Mills 1960), Mills attempted to capture the voice, meaning and experiences of the Cuban perspective in a wholly fictional text!

Further, we find in an unfinished manuscript "Contacting the Enemy: Tovarich" a series of letters from Mills to an *imaginary* Russian colleague. It appears that Mills' intentions in turning once again to fiction to reach sociological truths were both political and personal in nature- attempting to increase dialogue between groups of hostile peoples as well an attempt at self-scrutiny (Mills and Mills 2000).

With Mills' contingent methodology, his inclusion of "imagination" as the label to this methodology, and his use of poetry and fiction as vehicles to communicate his ideas, there are striking similarities between Mills' sociology and Stephen Tyler's 1997 statements on postmodern ethnography (written almost 40 years after Mills' death), "[postmodern ethnography's attempt is to] evoke in the minds of *both reader and writer* an emergent *fantasy* of a *possible* work of common-sense reality..," (p. 254). As a

statement of contingent, fluid and anti-empirical methodology, this statement could just as easily sum-up Mills' sociological imagination.

In addition, in showing some of Mills' early "intimations" (to borrow a word from Ritzer (1997)) of the postmodern turn years before the turn actually occurred, is the original title of that manuscript which would famously come to be known as *The Sociological Imagination.* We have already briefly discussed Mills' intentional choosing of *Imagination* in the final title of the manuscript (to form an image of what is not actually present to the senses). Yet, here I would like to return to this word because of its links to contemporary postmodernism and the links to postmodernism which also existed in Mills' original title for the book.

Both imagination and imaginary speak to something that is unreal, and both are based off the shared root word *image* (a reproduction or representation)- a base concept in postmodern discourse (Ritzer 1997 and Rosenau 1992). It seems clear that with Imagination's inclusion in the title of his opus, Mills was foreshadowing postmodernism's turn toward the unreal. This is seen not only in his critical stance toward empirical facts, but his critical questioning of whether empirical methodologies could even produce such facts. Yet, the original title to *The Sociological Imagination- Autopsy of Social Science* (Tilman 1989) spoke just as boldly to a postmodern grounding- holding strong to another postmodern claim- Baudrillard's and other postmodernists' pronunciation of sociology's demise.

Finally, if we turn once again to the modernist tool supplied to us by Ritzer (1997)- his multi-point explication on Postmodern social theory mentioned near the front

of the section- we see that Mills' writings fit neatly into each of Ritzer's components (perhaps one could argue this demonstrates the weakness in Ritzer's attempt at a definition more than it does to Mills' applicability to such a definition).

1. *According to Ritzer's first point, postmodern social theory is critical of modern society's failure to carry through with Enlightenment promises, "asking how anyone can believe that modernity has brought with it progress and hope for a still brighter future" (Ritzer 1997: 8).*

Such is Mills' trajectory in many of his books- from *The Power Elite, New Men of Power, The Causes of World War III, White Collar, Listen Yankee* and *The Sociological Imagination*- describing a social landscape that "trapped" individuals, turned them into "Cheerful Robots," and produced "rationality without reason." Mills was so critical of modernity's excesses he was disavowed by many sociological theorists of his time- labeled by these elites as merely a social critic- as were both Veblen and Riesman.

2. *Ritzer states that the second component of postmodern social theory is its rejection of grand narratives and totalizations (1997).*

Despite Denzin's (1989) claim to the contrary, Mills' inclinations were to *move away* from such totalizing positions. As already discussed, grounded in Pragmatic philosophy and Weberian methodology, Mills produced his own methodology which by design, produced a very contingent outcome in order to capture a "variety of human viewpoints" (1959[1967]:133)- which Mills argues in *The Sociological Imagination* is the goal of his

methodology. More explicitly, however, we can turn to Mills' own words to see his disavowal of meta-narratives- especially those with moral concern.

> Of course [social scientists] do talk as if the values they have selected 'transcend' Western or any other society; others speak of their standards as if they were 'immanent' within some existing society…But surely it will now be widely agreed that the values inherent in the traditions of social science are neither transcendent nor immanent. They are simply values proclaimed by many and within limits, practiced in small circles. What a man calls a moral judgment is merely his desire to generalize, and so make available for others, those values he has come to chose. (1959[1967]: 178)

3. *Postmodern social theory, according to Ritzer, is also marked by its emphasis on premodern phenomena such as reflection and personal experience.*

In addition to "biography's" inclusion into Mills' methodology we can turn to the earlier sections within our present study to see the inclusion of personal experience within Mills' work- albeit much of it likely occurring on an unconscious level. Further, we can look toward Professor Hofstadter's critique of Mills' *White Collar*. In a 1952 letter to Mills, Hofstadter attacks Mills for what he feels is an "overly projective book, in the psychological meaning of the word…You detest white collar people too much…perhaps because in some intense way you identify with them" (quoted in part from Horowitz 1983:250-1).

Finally, in speaking to Mills' applicability to Ritzer's claim that postmodern social theory is distinguished in part by the inclusion of personal experience and reflection, we can turn to Mills himself: "…the most admirable thinkers within the scholarly community you have chosen to join do not split their work from their lives…you must learn to use your life experiences in your intellectual work. (1959[1967]: 195-196). Once again, we find a Mills who seems to fit Ritzer's definition

4. ***Ritzer's fourth point is that postmodern social theory rejects disciplinary boundaries, pointing out that Baudrillard sees his theories as a sort of "fiction, science fiction,[and] poetry" (Ritzer 1997:9).***

Previously discussed in some detail earlier in this section, little more needs to be said of Mills' tendency toward exploding barriers between sociology, poetry and fiction.

5. ***Lastly, Ritzer claims that a hallmark of postmodern social theory is its tendency to shock the reader rather than to be objective, and that it often achieves this through a more literary style***.

Mills, much in line with this last point, infamously attacks Parsons in *The Sociological Imagination*'s second chapter for his lack of literary skill by quoting excessively long passages from Parsons' *The Social System,* only to jab at the end of the passage (and the start of Mills' own chapter), "Perhaps some readers will now feel a desire to turn to the next chapter; I hope they will not indulge the impulse" (1959[1967]: 26). Mills goes on to translate several more Parsons passages, finally telling the reader

in a shockingly humorous statement, "In a similar fashion, I suppose, one could translate the 555 pages of *The Social System* into about 150 pages of straightforward English. The result would not be very impressive" (1959[1967]: 31).

    5.2   Section Conclusion

    Was Mills a postmodernist? Who knows? However, it seems altogether clear that he foreshadowed many salient post-modern ideas. And while some such as Denzin read Mills today and see Mills' text wrapped in modernist ideologies, if placed in the context of his time and the sociological heavyweights of his day, what Mills was writing was as provocative and "out there" as some of Baudrillard's texts are in context of today's sociology- it is all a matter of degrees. Studying sociology under the shadows of Merton's and Parsons' overbearing structural pull on sociology- a shadow the discipline as a whole is perhaps just now emerging from- and writing in opposition to the statistical turn that he saw emerging within the discipline; Mills stood alone in producing texts that stood apart from and in open revolt to the canopy of his day. Fighting for his own autonomy, all the while writing about the loss of just such autonomy; lamenting the "Personality Market" that America had become, while simultaneously cultivating the outlandish and crude personality now inexorably connected to his name; producing fiction and poetry and constantly fretting over "style" while the discipline around him increasingly lost the ability to speak to, much less be understood by larger publics, Mills was as postmodern for his day as Baudrillard or any other similar writer is for our own time.

In a very real sense, Mills took on the persona and style of his long dead but not forgotten grandfather- the outlandish cowboy from Texas who refused to succumb to the urbanizing and structurally shifting world around him. Alone and isolated on the frontier plains of American academia, Mills with a gun on one side and a pen on the other, refused to follow in the steps of his father's march into the dark and depressed urbanized white collared lonely masses. Standing intentionally apart from the academic community of his day, Mills staked out a homestead that placed him isolated and alone in a sociology that Riesman defined as "The wild, wild west of the social sciences." But it was only from here that Mills could take aim at those power elites who were attempting to reign-in his grandfather's mythical landscape of the free and unrestrained cowboy into a formulaic and stifling post-modern machine which would come to imprison his dad. Longing for the autonomous life his grandfather lived, fearful of the white-collar existence his father endured, Mills, in a fashion, transformed himself into a postmodern cowboy amidst a lonely crowd of cheerful robots.

6. CONCLUSIONS

It is good that Mills is still read today. It would be undoubtedly better if people understood in a more systematic way what he was attempting to get across. Mills, like Veblen, Riesman and a very small group of others, was one of the few to diagnose the distinguishing characteristics of the new emerging era. What Mills and this small cadre of intellectuals also did, however, was to demonstrate the link between culture and psyche; they told us that to gain insight into one, is to gain insight into the other- so long as one utilizes a sociological imagination to make this connection.

On some level, following the lead of Mills and those theorists discussed throughout these pages, this project has hinted at the impact and promise that psychoanalytic theory has had on sociology; it has undoubtedly influenced many of the "greats" who are still read within sociological and broader intellectual circles. Specific to sociology, however, are the capabilities inherent to psychoanalytic insights to link the competing and parochial endeavors of contemporary sociological thought- the individual to culture and both of these to structure. And while many have criticized psychoanalytic approaches for their non-empirical nature (which is a way of framing that groups it into notions of mysticisms and the unreal- a charge unfortunately often levied at Jung), we can turn to existential and pragmatic philosophy's influences on Mills' thought as well as Weber's, to understand the non-empirical nature of sociology's base unit of analysis- the individual. In pointing to the all-important and fundamental position that the non-empirical holds in our lives and those disciplines that study this; that is for the hardcore

empiricist who can still not accept this proposition, I simply ask, "How much does a thought weigh?"

Others, yet, may still criticize this work from a psychoanalytic standpoint, arguing that what has been written here is nothing more or less than a projection of my own psyche onto the page. This is a fair criticism, for it speaks to an extreme subjectivism which fields such as ethnomethodology are still grappling with today. It is true, not only *may* this present project be a projection, *it likely is*. One simply need to look at the etymology of the words "project" and "projection" to understand the inherent logic and truth found within this position. And yet, our inability to completely escape subjectivism is not inherently a bad thing. As Miller tells us, "The experience of one individual, despite their subjectivity, can have universal validity because [the individual and his or her subjective experience can] represent society as a whole" (1991: 85). In these words we also find the essential wisdom in Durkheimian theory ([1893]1965; [1893]1965)- society and the individual, collective consciousness and personal consciousness are *of the same fabric*.

So yes, this may all be my psyche's projection onto these pages and hence not "objective." But to hold this position as a point of attack is to hold the position that the attack itself derives from projection mechanisms of the attacker- thus denying any objective basis in its criticism of my alleged subjectivism. Ultimately to his position I simply respond as Mestrovic eloquently does, "To wait for some magical, pure moment of objectivity is to preclude the possibility of meaningful discourse" (Mestrovic 1996).

Or, as Mills more bluntly put it, "[Perhaps] everything you write…isn't about anything at all but your own god damned self…" (quoted from Gillam 1981).

In taking Mills at his word, in attempting to approach and understand his intellectual thought via his subjective and private experiences as a young child, it strikes me how much of what Mills wrote half a century ago still applies today. In education, it is at this point, undeniable the inroads that corporate, government and military institutions have made into higher education some 50 years after Mills warned us of this encroaching trend. We are no longer confronted with a Cold War, but the perplexingly more ominous and wider ranging Global War on Terror. Higher education, in its pursuit of grants, of honor and of prestige, is being co-opted by the furtherance of those technologies and insights which help fight this simulacra of war. Mills undoubtedly would have had much to say to the fact that his old school, Texas A&M, elected Robert Gates, former head of the Central Intelligence Agency and now acting Defense Secretary as its President; and undoubtedly, Mills would not have missed the opportunity to attack the establishment of Department of Homeland Security- funded institutes at Texas A&M and abroad.

Likewise, Mills would have likely been alarmed at how extensive the co-option of higher education is by other elite spheres. Developing trends indicate just how correct Mills was. Currently at the University of Georgia's J.M. Tull School of Accounting, according to one of its instructors and doctoral candidates, Sean McGuire (2007), classes are sold to corporate sponsors. The department receives corporate money to sponsor a class, and in return for this payment, the corporations receive a captive audience to

recruit from: having its logo placed on all paperwork handed from the professor to the students and is given access to the class several times a semester in order to give recruiting presentations. By now, both Veblen and Mills have surely rolled over in their graves.

Finally, in speaking to Mills' all-consuming concern with the loss of autonomous agency amidst a white-collar world controlled by a power elite, we can see the extensions of his theories laid-out in *White Collar* during the 1940s and 1950s as being even more applicable today than even in his own time. Bemoaning American culture as the "Great Salesroom" and the emerging "Personality Market" as being aspects of post-modern culture that defied Marxian analysis, there is little doubt today as to the validity of Mills' observations.

In *The Managed Heart*, Hoschild (1983) has previously gathered data to support Mills' proposition of a personality market- she located one in the airline industry. Yet today, unable to distinguish differences between the plethora of goods and services available within the great salesroom, emotional commodities have perhaps become the one distinguishable trait separating Nike from Addidas, McDonald's from Burger King, Coca-Cola from Pepsi, Honda from Toyota, or Johnny Carrino's from Olive Garden. One simply need witness advertisements to understand what Mills spoke of some fifty years ago in regards to the personality marketplace's comodification of emotions:

McDonald's. "I'm Loving It," and "We'll Make You Smile"

Hummer SUV. "Get your Girl On"

MasterCard. "Two front row tickets at Yankee Stadium $465; two hotdogs

$13; watching your son catch his first major-league baseball…Priceless"

Allstate. "You're in Good Hands with Allstate"

Pepsi. "The Joy of Pepsi"

Nike. "Just Do It"

L'Oreal. "Because I'm Worth It"

Mazda. "Zoom, Zoom"

Doublemint gum. "Double your pleasure. Double your fun"

GE. "We bring good things to life"

Wheaties. "Breakfast of Champions"

Olive Garden. "When you're here- you're family"

These slogans, and the millions more like them, tell us nothing of what the product is, much less what it offers or how it differs from our other choices- they simply tell us *how we should feel*. In the end, the cheerful robot as cheerful consumer is buying back an emotional state which was lost amidst its entry into the alienating white-collar arena of the American culture.

Further to Mills' point that this post-modern turn defies Marxian analysis is the consumption of labor that goes hand in hand with the personality market. And while Mills' analysis never went this far, it is the logical end to the trajectory he early-on identified. While Marx was reacting against the alienating shift in labor practice- from labor for one's self to the selling of labor to another- the post-modern turn identified by

Mills has moved alarmingly past this trend. Ritzer (1993), depicting a world similar to Mills' post-modern machine, has previously discussed the willingness of the cheerful robot to engage in free labor. Examples he uses are the throwing away of our trash at fast food establishments- labor we engage in for free that we once were paid to do.

And yet, in the some 15 years since Ritzer's McDonaldization thesis- a book which by the way, completely ignored the emotional component of the trend identified by Mills- we see labor practices have shifted once again. Less and less are we engaging in free labor as Ritzer pointed out, but instead, in defiance of Marxian analysis, *we are paying for the right to engage in labor that we once were paid for!!* From the nationwide chain Build-a-Bear where customers pay a high premium in money to enter a simulacra factory and build their own teddy bear; You Cook it Steaks!, an establishment selling raw steaks which customers have the option of cooking themselves at a tableside grill; or Bath Junkie where customers enter a cross between a chemistry lab and factory and pay for the right to create, mix, color and then bottle their own bath products; who needs high overhead labor costs when in Mills' post-modern age, the cheerful robot is gleefully willing to pay the factory for the right to engage in labor that the cheerful robot was once paid for.

Much can be said about this emerging trend- and much needs to be said about it. Concepts of alienation from self and product immediately come to mind. But in terms of our current concluding remarks on C. Wright Mills and the applicability of his ideas to current times, perhaps Mills' notions of craftsmanship are most appropriate in discussing this radical shift toward the consumption of labor. The cheerful robot, cut off from what

Veblen called a natural instinct toward workmanship- a term synonymous with Mills' craftsmanship (see earlier for his six-part definition)- is sold back a simulacra of this very instinct as we willingly pay for the right to engage in what was once our own natural and free inclination. The result of this extreme and alarming co-option of our natural relation to the world (idle curiosity as expressed through workmanship) is the ultimate false self- the very hallmark of postmodern culture and character type identified by Mills, Riesman and more recently Lasch, Mestrovic and others.

Ultimately, Mills concluded, (seemingly in his private life, as well as in his intellectual thought) that the agent in post-modernity could not simply trust those institutions, people of power, or mechanism making-up society- Mills was clear on this matter, describing in *The Sociological Imagination* a social landscape that is eerily similar to Giddens' "juggernaut"- one of fast-paced and cataclysmic change, confronting the agent with more information then the agent could ever possible hope to understand- in this regard it is also similar to the other-directed character type. Mills, seemingly speaking to his own traumas as a young boy, saw agents in such an epoch not tied to each other or to institutions by an optimistic and naive sense of "trust," but instead, saw the agent "trapped" and hopelessly alone in what Mills called "this Age of Fact, [where] information often dominates their attention and overwhelms their capacity to assimilate it," leaving them as Riesman described of the other-directed individual, alone, powerless and overwhelmed with "curdled indignation": a statement on both the cheerful robot of the post-modern era, as well as that of a lonely boy attempting to find attachment and meaning to a family and post-modern world that seemed to offer him neither.

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