Self-Portrait

On Intellectual Craftsmanship (1952)

C. Wright Mills

Through the kind offices, and with the permission of, my colleagues at the University of Wisconsin, we have been able to retrieve and now publish for the first time the initial draft of C. Wright Mills' essay "On Intellectual Craftsmanship"—a statement which, in its expanded and corrected version, became the cornerstone of The Sociological Imagination.

What is so fascinating about this first drafting is its agenda for work which Mills was to go and do later. In effect, this working document represents nothing short of a prolegomena to his Introduction to Images of Man, *and before that, his original work design for* The Power Elite. *As a result, this draft, which Mills notes on the manuscript was "written in April 1952" and distributed for classroom use in 1955, provides a fascinating self-portrait of Mills' own sense of intellectual craftsmanship.*

With the passing of Hans H. Gerth on December 19, 1978, it is fair to say that a close to a sociological era took place. Long associated as colleague and co-worker of Mills, especially during the 1940s and the Wisconsin period, he wrote a major assessment presented at the memorial meeting for Mills at Columbia University on April 16, 1962. Since that statement, hitherto unpublished, offers a revealing insight into Mills, especially his sense of intellectual craft, it provides a fitting postscriptum to Mills' own first drafting of his most famous statement on the sociological imagination.

—IL H

Everyone seriously concerned with teaching complains that most students do not know how to do independent work. They do not know how to read, they do not know how to take notes, they do not know how to set up a problem nor how to research it. In short, they do not know how to work intellectually. Everyone says this, and in the same breath asserts: "But then, you just can't teach people how to think," which they sometimes qualify by: "At least not apart from some specific subject matter," or "At least not without tutorial instruction."

There is the complaint and there are the dogmatic answers to the complaint, all of which amount to saying: "But we cannot help them much." This essay is an attempt to help them. It is neither a statement of formal method nor an attempt to inspire. Perhaps there are already too many formal discourses on method, and certainly there are too many inspirational pieces on how to think. Neither seem to be of much use to those for whom they are apparently intended. The first does not usually touch the realities of the problem as the beginning student encounters them; the second is usually vulgar and often nonsense.

In this essay I am going to try candidly to report how I became interested in a topic I happen now to be studying, and how I am going about studying it. I know that in doing this I run the risk of failing in modesty and perhaps even of claiming some peculiar virtue for my own personal habits. I intend no such claims. I know also that it may be said: "Well, that's the way *you* work; but it's not of much use to me." To this the reply seems quite clear; it is: "Wonderful. Tell me how you work." Only by conversations in which experienced thinkers exchange information about their actual, informal ways of working can "method" ever really be imparted to the beginning student. I know of no other way in which to begin such conversations, and thus to begin what I think needs to be done, than to set forth a brief but explicit statement of one man's working habits.

I must repeat that I do not intend to write about method in any formal sense, nor, under the guise of methodology, to take up a statesman-like pose concerning the proper course for social science. So many social scientists nowadays, it seems to me, seem always to be writing about something; and, in the end, to be thinking only about their own possible thinking. This may indeed be useful to them and to their future work. But it seems to me rather less than useful to the rest of those at work in the social studies, to those who are just beginning their studies, or to those who have lived with them for quite a while.

Useful discussions of method and theory usually arise as marginal notes on work in progress or work about to get under way. In brief, "methods" are simply ways of asking and answering questions, with some assurance that the answers are more or less durable. "Theory" is simply paying close attention to the words one uses, especially their degree of generality and their interrelations. What method and theory properly amount to is clarity of conception and ingenuity of procedure, and most important, in sociology just now, the release rather than the restriction of the sociological imagination.

To have mastered "theory" and "method," in short, means to have become a self-conscious thinker, a man

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ready for work and aware of the assumptions and implications of every step he will take as he tries to find out the character and the meaning of the reality he is working on. On the contrary, to be mastered by "method" and "theory" means simply to be kept from working; from trying, that is, to find out about some area of reality. Just as the result of work is infirm without insight into the way it was achieved, so is the way meaningless without a determination that the study shall come to an end and some result be achieved. Method and theory are like the language of the country you live in: it is nothing to brag about that you can speak it, but it is a disgrace, as well as an inconvenience, if you cannot.

I forget how I became technically concerned with "stratification," but I think it must have been by reading Veblen. He had always seemed to me very loose, even vague about his "business" and "industrial" employments, which are a kind of translation of Marx for the academic American public. Marx himself, I think it must be agreed, is quite unfinished and much too simple about classes; he did not get to write a theory of classes, although Max Weber finished one version which I believe Marx would have liked. When in the early forties I began, with Hans Gerth, to translate some of Weber's writings—it was the first essay we published—certain conceptions were cleared up for me.

I then wrote a book on labor organizations and labor leaders—a politically motivated task; then a book on the middle classes—a task primarily motivated by the desire to articulate my own experience in New York City since

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1945. It was thereupon suggested by friends that I ought to round out a trilogy by writing a book on the upper classes. I think the possibility had been in my mind; my plans have always exceeded my capacities and energies. I had read Balzac off and on during the forties, and been much taken with his self-appointed task of "covering" all the major classes and types in the society of the era he wished to make his own. I had also written a paper on "The Business Elite," and had collected and arranged data about the careers of the topmost men in American politics since the Constitution. These two tasks were primarily inspired by seminar work in systematic American history.

In doing these several articles and books and in preparing courses on different strata of modern society, I had accumulated a residue of ideas and facts about the upper classes. It is especially difficult in the study of social stratification to avoid going beyond one's immediate subject, because "the reality" of any one stratum is in large part its relations to the rest. Accordingly, I began to think of a book on "The American Elite."

And yet that is not "really" how the project arose. What really happened is that the idea and the plan came out of my files; for all projects with me begin and end with them, and books are simply organized releases from the continuous work that goes into them. Presently I shall explain what these files involve, but first I must explain the ideal of intellectual craftsmanship that lies back of them and keeps me at work on them.

Life and Work

In joining the scholarly community, one of the first things I realized was that most of the thinkers and writers whom I admired never split their work from their lives. They seemed to take both too seriously to allow such dissociation, and they wanted to use each for the enrichment of the other. Yet such a split is the prevailing convention among men in general, deriving, I suppose, from the hollowness of the work which men in general now do.

I recognized that insofar as I might become a scholar, I would have the exceptional opportunity of designing a way of living which would encourage the habits of good workmanship. It was a choice of how to live as well as a choice of career; whether he knows it or not, the intellectual workman forms his own self as he works towards the perfection of his craft. And so, I came early to the conviction that to realize my own potentialities and opportunities I had to try to construct a character which had as its core the qualities of the good workman. Somehow I realized that I must learn to use my life experience in my intellectual work: continually to interpret it and to use it. It is in this sense that craftsmanship is the center of oneself and that one is personally involved in every intellectual product upon which one may work.

To say that one can "have experience," means, in part, that past experience plays into and affects present experience, and that it limits the capacity for future experience. But I have to control this rather elaborate interplay, to capture experience and sort it out; only thus can I use it to guide and test my reflection and in the process shape myself as an intellectual craftsman. A personal file is the social organization of the individual's memory; it increases the continuity between life and work, and it permits a continuity in the work itself, and the planning of the work; it is a crossroads of life experience, professional activities, and way of work. In this file the intellectual craftsman tries to integrate what he is doing intellectually and what he is experiencing as a person. Here he is not afraid to use his experience and, as it were, to cross-classify them with various projects which he has under way. It is the link between life and work; in it the two become one.

By serving as a check on repetitious work, my file enables me to conserve what little energy I have. It also encourages me to capture "fringe-thoughts": various ideas occur, which may be byproducts of everyday experience, snatches of conversation overheard on the street,

or, for that matter, dreams. Once noted, these may lead to more systematic thinking, as well as lend intellectual relevance to more directed experience.

I have often noticed how carefully accomplished thinkers treat their own minds, how closely they observe their development and codify their experience. The reason they treasure their smallest experiences is because, in the course of a lifetime, a modern man has so very little personal experience, and yet experience is so important as a source of good intellectual work. To be able to trust one's own experience, even if it often turns out to be inadequate, is one mark of the mature workman. Such confidence in one's own experience is indispensable to originality in any intellectual pursuit, and the file is one tool by which I have tried to develop and justify such confidence.

If the intellectual workman is a man who has become self-confidently aware of himself as a center of experience and reflection, the keeping of a file is one way of stabilizing, even institutionalizing, this state of being. By the keeping of an adequate file and the self-reflective habits this fosters, one learns how to keep awake one's inner world. Whenever I feel strongly about events or ideas I try not to let them pass from my mind, but instead to formulate them for my files and in so doing draw out their implications, show myself either how foolish these feelings or ideas are, or how they might be developed into articulate and productive shape. The file also maintains the habit of writing. I cannot "keep my hand in" if I do not write something at least every week. In the file, one can experiment as a writer and thus develop one's own powers of expression.

Arrangement of File

Under various topics in this file there are ideas, personal notes, and excerpts from books; there are bibliographic items and outlines of projects—it is, I suppose, a matter of arbitrary habit, but I have found it best to blend all these items into a master file of topical projects, with many subdivisions. The topics, of course, are frequently changed. For instance, when as a student I was working toward the preliminary oral examination, the writing of a thesis, and, at the same time, doing term papers, my files were arranged in these three focal areas of endeavor. But after a year or so of graduate work, I began to reorganize the whole file in relation to the main project of the thesis. Then as I pursued my work I noticed that no one project ever dominated my work, nor set the master categories in which the file was arranged. In fact, the use of this file encouraged an expansion of the categories with which I was actively thinking. And the way in which these categories changed, some being dropped out and others being added, was an index of my own intellectual progress and breadth. Eventually, the file came to be arranged according to several larger projects, having many subprojects, which changed from year to year.

All this involves the taking of notes. It is my habit to take a very large volume of notes from any book I read which I feel worth remembering. For the first step in translating experience, either of other men's symbols or of one's own life, into the intellectual sphere is to give it form. Merely to name an item of experience often invites us to explain it; the mere taking of a note from a book is often a prod to reflection. At the same time, the taking of a note is an additional mechanism for comprehension of what one is reading.

My notes seem to be of two sorts. In reading certain very important books I try to grasp the structure of the writer's thought, and take notes accordingly. But more frequently, in the last ten years, I do not read whole books, but rather parts of many books, from the point of view of some particular theme in which I am interested, and concerning which I usually have plans in my file. Therefore, I take notes which do not fairly represent the books I read. I am *using* this particular passage, this particular experience, for the realization of my own projects. Notes taken in this way form the contents of memory upon which I may have to call.

Use of File

But how is this file—which so far must seem to the reader more like a journal—used in intellectual production? Well, the maintenance of this file *is* intellectual production, one step removed from daily musing, and one step removed from the library and "the field"; it is a continually growing store of facts and ideas, from the most vague to the most finished.

The first thing I did upon deciding on a study of The American Elite was to make a crude outline, based on a listing of the types of people I wished to understand. The next step was to examine my entire file, not only those parts of it which obviously bore on the topic, but also many others which seemed to have no relevance whatsoever. For imagination and "the structuring of an idea" are often exercised by putting together hitherto isolated items, by finding unsuspected connections. I made new units in the file for this particular range of problems, which, of course, led to a new arrangement of other parts of the file.

As I thus rearranged the filing system, I found that I was loosening my imagination. This apparently occurred by means of insight deriving from merely trying to combine various ideas and notes on different topics. It is a sort of logic of combination, and "chance" sometimes plays a curiously large part in it. In a relaxed way, as it were, I tried to engage my intellectual resources, as exemplified in the file, with the new themes.

I also began to use my observations and daily experiences. I thought first of experiences I had had which bore upon such problems, and then I went and talked with those who I thought might have experienced or considered the issues. As a matter of fact, I began now to alter the character of my routine so as to include in it (1) people who *were* the phenomenon, (2) people in contact with the phenomenon, and (3) people interested in them. I do not

know the full social conditions of the best intellectual workmanship, but certainly surrounding oneself with a circle of people who will listen and talk—and at times they have to be imaginary characters—is one of them. I try, at any rate, to surround myself with all the relevant environment—social and intellectual—which I think might lead me into thinking well along the lines of my work. That is one meaning of my remarks about the fusion of personal life and intellectual work.

My kind of work is not, and cannot be, made up of one clear-cut empirical "research." It is, rather, composed of a good many small-scale studies which at key points anchor general statements about the shape and the trend of the subject. So the decision—what are these anchor points?—cannot be made until existing materials are reworked and general hypothetical statements constructed.

I found in the files three relevant types of "existing materials": several theories having to do with the topic; materials already worked up by others as evidence for *those* theories; and data already gathered and in various stages of accessible centralization, but not yet made theoretically relevant. Only after completing a first draft of a theory with the aid of such existing materials as these can I efficiently locate my own pivotal assertions and so design researches to test them—and maybe I will not have to, although, of course, I know I will later have to shuttle back and forth between existing materials and my own research.

I make it a rule—picked up, I suppose, from philosophical reading which led me into the sociology of knowledge—that any final statement must not only cover the data so far as the data is available and known to me, but also in some way, positively or negatively, take into account the available theories. (This is one of the things I mean by the methodological consequences of the sociology of knowledge.) Sometimes this "taking into account" of a theory is easily done by a simple confrontation of the theory with overturning or supporting fact; sometimes a detailed analysis or qualification is needed. Sometimes I can arrange the available theories systematically as a range of alternatives, and so allow their range to organize the problem itself. But sometimes I allow such theories to come up only in my own arrangement, in quite various contexts. At any rate, in *The American Elite*, I will have to take into account the work of such men as Mosca, Schumpeter, Veblen, Marx, Lasswell, Michel, Pareto, and I am now at work on them.

In looking over some of the notes on these writers, I find that they fall into three general types of statement: (1) I learn directly, by restating systematically, what the man says on given points or as a whole; (2) I accept or refute these statements, giving reasons and arguments; (3) I use the book as a source of suggestions for my own elaborations and projects. This involves grasping a point and then asking: How can I put this into testable shape and then test it? How can I use this as a center from which to elaborate—use it as a perspective from which descriptive details will become relevant? It is in this handling of existing theory that I feel myself in continuity with previous work. Here are two excerpts from preliminary notes on Mosca, which may illustrate what I have been trying to describe:

In addition to his historical anecdotes, Mosca backs up his thesis with this assertion: It's the power of organization that enables the minority always to rule. There are organized minorities and they run things and men. There are unorganized majorities and they are run. (There are also statements in Mosca about psychological laws supposed to support his view. See his use of the word *natural*. But this isn't central, and, in addition, it's not worth considering.) But: why not also consider the apparent opposite? In fact why not the full scale of possibilities?

	Elite (Minority)	Mass (Majority)
Organized	1	2
Unorganized	3	4

1 the organized minority
2 the organized majority
3 the unorganized minority
4 the unorganized majority

This is worth full-scale exploration. The first thing that has to be straightened out: just what is the meaning of "organized"? I think Mosca means: capable of more or less continuous and coordinated policies and actions. If so, his thesis is right by definition. He would also say, I believe, that an "organized majority" is impossible because all it would amount to is that new leaders, new elites, would be on top of these majority organizations, and he is quite ready to pick up these leaders in his *The Ruling Class*. He calls them "directing minorities," all of which is pretty flimsy stuff alongside his big statement.

One thing that occurs to me is the use of the table (I think it is the core of the problems of definition Mosca presents to us) as a model for trend analysis. Try this: from the 19th to the 20th centuries, we have witnessed a shift from a society organized as 1 and 4 to a society established *more* in terms of 2 and 3. We have moved from an elite state to an organizations state, in which the elite is no longer so organized nor so unilaterally powerful, and the mass is more organized and more powerful. Some power has been made in the streets, and around it whole social structures and their "elites" have pivoted. And what section of the ruling class is more organized than the farm bloc? That's not a rhetorical question: I can answer it either way at this time; it's a matter of degree; all I want now is to get it way out in the open.

Mosca makes one point that seems to me excellent and worth elaborating further. There is often in "the ruling class," according to him, a top clique and there is this second and larger stratum, with which (A) the top is in continuous and immediate contact, and with which (B) it shares ideas and sentiments and hence, he believes, policies. (page 430) Check and see if anywhere else in the book, he makes other points of connection. Is the clique recruited largely from the second level? Is the top, in some way, responsible to, or at least sensitive to, this second stratum?

Now forget Mosca: in another vocabulary, we have, (A) the elite, by which we here mean that top clique, (B) those who count, and (C) all the others. Membership in the second and third, in this scheme, is defined by the first, and the second may be quite varied in its size and composition and relations with the first and the third. (What, by the way, is the range of variations of the relations of B to A and to C? Examine Mosca for hints and further extend this by considering it systematically.)

This scheme may enable me more neatly to take into account

the different elites, which are elite according to the several dimensions of stratification. Also, of course, to pick up in a neat and meaningful way the Paretian distinction of governing and non-governing elites, in a way less formal than Pareto. Certainly many top status people would at least be in the second. So would the big rich. The Clique or The Elite would refer to power, or to authority, as the case may be. The elite in this vocabulary would always mean the power elite. The other top people would be the upper classes or the upper circles.

So in a way, maybe, we can use this in connection with two major problems: the structure of the elite; and the conceptual—later perhaps, the substantive—relations of stratification and elite theories. (Work this out).

From the standpoint of power, it is easier to pick out those who count than those who rule. When we try to do the first we select the top levels as a sort of loose aggregate and we are guided by position. But when we attempt the second, we must indicate in clear detail how they wield power and just how they are related to the social instrumentalities through which power is exercised. Also we deal more with persons than positions, or at least have to take persons into account.

Now power in the U.S. involves more than one elite. How can we judge the relative positions of these several elites? Depends upon the issue and decisions being made. One elite sees another as among those who count. There is this mutual recognition among the elite, that other elites count; in one way or another they are important people to one another. Project: select 3 or 4 key decisions of last decade—to drop the atom bomb, to cut or raise steel production, the G.M. strike of '45—and trace in detail the personnels involved in each of them. Might use "decisions" and decision making as interview pegs when you go out for intensives.

Empirical Work

There comes a time—not as yet reached in this study—when I am through with books. Whatever I want from them is down in my own notes and abstracts; on the margins of these notes, as well as in a separate file, are further ideas for empirical studies.

I do not like to do empirical work if I can possibly avoid it. It means a great deal of trouble if one has no staff; if one does employ a staff, then the staff is often more trouble than the work itself. Moreover, they leave as soon as they have been trained and made useful. More seriously, in a field like sociology there is so much to do by way of initial "structuring" (let the word stand for the kind of work I am describing) that much "empirical research" is bound to be thin and uninteresting.

In our situation, empirical work as such is for beginning students and for those who are not able to handle the complexities of big problems; it is also for highly formal men who do not care what they study so long as it appears to be orderly. All these types have a right to do as they please or as they must; they have no right to impose in the name of science such narrow limits on others. Anyway, they do not bother me.

Although I shall never be able to get the money with which to do many of the empirical studies I design, it is necessary for me to continue designing them. For once I lay out an empirical study, it leads me to a new search for data which often turns out to have unsuspected relevance for my problems. Just as it is foolish to design an empirical field study if the answer can be got from a library, so it is foolish to think you have exhausted books before an appropriate empirical study has been translated into questions of what facts are needed. So considered, library materials help the researcher who is working outside the research organizations to approach real answers.

Empirical studies necessary to my kind of work must show two characteristics. First, they must be relevant for the first draft, of which I wrote above; they have to anchor it in its original form or they have to cause its modification, or to put it more abstractly, they must have implications for theoretical constructions. Second, the projects must be efficient and neat and, if possible, ingenious. By this I mean that they must promise to yield a great deal of material in proportion to the time and effort they involve.

Now, I have not decided upon the studies necessary for the present job, but here is the beginning of a larger design within which various small-scale studies have begun to arise. Again I excerpt from the files:

I am not yet in a position to study the upper circles as a whole in a systematic and empirical way. So what I do is set forth some definitions and procedures that form a sort of ideal design for such a study. I can then attempt, *first*, to gather existing materials that approximate this design; *second*, to think of convenient ways of gathering materials, given the existing indices, that satisfy it, at crucial points; and *third*, as I proceed, to make more specific the full-scale, empirical researches that would in the end be necessary.

The upper circles must, of course, be defined systematically in terms of specific variables. Formally—and this is more or less Pareto's way—they are the people who "have" the most of whatever is available of any given value or set of values. So I have to make two decisions: What variables shall I take as the criteria, and what do I mean by "the most"? After I've decided on my variables, I must construct the best indices I can, if possible quantifiable indices, in order to distribute the population in terms of them; only then can I begin to decide what I mean by "the most." This should, in part, be left for determination by empirical inspection of the various distributions, and their overlaps.

My key variables should, at first, be general enough to give me some latitude in the choice of indices, yet specific enough to invite the search for empirical indices. As I go along, I'll have to shuttle between conceptions and indices, guided by the desire not to lose intended meanings and yet to be quite specific about their indices. Here are the four Weberian variables with which I will begin:

I. *Class* refers to sources and amounts of income. So I'll need property distributions and income distributions. The ideal material here (which is very scarce, and unfortunately dated) is a cross-tabulation of source and amount of annual income. Thus, we know that X per cent of the population received during 1936 Y millions or over, and that Z per cent of all this money was from property, W per cent from entrepreneurial withdrawal, Q per cent from wages and salaries. Along this class dimension, I can define the upper circles—those who have the most—either as those who receive given amounts of income during a given time—or, as those who make up the upper two per cent of the income pyramid. Look into treasury records and lists of big taxpayers. See if TNEC tables on source and amount of income can be brought up to date.

II. *Status* refers to the amounts of deference received. For this, there are no simple or quantifiable indices. Existing indices require personal interviews for their application and are limited so far to local community studies. There is the further problem that, unlike class, status involves social relations: at least one to receive and one to bestow the deference.

It is easy to confuse publicity with deference—or rather, we do not yet know whether or not volume of publicity should be used as an index to status position, although it is the most easily available: (For example: On one of three successive days in mid March 1952, the following categories of people were mentioned by name in *The New York Times*—or on selected pages—work this out).

III. *Power* refers to the realization of one's will even if others resist. Like status, this has not been well indexed. I don't think I can keep it a single dimension, but will have to talk of (a) formal authority—defined by rights and powers of positions in various institutions, especially military, political and economic; and (b) power known informally to be exercised but not formally instituted—pressure group leaders, propagandists with extensive media at their disposal, and so on.

IV. *Occupation* refers to activities that are paid for. Here, again, I must choose just which feature of occupation I should seize upon. (a) If I use the average incomes of various occupations to rank them, I am using occupation as an index, and as a basis of class. In like manner (b) if I use the status or the power typically attached to different occupations, then I am using occupations as indices, and bases, of power and skill or talent. But this is by no means an easy way to classify people. Skill is not a homogeneous something of which there is more or less. Attempts to treat it as such have usually been put in terms of the length of time required to acquire various skills, and maybe that will have to do, although I hope I can think of something better.

Those are the types of problems I will have to solve in order to define analytically and empirically the upper circles, in terms of these four key variables. For purposes of design, assume I have solved them to my satisfaction, and that I have distributed the population in terms of each of them. I would then have four sets of people: those at the top in class, status, power and skill. Suppose further, that I had singled out the top two per cent of each distribution, as an upper circle. I then confront this empirically answerable question: How much, if any, overlap is there among each of these four distributions?

There are two additional points which I must add to this general model in order to make it formally complete. Full conceptions of upper strata require attention to duration and mobility. The task here is to determine positions between which there is typical movement of individuals and groups—within the present generation, and between the last two or three generations.

This introduces the temporal dimension of biography or career-lines, and of history into the scheme. These are not merely further empirical questions, they are also definitionally relevant. For (a) we want to leave open whether or not in classifying people in terms of any of our key variables, we should define our categories in terms of how long they, or their families, have occupied the position in question. For example, I might want to decide that the upper two per cent of status—or at least one important type of status rank—consists of those up there for at least two generations. Also (b) I want to leave open the question of whether or not I should construct a "stratum" not only in terms of an intersection of several variables, but also, in line with Weber's neglected definition of "social class," as composed of those positions between which there is "typical and easy mobility." Thus, the lower white collar occupations and middle and upper wage-worker jobs in certain industries seem to be forming, in this sense, a stratum.

In the course of the reading and analysis of others' theories, the design of ideal research, and the perusal of the files, I began to draw up a list of special studies. Some of them are too big to handle, and will in time regretfully be given up; some will end as materials for a paragraph, a section, a sentence, a chapter; some will become pervading themes to be woven into the entire book or into parts of it. Here, again, are initial notes for several such special projects, taken from an application I have made for a small research grant:

(1) A time-budget analysis of a typical working day of 10 top executives of large corporations, and the same for 10 federal administrators. These observations will be combined with detailed "life history" interviews. The aim here is to describe the major routines and decisions, partly at least in terms of time devoted to them, and to gain an insight into the factors relevant to the decisions made. The procedure will naturally vary with the degree of cooperation secured, but ideally will involve first, an interview in which the life history and present situation of the man is made clear; second, observations of the day, actually sitting in a corner of the man's office, and following him around; third, a longish interview that evening or the next day in which we go over the whole day and probe the subjective processes involved in the external behavior we've observed.

(2) A time-budget analysis of upper class weekends, in which the routines are closely observed and followed by probing interviews with the man and other members of the family on the Monday following.

For both these tasks I've fairly good contacts, and good contacts, if handled properly, lead to better ones. I've done this with labor leaders, and, in general, I believe business and government people are more cooperative.

(3) A study of the expense account and other privileges which, along with salaries and other incomes, form the standard and the style of living of the top levels. The idea here is to get something concrete on "the bureaucratization of consumption," the transfer of private expenses to business accounts.

(4) Bring up to date the type of information contained in such books as Lundberg's *America's Sixty Families*, which is dated as of the tax returns for 1923.

(5) Gather and systematize, from treasury records and other government sources, the distribution of various types of private property by amounts held.

(6) A career-line study of the presidents, all cabinet members, and all members of the Supreme Court. This I already have on IBM cards from the constitutional period through Truman's second term, but I want to expand the items used and analyze it afresh.

There are other—some 35 so far—small scale "projects" of this sort, (for example, comparison of the amounts of money spent in the presidential elections of 1896 and 1952, detailed comparison of Morgan of 1910 and Kaiser of 1950, and something concrete on the careers of "Admirals and Generals"). But, as I go along, I must adjust my aim to what is accessible. I hope that the above list will make clear the kind of thing I want to do.

Designs

My sense of form—unskilled though it still is—begins to tempt me into concealment. I feel the tendency to leave my fragmentary notes and round all this out so as to make my ways of working seem more effective than they are; in short, to draw the reader's attention away from my limited discoveries and towards my modes of presentation and persuasion. I want to guard against that. So I must tell you

that during the last several months I have been doing a great deal of writing; to be sure it has been writing along the general lines of the big model and in terms of the theories examined, but still it has at times seemed quite free of all that. I cannot say for sure whether my imagination has been prompted by having these larger designs before me, although I am aware that I can easily make it look that way. Maybe these designs are a sort of professional ritual I go through; maybe they are more than that, more than psychologically necessary. At any rate, some of this writing leads me to feel uneasy about the assumption that all the skills required to put a book together are explicit and teachable, as are the deadbeat methods of much orthodox social science today.

After these designs were written down, I began, with a clearer conscience, and I must say greater zest, to read historical works on top groups, taking random (and unfiled) notes and interpreting the reading. You do not really have to *study* a topic you are working on; once your are into it, it is everywhere. You are sensitive to its themes; you see and hear them everywhere in your experience, especially, it always seems to me, in apparently unrelated areas. Even the mass media, especially bad movies and cheap novels and picture magazines and night radio, are disclosed in fresh importance to you.

From existing sources as well as those that you have fashioned, trying to remain open, as it were, on all sides, you slowly go forward, continually outlining and re-outlining the whole, specifying and elaborating the list of anchor projects, refining and trying to index parts of the master design, writing this and editing that, bringing intellectual neatness for a day or a week or a month to this section or to that part.

The Sociological Imagination

But, the reader may ask, how do ideas come? How is the imagination spurred to put all the images and facts together and lend meaning to them? I do not think I can really answer that; all I can do is talk about the general conditions and a few simple techniques which have seemed to increase my chances to come out with something.

I do not believe that workmanlike imagination is an absolute gift. I, at least, have got to work in order to call it forth, and when I am really in the middle of some set of problems, I am working for it all the time, even when I do not know it. I have to develop and nurse it, and I must live as well as work in such a way as to allow it to occur. I believe that there are techniques of imagination and definite ways of stimulating it, although I do not want to acquire any technique of work that would limit the play of fancy. Naturally I hope that beginning students might gather a few hints for their own ways of work, and some encouragement to pursue them, but I am not suggesting any rigid technique. Yet, there are several ways I have found useful to invite the sociological imagination:

(1) The rearranging of the file, as I have already said, is one way. One simply dumps out heretofore disconnected folders, mixing up their contents, and then re-sorts them many times. How often and how extensively one does this will of course vary with different problems and the development of their solutions. But in general the mechanics of it are as simple as that.

(2) A second technique which should be part of the intellectual workman's way of life consists of a kind of relaxed browsing in libraries, letting the mind play over books and new periodicals and encyclopedias. Of course, I have in mind the several problems on which I am actively working, and try to be passively receptive to unforeseen and unplanned linkages.

(3) Closely related to playing with the file and relaxing in the library is the idea of actively using a variety of perspectives. I will, for instance, ask myself how would a political scientist whom I recently read approach this, or that experimental psychologist, or this historian. One thinks in multiple perspectives which are here represented by men of different specialties. I try in this way to let my mind become a moving prism that catches light from as many angles as possible. In this connection, the writing of dialogues is often very useful.

(4) One of the things meant by "being soaked in the literature" is being able to locate the opponents and the friends of every available viewpoint. I very often try to think against something, and in trying to understand and advance an intellectual field, one of the first things I do is lay out the arguments. On this point, for instance, the book on John Dewey's technique of thought by Bogoslovsky, *The Logic of Controversy*, and C.E. Ayers' essay on the gospel of technology in *Philosophy Today and Tomorrow*, edited by Hook and Kallen.

(5) An attitude of playfulness toward the phrases and words with which various issues are defined often loosens the imagination. I look up synonyms for each of my key terms in dictionaries as well as in various scholarly books, in order to know the full range of their connotations. This simple procedure seems to prod me to a conceptual elaboration of the problem and hence to a more precise definition of terms. Only if I know the several meanings which might be given to terms or phrases can I select the precise ones with which I want to work. As a student, I kept a notebook containing the vocabularies for handling given problem areas.

(6) On all work, but especially on existing theory, I try to keep close watch on the level of generality of every key term, and I often find it useful to take a high-level statement and break it down to more concrete levels. When that is done, the statement often falls into two or three components, each lying along different dimensions. I also try to move up the level of generality: remove the specific qualifiers and examine the re-formed statement or inference more abstractly, to see if I can stretch it or elaborate it. From above and from below, I try to probe, in search of clarified meaning, into every aspect and implication of the theory.

(7) Almost any general idea I come upon will, as I think about it, be cast into some sort of types. A new classification is often the beginning of fruitful developments. The skill required to make up types and then to search for the conditions and consequences of each type has become an automatic procedure with me. Rather than resting content with Democratic vs. Republican voters, I have to make up a classification of voters along the motivational line, and another along the intensity line, and so forth. I am searching for common denominators within Democratic types and Republican types and for differentiating factors within and between all of the types built.

(8) The technique of cross-tabulating is not limited to quantitative materials, but, as a matter of fact, is a good way to get hold of new types. Charts, tables, and diagrams of a qualitative sort are not only display models for work already done; they are very often genuinely productive in their effects.

(9) On almost any problem with which I am concerned, I try to get a comparative grip on the materials. The search for comparable cases in one civilization or historical period or several, or in two samples, gives me leads. I would never think of describing an institution in twentieth-century America without trying to bear in mind similar institutions in other types of milieu and structure.

(10) In the search for comparable cases, I seem to get the best insights from extreme types—from thinking of the opposite of that with which I am directly concerned. If I think about despair, then I also think about elation; if I study the miser, then also the spendthrift. That is also a general characteristic of anchor projects, which, if it is possible, I design in terms of "polar types." The hardest thing in the world for me is to study one object; but when I try to contrast objects, I get a sort of grip on the materials and I can then sort out the dimensions in terms of which the comparisons are made. I find the shuttling between these dimensions and the concrete types very illuminating. This technique is also logically sound, for without a sample, you can only guess about statistical frequencies: what you can do is give the range and major types of some phenomenon, and for that it is more economical to begin by constructing "polar types," opposites along various dimensions. This does not mean that I do not strive to gain and to maintain a sense of proportion, some lead on the frequencies of given types. One continually tries, in fact, to combine this quest with the search for indices for which one might find statistics.

Reflection, on those rare occasions when it is more or less successful, is the most passionate endeavor of which a man is capable.

(11) I seem automatically to try to put historical depth into my reflection, and I think this is the reason for it: Often what you are examining is limited in number, so to get a comparative grip on it, you have got to place it inside a frame with historical depth. To put it another way, the contrasting-type approach often requires the examination of historical cases. This sometimes results in points useful for a trend analysis, or it leads to a typology of stages. I use historical materials, then, because of the desire for a fuller range, or for a more convenient range of some phenomena—by which I mean one that includes the variations along some known set of dimensions. Some knowledge of world history is indispensable to the sociologist; without such knowledge, he is simply a provincial, no matter what else he knows.

From these considerations, I hope the reader will understand that in a way I never "start" writing on a project; I am writing continuously, either in a more personal vein, in the files, in taking notes after browsing, or in more guided endeavors. I always have, in following this way of living and working, many topics which I want to work out further. After I decide on some "release" out of this work, I try to use the entire file, the browsing in libraries and periodicals, my conversations and my selection of people—all on this topic. I am trying, you see, to build a framework containing all the key elements which enter into the work; then to put each section in separate folders and continually readjust the whole framework around changes in them. Merely to lay out such a skeleton is to suggest what flesh is needed: facts, tables, more ideas.

So one discovers and describes, constructing typologies for the ordering of what one has found out, focusing and organizing experience by distinguishing items by name. This search for order pushes one to seek out underlying patterns and trends, to find relations that may be typical and causal. One searches, in short, for the meanings of what one has come upon, for what seems capable of being interpreted as a visible token of something else that is invisible. One makes an inventory of everything that seems involved in some phenomenon, pares it down to essentials, then carefully and systematically relates these items to one another, thus forming a sort of working model. And then one relates this model to the systematically defined phenomenon one wants to explain. Sometimes it is that easy; sometimes it just will not come.

But always, among all these details, one searches for indicators that might point to the main drift, to the underlying forms and tendencies of the society of the United States in the middle of the twentieth century. For that is what, in the end, one is always writing about.

Thinking is a simultaneous struggle for conceptual order and empirical comprehensiveness. You must not close it up too soon—or you will fail to see all that you should; you cannot leave it open forever—or you yourself will burst. It is this dilemma that makes reflection, on those rare occasions when it is more or less successful, the most passionate endeavor of which a man is capable.□