The Intellectual as a Free and Rational Man: On Mills’ The Sociological Imagination

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As C. Wright Mills’ most enduring book, The Sociological Imagination (in the following abbreviated as TSI) has been a classic for many scholars in social studies, as well as in literature, art, architecture, psychology, etc. Nevertheless, merely acknowledging its academic influence risks neglecting another important achievement of TSI. Written in Mills’ academically mature age, TSI is not only academic, but also personal. Considering the fact that the book was written only several years prior to the author’s death, we can say that TSI is at the same time a book containing Mills’ autobiography, or, in a larger sense, an American’s intellectual life experience in an age of “uneasiness and indifference”. [1] This, of course, is in accordance with how Mills defines the sociological imagination as the ability to “grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society”. [2] In TSI, Mills intends to combine his own career as a sociologist and the American academic history, to offer an image of the intellectual with the fundamental ideas of freedom and reason inherited from the era of Enlightenment in the western society. In fact, in addition to TSI (1959), Mills also indicates in his other works White Collar (1951) and The Power Elite (1956) that intellectuals should be responsible for educating
and enlightening the public and thus cultivate free and rational men among them. In order to play this social role, the intellectual himself should be a free and rational man in the first place. This article tries to point out that, although comparatively seldom noticed or discussed, Mills' idea of the intellectual as a free and rational man, the central concern of his autobiography, runs throughout the whole TSI.

I. Why a Free and Rational Man: TSI as Mills' Intellectual Autobiography

To many scholars, being value-neutral most probably means to be factually objective (no intrusion of personal or emotional expressions), without going to extremes (in order not to pose polemic issues by moral or political implications), or, to be politically correct (a radical may not be welcomed by the academia). But Mills seems never to be such a scholar. In his major academic works, you can always read his personal experiences mixed with larger American social and historical milieu and context. He is bold enough to bring out the big names, for instance, Talcott Parsons, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, questioning their abstraction or practicality either in language or in thoughts, never afraid of making enemies, if it is for the purpose of academic debates. He is labeled as a radical, a political left, even a sexist and a racist, for his progressive thinking as well as the lack of concern about woman and race in his works. Most of all, he is never afraid of being personal in his academic writing. As he puts in his definition of sociological imagination, you can never be a good sociologist without taking your own biography into consideration.

Of course, Mills never forgets his own identity as a sociologist. In his writing, Mills tries to translate personal ravels into academic thinking. As a social scientist, Mills insists that no matter what focus of the studies is, the society, the history, or the human in both of them, the main goal of social studies ultimately points to the social and historical meaning of the individual. [3] This, to a certain degree, sets up another basic tone of TSI. Since doing social studies is essentially to study various human beings, it is natural for a sociologist to examine his own career as an intellectual in his academic writing. Perhaps this seems to be a little personal, which is supposed to be avoided in academic works. However, even Mills himself never pretends that academic is impersonal and TSI truly shows how the struggle of a man is turned into academic writing as well as how personal troubles are defined into public issues. These personal struggles and troubles imbedded in such an academic masterpiece like TSI makes it possible for the reader, especially the reader as a
scholar, to associate personal feelings and experiences with one's own academic life, thus realizing that one is not alone and not an abnormal or a crazy person. \cite{4} In the above sense, \textit{TSI} is important not only in terms of academic criterion, but also in terms of intellectual self-reflection. Mills' intellectual autobiography, to a certain degree, serves as a good example of a scholar who can write personally, but never loses his academic insights.

The capacity of being able to achieve this combination of academic and personal certainly comes largely from Mills' being trained as a Ph. D. student at the University of Texas, as well as his years of working at the Columbia University as a sociologist. However, Mills seems never to feel at ease with his academic career, instead he even admits that he is intellectually, politically, and morally alone, and is upset about what he sees is wrong with academia. \cite{5} Nowadays, so many young scholars may have the same uneasiness as Mills' and they also see that what is happening in the academic circle is not correct or reasonable, but they will never feel the necessity of thinking too much about it. Or, many young scholars will choose to be what Mills terms as "the adapted man", who decides to accept what he sees and makes every effort to become one part of the academic machine. Others, out of either tiredness or lack of capacity, even give up being academic at all or end up with being cynics who adopt the idea that "living well is the best revenge". \cite{6} In a sense, such scholars give up both academic and personal. Giving up academic means you do not think much, which results in doing not much; giving up personal means you are lost either in the technocratic world or money-making milieu.

But Mills grasps both. He probes into what is exactly wrong with sociology. He raises questions like: What makes sociology a highly abstract and unintelligent discipline? How come so many social scientists do not write and speak plainly? Why does a young scholar, who does not belong to any of big schools of experts, meet with unexpected difficulties on his academic road? Why don't scholars care about politics? How does the power relation work in current academia? By looking for the answers to such questions, Mills eventually works out a space in which personal meets academic, and thus finishing \textit{TSI} as an intellectual autobiography. And he did it splendidly.

Mills' first target is the grand theory. In this part, Mills critiques the lack of clarity and intelligibility from the grand theorists, who intend to make their theory high above the understanding even by scholars in the sociological circle, not to mention the public. By translating from Talcott Parsons' long and confusing passages
into a few easily understood lines, Mills states the weak point of the grand theory, that is, the practitioners of it obviously neglect the problems in their historical and structural contexts, which prevents them from making “effort to describe and explain human conduct and society plainly” [7]. Even there are types of social studies of the specific group of people or events or opinions, they are likely to fall into what Mills calls abstracted empiricism, which confuses methods with methodologies, confines the research objects into narrow perspective or short span of time for the sake of convenience or efficiency, or results thinly due to the limitation of money and time. [8] If the above two trends that Mills observes are merely about working styles, then the following two kinds of realities obviously concern how scholars react with their social and historical structure. By “practicality” Mills wants to reveal the fact that American social scientists misuse their so-called value-neutrality without realizing being ideologically manipulated by the power structure both in and outside universities. What’s more, the rise of administrative technician or businessman indeed paralyses social scientists’ political consciousness and their ability to grasp political problems. [9] This, naturally, leads to another problem, that is, the bureaucratic ethos. In a typically technocratic society like America, social sciences have resorted to administrative uses or bureaucratic purposes to a large extent. Due to this, many scholars become what Mills calls “administrative technicians” or “academic statesman”. As a result, social theory becomes justification of authority and research serves to produce a more effective and efficient bureaucratic machine. [10]

The reason why Mills lists out these problems is what he personally sees and experiences during his career as a sociologist. He actually writes down his own biography as an important part of the whole American intellectual biography. By doing this, Mills intends to remind the American scholar of the crisis, that is, intellectual freedom and reason are being threatened by the prevalent academic styles that are taken for granted as natural and proper. Therefore, Mills’ autobiography is about the intellectual’s fight against such hypocritical and irrational working styles and his pursuit of real freedom and reason in his academic career.

What Mills’ observes in American academia are not isolated cases. As a matter of fact, it is very common in a world-wide range. As a Chinese scholar, I can see such styles as grand theory, abstracted empiricism, types of practicality, and bureaucratic ethos heavily practiced in Chinese academia as well, for the sake of efficiency, convenience, and other unknown reasons. Meanwhile, till now I have
never seen any Chinese scholar like Mills who stands out and bravely tells the truth of the Emperor’s new costume, and at the same time combines the academic and the personal so well. We can usually read articles and blogs written to show complaints, rumors, or even abuses, but seldom rational observance and analysis based on objective researches and convincing arguments. The intellectual freedom and reason is defeated by academic authority and fads. As a result, the Emperor’s new costume becomes a certain fashion, and many scholars follow suits and join the street processions showing their highly abstract and newly-decorated new theories, without paying attention to social and historical realities that they ought to be faced with.

What keeps Mills an indispensable and brilliant voice is that he does not stop at the point where problems are brought out for us only to see. He goes further by asking what kind of danger these problems may pose to intellectual life. His answer is: such styles of work, grand theory and abstracted empiricism, if combined with their practicality and bureaucratic ends, will “constitute a grievous threat to the intellectual promise of social science and as well to the political promise of the role of reason in human affairs” \[^{[11]}\]. Not only reason of course, but also freedom, which are the central concerns of Mills’ reflection about intellectual life, for he strongly believes that freedom and reason are the core values of the civilization of the Western world. \[^{[12]}\] According to his observation, Mills takes a dim view of the due place of freedom and reason in current academia, if no one really understands the threats that the current academia imposes on intellectual freedom and reason.

Mills does not only criticize, but also sets up principles of working as a sociologist. In the appendix to *TSI*, titled “On Intellectual Craftsmanship”, Mills goes in details to the specific procedures of sociological working, such as taking notes of ideas and key terms, organizing scattered clues into logical train of thoughts, working out a project outline, employing theoretical models to build one’s own framework. Most important of all, he does not forget to remind the students of sociology of the idea of working with the sociological imagination;

Above all, do not give up your moral and political autonomy by accepting in somebody else’s terms the illiberal practicality of the bureaucratic ethos or the liberal practicality of the moral scatter. Know that many personal troubles cannot be solved merely as troubles, but must be understood in terms of public issues—and in terms of the problems of history making. \[^{[13]}\]

Note that by the term “moral and political autonomy”, Mills is in fact stressing
again his most-concerned ideals: freedom and reason. The scholar should enjoy the freedom of thinking and reasoning. To a certain degree, “On Intellectual Craftsmanship” is totally about how Mills himself works as a social scientist in his academic career, methodologically and theoretically. Therefore, this appendix indeed serves as the best footnote to the whole book of TSI as Mills’ intellectual autobiography. All in all, TSI is an autobiography of the intellectual who seeks for freedom and reason, both academically and politically.

II. Intellectual as a Free and Rational Man: Anti-alienation

Mills calls the post-modern period The Fourth Epoch, which follows the previous eras of Antiquity, The Dark Age, and The Modern Age. The ideological mark of The Fourth Epoch, according to Mills, is that “the ideas of freedom and of reason have become moot; that increased rationality may not be assumed to make for increased freedom”\(^{14}\). Obviously, Mills wants to remind us of the fact that, although our society is organized based on the principles of rationality, it does not necessarily mean that this may increase freedom or reason in our life. In a word, this is a world of rationality without reason. The instrumental rationality, of which is the organizing principle of the technocratic society, indeed never brings to us more freedom. Therefore we have to be aware that freedom and reason are closely related to each other. In order to understand this, we need to know exactly what Mills means by freedom and the relationship between freedom and reason:

Freedom is not merely the chance to do as one pleases; neither is it merely the opportunity to choose between set alternatives. Freedom is, first of all, the chance to formulate the available choices, to argue over them—and then, the opportunity to choose. That is why freedom cannot exist without an enlarged role of human reason in human affairs.\(^{15}\)

Mills’ definition of freedom obviously demands a very high requirement for reason, for without reason, how can one “formulate the available choices” and “argue over them” and then have the ability to make choices? Then, the question will be: do we have enough reason in our time? The answer seems to be: maybe not. The reason might be simple; we are living in this Fourth Epoch in which Karl Marx’s alienation still prevails and turns to be in an even worse situation. However, it seems that Mills does not think Marxism very high in TSI, for in the book he writes that the two dominant ideologies in current Western society, Liberalism and Marxism, fail in
explaining the new developments of our time. \[16\] No wonder it is pointed out that one of the shortcomings of TSI is its lack of Marxist analysis. \[17\] But, is this true? Of course not. First of all, in TSI, Mills admits that he is inspired by many great thinkers back in time, such as Georg Simmel, Graham Wallas, Fromm, Riesman, Whyte, including Karl Marx. Second, Mills does go very deep into the problem of alienation in his book, not only in Marx’s very term “alienation”, but also with his own interpretations based on the social realities of The Fourth Epoch. \[18\]

Under the circumstance of The Fourth Epoch, it seems that the intellectual does not have so many choices, not to mention the fact that these choices are not formulated by the intellectual themselves, but imposed on them in the state of alienation by either manipulation, management, or even blind drift as observed by Mills. Consequently, according to Mills, there are at least three types of “alienated man”: the trapped man, the adapted man, and the cheerful robot.

The first type, that is, the trapped man, may be most commonly seen in our society. These men cannot relate his individual problems with the social and historical structure as a whole, thus feel lost in how to solve these problems. \[19\] If an intellectual is trapped, in Mills’ sense, it refers to a scholar who is only obsessed with his own affairs, for instance, his pay, his publications, his academic status, his uneasiness with his colleagues and the dean, etc., unaware that all those problems are caused in fact by a larger institutional as well as bureaucratic force that lies behind. He becomes a part of his own problem. This trapped intellectual never recognizes the real reasons that caused his state of being trapped, thus missing the chances to change his awkward situation and even make changes to be involved in the process of history making. They have neither freedom nor reason.

The adapted man, as mentioned above, is the man who regulates his own behavior and thoughts to be in accordance with the rules, principles, or requirements of organization, and his adaptation “results not only in the loss of chance, and in due course, of his capacity and will to reason; it also affects his chances and his capacity to act as a free man” \[20\]. If the reason why the trapped man cannot find a way out is that he lacks the capacity and has no chance, then the adapted man has the capacity and chance but volunteers to lose them. This, obviously, is more often seen among the scholars, who are better educated and thus own more cultural capital to change their fate, being able to exert their power in social and historic reformation. But in fact, the adapted man is the least likely to be involved in social changes, instead, he changes himself. We should know the fact that the adapted man is usually very
smart. Unlike the trapped man, he is more active and ambitious. He knows the
direction to which the wind blows. He adapts for the sake of adaption itself, thus
becoming a part of his own adaption. They seem to be rational, in the sense that
they can always make a worldly success, but you can never say he is free, for
everything he does he has to conform to the organization and power.

Then, the cheerful robot, is the type of man who is neither trapped nor adapted,
for he is unaware of the coercion or manipulation or pressure behind, instead, he is
willing to be controlled and ruled, admits the legitimacy of the status quo, feels
happy that life is so. Cheerful robots are given birth by “chemical and psychiatric
means, by steady coercion and by controlled environment; but also by random
pressures and unplanned sequences of circumstances” [21]. Cheerful robots made by
“chemical and psychiatric means” can be seen in Aldous Huxley’s Brave New World,
in which people always feel happy, guaranteed by the highly developed science and
technology. When people feel not so good, they will be offered a medicine called
“soma” to relieve them from pain and doubts, then they can maintain their
happiness. The second type of cheerful robots produced by “steady coercion and by
controlled environment” of course are the typical citizens in Oceania in George
Orwell’s Nineteen-Eighty Four. The cheerful robots made by “random pressures and
unplanned sequences of circumstances” seem to have not appeared in literary
depiction, yet it is not difficult for us to find such ones in our daily life. Think about
those people who cannot leave their mobile phones for a while even they are talking or
eating or in the toilet or anywhere he or she goes. If Karl Marx by alienation means
the worker becomes an appendage of the machine, then nowadays people become also
a part of the mobile phone itself, hence the new alienation. Naturally, the mobile
phone’s impact on people’s life is random and unplanned, for people never intend or
expect that they will become machines. So many people take for granted that they
cannot live without the mobile phone which brings to them not only convenience, but
also everything that they do not have in reality, thus feeling is cheerful to live.
Cheerful robots feel they are happy and free, but without reason.

The existence of the cheerful robots also explains perfectly the fact that Mills
observes that “all men do not naturally want to be free; that all men are not willing or
not able, as the case may be, to exert themselves to acquire the reason that freedom
requires” [21]. Sadly enough, this does not only happen among the mass, who may
not be aware that they are not free, but also among intellectuals, who are aware of
their situation but unwilling or not daring to challenge the status quo. Always
remember that there are trapped men and adapted men among intellectuals. Why change? Why freedom? If it costs too much or it has to be done with the price of freedom itself. Alienation, to many, is much better than being lonely and isolated, and as a result there is even no chance to be alienated at all. It is the same that when workers say that they prefer to be exploited by the capitalists, for it is much better than being unemployed and homeless, and as a result there is even no chance to be exploited at all.

Mills’ autobiographic observation gives a relentless anatomy of the modern intellectual life, bringing the fundamental spiritual crisis in this era of alienation. Based on his solid sociological researches and his keen insight into human nature, Mills seems to have given hints to us already in his TSI: the intellectual, endowed with the task of enlightening people with the idea of freedom and reason, should be the avant-garde to fight against the widespread modern disease called alienation. First, the intellectual should fight against the irrational working styles in academia, that is, academic alienation. Then, he should fight against the irrational living styles in the society, that is, the social alienation. Ralph Waldo Emerson, also with a warning towards the problem of alienation, critiques that due to the modern social division, men have become the tools that they work with, for instance, “the priest becomes a form; the attorney a statue-book; the mechanic a machine; the sailor a rope of the ship”. Then, the scholar is now only a thinker—a tool for thinking, instead a man thinking, who, with spiritual integrity, refuses to be alienated as fragments. Only by refusing and fighting against alienation, can the modern intellectual find his way into freedom and reason. In this sense, Mills says that the alienated man “is the antithesis of the western image of the free man”.

Therefore, Mills’ autobiography obviously responds to the American scholarly tradition initiated by Emerson, thus locating himself in the whole American intellectual history of anti-alienation.

III. Intellectual as a Free and Rational Man: Breaching the Gap between Academia and Public

In his academic writing, Mills is always concerned about the relationship between a free, rational public and the democratic society. He insists that the former is the solid foundation of the latter. Meanwhile Mills also gives emphasis to the difference between the public and the mass. In TSI, Mills again distinguishes these two: the mass usually do not know that their personal troubles have to be understood
in terms of social structure and this results in their inability to work out solutions; while the genuine public are aware that these personal problems are also shared by others and can be only solved by modifying the structure of the group, even the structure of the whole society. \[25\] Mills thinks that without the genuine public, a democratic society is impossible. Based on this, Mills even holds that America, similarly without such a mature public, is not altogether a democratic country, except for “in form and in the rhetoric of expectation”. \[26\] It is exactly at this point that we can read Mills’ unremitting critiques not only within the narrow circle of sociology but also towards the democracy of American society as a whole, showing his effort to bring his academic thinking to the public, in the hope that the ordinary people can realize that the problems they are faced with are not personal at all, but intrinsically public on the level of the country. Therefore, Mills serves as an American scholar “who raises himself from private considerations, and breathes and lives on public and illustrious thoughts” \[27\]. Only by this, can people have the opportunity to undergo the change from mass to the public, who manage to make social and historic, instead of only personal changes.

In fact, Mills here sets up a typical example of how an intellectual plays the social role of enlightening the ordinary people and cultivating genuine public among them. But at the same time he has to consider the paradox in reality, that is, on the one hand, there are newer means of history making which encourage men to make history, while on the other hand those ideologies that offer hope—for instance those of the 1960’s—for social changes at the same time have declined and collapsed. This, inevitably, leads to the default of the intellectual community. Therefore, Mills asks such questions:

Where is the intelligentsia that is carrying on the big discourse of the Western world and whose work as intellectuals is influential among parties and publics and relevant to the great decisions of our time? Where are the mass media open to such men? Who among those who are in charge of the two-party state and its ferocious military machine are alert to what goes on in the world of knowledge and reason and sensibility? Why is the free intellect so divorced from decisions of power? Why does there now prevail among men of power such a higher and irresponsible ignorance? \[28\]

Obviously, Mills wants to suggest that the intellectual is obligated to speak not only to his academic circle, but also to the public, and most important, this public
speaking ought to reach the decision-making level, that is, the power. But by what ways? Mills believes that mass media might be an efficient channel through which intellectuals can have their voices heard by the public and eventually by the power. Ironically, this era is not only an era in which mass media is most highly developed, but also the one in which mass media is the least interested in intellectual voices. What can cause sensations are sexual scandals, celebrity gossips, romances, murders, unrealistic illusions, etc., which may replace people's uneasiness and dullness in their daily life for a while. Who cares about the square scholar talking in rage about freedom and reason, which are too abstract for them to think, and about vote, tax-paying, fair education, better environment, which are too far way for them to concern? In addition to the mass, people with power—who are in charge of the state and the military machines—seem also unprecedentedly indifferent to the ideals that the intellectual adheres to.

With the images of the trapped man, the adapted man and the cheerful robot in mind, together with the ruthless mass and the self-conceited power, we may find it rather difficult and unrealistic to be an intellectual with freedom and reason in such an era of uneasiness, indifference, and ignorance. But if depraved of freedom and reason, can the intellectual be called intellectual anyway?

This, again, leads us to the very central question of power and knowledge, that is, how should the intellectual face power? Concerning this, Edward Said once states that

The individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an altitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public. And this role has an edge to it, and cannot be played without a sense of being someone whose place it is publicly to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them), to be someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations, and whose raison d'être is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug. The intellectual does so on the basis of universal principles: that all human beings are entitled to expect decent standards of behavior concerning freedom and justice from worldly powers or nation, and that deliberate or inadvertent violations of these standards need to be testified and fought against courageously. [29]

Undoubtedly Said's intellectual plays a rather explicit political role, the image of which is a person capable of public articulation, resisting against power, daring to question and confront, but not to conform. Most important of all, is that all these
articulation, questioning, confrontation, must be based on universal principles. What are the universal principles? According to Said, the first one is freedom and the second one is justice. If we talk about justice in the behavior of "worldly powers or nation", in fact we are still talking about reason, while Said uses the term "raison d'être". In this sense, what Said expects is the same as Mills asks for the intellectual, that is, with their fundamental ideas of freedom and reason, the intellectual speaks publicly and speaks to the power courageously.

Nevertheless, the ability to speak truth to the power relies largely on the intellectual's relationship with the power. Suppose you yourself are a member of the status quo, how would you be able to resist and tell the truth? But one interesting phenomenon in nowadays colleges and universities is that so many scholars have become and are managing to be what Mills calls the "academic statesman". They are so glad to be, but not to be afraid of being, "co-opted" both by the institution and the power, for it means stability, safety, as well as worldly good. Naturally such scholars by and by will lose their capacity of speaking truth or asking embarrassing questions to the power, for they themselves become the power itself. This is why Emerson warns that what we should do to such intellectuals is to "wake them and they shall quit the false good, and leap to the true, and leave governments to clerks and desks". This distance between the intellectual and the power makes it possible for the former to take a critical stand towards the latter.

It should be noted that what Emerson suggests implies another seldom-talked ability and task of the intellectual: a scholar's capacity to speak truth to his colleagues to remind them of their obligation and responsibility as intellectuals. As "an intellectual frequently skeptical of intellectuals" termed by Todd Gitlin, Mills in details discusses this task of the intellectual in TSI. In terms of power and knowledge, or, the relationship between the intellectual and the power, according to Mills, social scientists belong to the group of people who differ from other three types of men in modern society, the first type being the men with the power and quite aware of the consequence of their action, the second type being others with power but unaware of its consequence, and the third type being the majority without power and unable to act to associate his personal troubles with structural changes. Then, social scientists are people who "are aware of social structure and somewhat aware of the historical mechanics of its movement". Thus, the social scientist, who is endowed with the ideals of freedom and reason, should address each of the other three types of men by imputing responsibility and helping them with connecting their personal
trouble with public issues. [32]

Whether your colleague is an academic statesman or a bureaucratic technician, a self-conceited adapted man or a politically-indifferent cynic, they can be categorized into one of the three types. For in such a case, it is the intellectual himself who gives up their ideals of freedom and reason and makes himself a member of either the power or the mass. Therefore, as an intellectual in either Said’s or Mills’ sense, you should realize that it is your educational as well as public task to address them about their responsibility. Why? Because if an intellectual intends to link the academia to the public, he is not only bringing himself, but also his intellectual community to the public, which may exert a much greater influence than that of his individual effort. Thus, the intellectual’s speaking publicly actually includes his speaking to his colleagues. Also, comparatively, your colleagues are certainly much closer to the ideals of freedom and reason than the power men who are more easily self-conceited and the mass who are less educated, hence possibly the more easily enlightened group of people. Last, the more intellectuals are enlightened, the more ordinary people will be enlightened by intellectuals; the more freedom and reason the intellectual enjoys, the more freedom and reason will the public enjoy.

From the beginning to the end of TSI, Mills tries to offer us this image of the intellectual who based on the ideals of freedom and reason tries to cross the gap between the academia and the public. He writes about great principles, but also particular issues; he talks about not only problems, but also solutions; he not only criticizes others, but also reflects himself; he speaks academically, as well as politically. I think this explains why TSI has always been a classic and Mills’ influence is not merely academic, but educational, capable of being interpreted by many intellectuals who are not willing to give up their ideals and refuse to be co-opted, and thus gaining courage and confidence to go on. This explains why Mills as well as his works are better remembered and more often celebrated compared to his contemporary social scientists such as Alvin Goldner, who is no less prolific and insightful. The reason lies in that Mills really works to breach the gap between the academia and the general public. [33]

Unfortunately, because of his ideas of political stand, Mills is always labeled as a political left and TSI is also regarded as “the intellectual armament of the New Left [...] rather than a tool that could be used from and for different political positions” [34]. I don’t think this is fair to Mills. Left wing as he is, Mills indeed cares more about the general mind quality of the modern intellectual than his political
orientation. The reason why he does not give much space for Marxism in TSI might be explained by this. No matter which political side you are on, the left or the right, the fundamental quality of the intellectual is always nothing else but these two: freedom and reason. And the intellectual with such ideals, no matter you are a socialist or a liberalist, according to Mills, is always expected to be able to translate his own problems into public concerns, thus leading the public to be on the way to social and historical changes. In fact, Mills insists his position as rather an outsider than anyone who belongs to an exact political camp. Therefore I totally agree with the comment that “from beginning to the end of his brief career, Mills was the quintessential outsider, critical of all establishments and conventions and skeptical of all efforts to harness intellect to the interests of power”[^35]. In the same sense, TSI remains a book that is inspiring to all from different political positions who are not afraid of being outsiders, who want to be free and rational in this technocratic society, who intend to maintain their enthusiasm to change the world, as only as it is an indifferent and irresponsible, unfair and unjust world.

If being anti-alienation gives the intellectual the opportunity to be free and rational, then breaching the gap between academia and public offers the intellectual the space to be free and rational. In a word, TSI is an autobiography about how Mills as an intellectual tries to liberate himself from the situation of alienation, in order to gain freedom and reason, both academically and politically, and eventually freely speaks to the public, which also includes the academic circle, that is, the academic public, with reason. According to Mills, this opportunity and space won’t appear if the intellectual is not aware that he is endowed with freedom and reason, and does not know how to use their freedom and reason, or even worse, is not willing to be free and rational.

Notes:
[^1]: C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2000), 11.
[^2]: Ibid., 6.
[^3]: Ibid., 6 – 7.
[^4]: Mandy D. Tröger, “How Can I Live with(out) C. Wright Mills? Breaking with the Disembodied Truth”, *Cultural Studies*, 3 (2012) : 175.
[^5]: Ibid., 176.
[^6]: This is from David Brooks, who wrote in his book *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper

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Class and How They Got there (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000) that more and more used-to-be bohemian intellectuals enter colleges and universities to be professors to enjoy the stable and decent life, thus they feel that this better life compensates for their unrealized political radicalism and ideals.

[7] C. Wright Mills, 33.
[8] Ibid., 64.
[9] Ibid., 99.
[10] Ibid., 117.
[11] Ibid., 118.
[12] Ibid., 179.
[13] Ibid., 226.
[14] Ibid., 167.
[15] Ibid., 174.
[16] Ibid., 167.
[17] Rick Tilman, “C. Wright Mills, The Sociological Imagination: A Reappraisal”, The American Sociology, Fall (1989): 283-287.
[18] In fact, three years after TSI, Mills published his book The Marxists (New York: Dell, 1962).
[19] C. Wright Mills, 3.
[20] Ibid., 170.
[21] Ibid., 171.
[22] Ibid., 175.
[23] Ralf Waldo Emerson, The American Scholar (New York: The Laurentian Press, 1901), 4-5.
[24] C. Wright Mills, 172.
[25] Ibid., 187.
[26] Ibid., 188.
[27] Ralf Waldo Emerson, 36.
[28] C. Wright Mills, 183.
[29] Edward Said, Representation of the Intellectual (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994), 12.
[30] Ralf Waldo Emerson, 45.
[31] Todd Gitlin, “Afterword” in C. Wright Mills, The Sociological Imagination, 229.
[32] C. Wright Mills, 185.
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