

Mills' Anticipation of Habermas' Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere

The Emergence of the Power Elite as a Result of the Transformation of the Public

This paper aims to demonstrate that the work of C. Wright Mills represents an earlier formulation of what later came to be known as «the structural transformation of the public sphere». While Jürgen Habermas published his famous book at the beginning of the 1960s, Mills had articulated this concept already in the 1950s, under the influence of John Dewey's work from the 1920s.

In order to demonstrate the similarities between Mills and Habermas, this paper brings to attention a key element of Mills' work which was mostly overlooked by the reception: the very explanation of the emergence of Mills' «power elite». While the reception was largely focused on the power elite as such, Mills explained this phenomenon by the «transformation of the public».

Firstly, the paper discusses briefly the reception history of Habermas' and Mills' book. Secondly, by revealing Mills' link between the emergence of the power elite and the transformation of the public, Mills' anticipation of Habermas' formulation of the structural transformation of the public sphere becomes apparent. Thirdly, the paper demonstrates that already Mills perceived the structural transformation of the public sphere as a key dimension of the social change in modern societies. Moreover, while it is well known that Mills opposed the predominant contemporary research designs for communication studies, the alternative he suggested is almost unknown: the structural transformation of the public sphere as the integrative framework for all communications studies in modern societies. In methodological respect, the paper finds the common roots of Habermas' and Mills' historical-sociological approach in Max Weber's work. The last part pre-

sents the commonalities and differences in Mills' and Habermas' view how to deal with the effects of the structural transformation of the public sphere, that is, how to (re)activate a deliberative public sphere.

The reconstruction or discovery of Mill's classical work on the structural transformation of the public sphere does not represent an aim in itself. It is part of an attempt – contrary to the classical works – to reconceptualize the structural transformation of the public sphere based on the arena-concept or field-concept of the public sphere, and to demonstrate that the classical works missed the perception of the distinct second structural transformation of the public sphere. At the same time, it is part of an attempt – on the shoulders of the classical works – to rediscover the structural transformation of the public sphere as a key dimension of social change and as one of two integrative frameworks for communication studies in modern societies. This attempt replaces the structural transformation of the public sphere at the heart of sociology, integrates the compartmentalized communications studies and reunites sociology and communication studies (Koller 2006).

Reception History

It is stunning that the parallels between Dewey's «The Public and its Problems» (Dewey 1954) from 1927, Mill's «The Power Elite» (Mills 2000b) from 1956 and Habermas' «Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit» (Habermas 1991) from 1962 have barely been recognized. Until today, the anglo-American and the European or German line of discussion have been scarcely brought into

connection¹ and have not been compared systematically at all. Also, there are barely comparisons of the other works from Dewey and Habermas, even if Habermas seems to be in many ways a German Dewey (Putnam 1999).²

This paper deals with the fact that the parallels between the «The Power Elite» (1956) by Charles Wright Mills and Habermas' «Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit» (1962) have been barely recognized, with only a few exceptions.³ However, already in 1963, the Luchterhand Verlag, which published one year earlier the first edition of Habermas' «Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit», that is, the German translator of Mills' «The Sociological Imagination» referred at the corresponding passage to Habermas' book, without declaring it as an unauthorized footnote (Mills 1963d: 95). In the English original which appeared in 1959, that is, three years before Habermas' book, this footnote does not exist (Mills 2000c: 52). The German translation (1963) only appeared after Mill's death (1962). Also, in the edition of the letters and autobiographical works of Mills, there is no reference to Habermas (Mills/Mills 2000). Habermas, on his side, discussed on the second last page of his book (Habermas 1991: 249) Mill's definition of public opinion from «The Power Elite» (1956) and also referred to «The Sociological Imagination» (1959). He did not recognize, however, that Mills' work does not only provide an empirically applicable definition of public opinion, but already contains in nuce the concept of the structural transformation of the public sphere.

There might be several reasons for the fact that the parallels between Mills and Habermas have been barely recognized. First of all, the reception of Mills' work in the U.S. overlooked the cen-

1 Exceptions with regard to Habermas and Dewey: (Scheidges 1979; Joas 1987: 617; Joas 1992: 112; Calhoun 1992: 43; Oelkers 1993: 510; Benhabib 1997, 1998).

2 For Dewey's anticipation of Habermas' structural transformation of the public sphere see Koller (2004).

3 See Kellner (1982: 493). Kellner does not mention, however, that already Dewey anticipated Habermas' structural transformation of the public sphere and that Mills was shaped by Dewey's related work. On the parallels between Dewey and Habermas, however without noticing Dewey's anticipation of Habermas, see later Antonio/Kellner (1992).

tral role of the transformation of the public in the first place. As for the reception outside the U.S. or the English-speaking area, it is important to see that Mills was mostly read in the 1950s and 1960s, that is, only shortly beyond his early death (1962). Afterwards, he faded in the background. Later, there appeared for example no new German translations of his monographies or new editions of old translations. In the U.S., however, Mills could to some extent keep the status of a sociological (post-)classic.⁴ On the other side, Habermas book, with the exception of one article, only appeared in English in 1989. As a result, important conditions for seeing the parallels were not given. While the parallels between Dewey and Habermas have been noticed sometimes in the course of the recent Dewey-revival, a Mills-revival outside the U.S. is not in sight at this point.⁵

Mills' book «The Power Elite» from 1956 was mostly received and discussed as a theoretical and empirical account of power and of the elite. Indeed, Mills focused mostly on the power elite as such, that is, the close interconnection between the «managerial class», the «political directorate» and the «warlords» (Domhoff/Ballard 1968; Wolfe 2000). However, surprisingly, the key element of this account has been overlooked, namely the very explanation of the emergence of this power elite. And this, of course, is not a detail. Rather, as *the* explanation of the power elite it is also *the* element for reversing or changing this very structure of power. According to Mills, the contemporary structure of power of the 1950s, that is, the power elite, is the result of the transformation of the public. Basically, Dewey, Habermas and Mills, perceived the structural transformation of the public sphere and its outcome in a very similar way. They just used different

4 For the subsequent discussion on Mills' «The Power Elite» see Domhoff/Ballard (1968). See especially Mills (1968).

5 Because of his status as a classic of American sociology, Mills is sometimes also portrayed in some German overviews over the classics of sociology. See for example Hess (2000). In general, however, Mills is not strongly discussed anymore in the German-speaking area.

words. What Dewey in 1927 called the «great society» and Habermas in 1962 «refeudalization» or «power infiltration» termed Mills in 1956 as the «power elite».

The interesting question why American (Dewey and Mills) and European (Habermas) thinkers formulated the concept of the structural transformation of the public sphere independent from each other cannot be discussed in detail in this paper. Basically, however, the discussion in the scientific field seems to indicate an effect of the structural transformation of the public sphere itself. While the decoupling of the media system from the political system and the newcoupling with the economic system took its course in the U.S. already in the Progressive Era and led to the Lippmann-Dewey debate in the 1920s, the corresponding historical change happened in Western Europe only in the late 1950s and 1960s. Habermas' book was embedded in that context. As for Mills' work in the 1950s, it seems to reflect both his close Dewey-reading and the completion of the decoupling/newcoupling process in the U.S. in the context of the cold war (Koller 2004, 2006).

Mills' Anticipation of Habermas' Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere

Shaped by reading Dewey's perception from 1927 (Mills 1966: 279-463, esp. 436f.), C. Wright Mills formulated in nuce the idea of the structural transformation of the public sphere already years before Habermas. Like Habermas later, his preferred method is historical and sociological at the same time. Also like Habermas' book later, Mill's work was influenced by Horkheimer and

Adorno.⁶ As well-known, Mills distanced himself both from the «Grand Theory» by Talcott Parsons (a.o.) and from «Abstracted Empiricism» by Paul Lazarsfeld (a. o.) and his mass communication research (Mills 2000c: 25-49, 50-75). Mills takes a stance for a combined historical and sociological method (Mills 2000c: 143-164).

Against «The Grand Theorists» on one side and the «The Scientists» (or «The Higher Statisticians») on the other side, Mills pursued a sociology which is shaped by the «classic sociological endeavor», the only sociology which deserves its name. For this, he relied on sociological classics like Max Weber (Gerth/Mills 1958b) and especially on writings of Horkheimer's and Adorno's Institut of Social Research. «I know of no better way to become acquainted with this endeavor in a high form of modern expression than to read the periodical, *Studies in Philosophy and Social Sciences*, published by The Institute of Social Research. Unfortunately, it is available only in the morgues of university libraries, and to the great loss of American social studies, several of the Institute's leading members, among them Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno, have returned to Germany. That there is now *no* periodical that bears comparison with this one testifies to the ascendancy of the Higher Statisticians and the Grand Theorists over the Sociologists. It is difficult to understand why some publisher does not get out a volume or two of selections from this great periodical» (Mills 1963c: 572). Though with a different historical explana-

6 Their «Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung» (1932-1941) was still published in German (by a Parisian publisher) until the beginning of World War II, that is, also after the «Institut für Sozialforschung» emigrated in 1933 via Geneva to New York. Only the last four issues appeared in English in New York (Habermas 1981: 411). The «Dialektik der Aufklärung» appeared in English only in 1972 (Horkheimer/Adorno 1972), but the thought of Horkheimer and Adorno was – beside the four English issues of the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* – available through the book «Eclipse of Reason» from 1947 (Horkheimer 1947). For the reception of the Frankfurt School in the U.S. (though Mills is barely mentioned) see Jay (1983; Jay 1985a, b, 1996; Habermas 1983, 1981; Wiggershaus 1994).

tion and without referring explicitly to Horkheimer's book, the «eclipse of reason» (Horkheimer 1947) is one of the central assumptions of Mills work.⁷

According to Habermas, the structural transformation of the public sphere consists of two dimensions: the massive extension of the public (Habermas 1991: 141ff.) and the change of the institutions or infrastructure of the public sphere (Habermas 1991: 181ff.). Mills thematizes exactly the same two dimensions while focusing more on the second one. The «transformation of the public into mass» consists of two dimensions, two «structural transformations»: a transformation «in terms of *scale*» and a transformation «in terms of *organization*». The first dimension represents the extension of the public from the restricted bourgeois public (restricted by property, education, sex and age) to a enlarged public, the second dimension the change of the communicative infrastructure from mainly face-to-face-communication (discussion) to mainly mass communication (media) (Mills 2000b: 306f.).

Already at the beginning of the 1950s, Mills historically differentiates the «simple democratic society of primary publics» from the «mass society of media markets» and formulates hereby the structural transformation of the public sphere (Mills 1963f: 581, 578-585). «The transformation of a community of publics into a mass society is one of the keys to the meaning of modern life. It is a structural trend [...].» This trend is rooted «in the nation as a set of metropolitan areas. For it is from such metropolitan centers that there has spread those forces that are destroying or minimizing the classic liberal public and making for the ascendancy of the mass society» (Mills 1963g: 353). For Mills, the structural transformation of the public sphere or the destruction of the classic liberal public is nothing less than the key for understanding modern societies.

7 Another implicit influence of Horkheimer and Adorno may be found in Mills' account of «the cultural apparatus» (Mills 1963a).

His most detailed sketch of the structural transformation of the public sphere can be found in «The Power Elite» from 1956 (Mills 2000b: 298-324). «The Power Elite» and «the transformation of the public into mass» (Mills 2000b: 302) are closely interwoven. «The Idea of mass society suggests the idea of an elite of power. The idea of the public, in contrast, suggests the liberal tradition of a society without any power elite, or at any rate with shifting elites of no sovereign consequence» (Mills 2000b: 323). In other words, the power elite is the result of the structural transformation of the public sphere. Without that, the power elite would not have been able to establish itself. In the words of Mills: «The rise of the power elite [...] rests upon, and in some way is part of, the transformation of the publics of America into mass society» (Mills 2000b: 297).

Mills portrays power as a question of democratic self-government and as dependent from the state of the public sphere. This is in fact the main idea of his book «The Power Elite», not what a lot of the reception was about.⁸ The question about who has the opportunity to make history reveals the connection of the term power and the term democratic self-government: «Power has to do with whatever decisions men make about the arrangements under which they live, and about the events which make up the history of their times» (Mills 1963h: 23).⁹

Mills point of departure is «the standard image of power and decision» which has «The Great American Public» in its core. «More than merely another check and balance, this public is thought to be the seat of all legitimate power» (Mills 2000b: 298). This traditional image of the public of classic democracy as the seat of all legitimate power is still used «as the working justifications of power in American society. But now we must recognize this description as a set of

8 For a summarizing article of «The Power Elite» by Mills see Mills (1963h). For Mills' comment on criticism see Mills (1968).

«The Power Elite» is the last book of a trilogy: (Mills 2001, 2002, 2000b).

9 In a way, Mills completes his trilogy in the first chapter «Do Men Make History?» of his subsequent book (Mills 1958).

images out of a fairy tale: they are not adequate even as an approximate model of how the American system of power works. The issues that now shape man's fate are neither raised nor decided by the public at large. The idea of the community of publics is not a description of fact, but an assertion of an ideal, an assertion of a legitimation masquerading – as legitimations are now apt to do – as fact» (Mills 2000b: 300).

Mills is taking a stance for what later Habermas called «the concept of a public sphere operative in the political realm» (Habermas 1992: 455).¹⁰ According to Habermas, «the mass democracies constituted as social-welfare states, as far as their normative self-interpretation is concerned, can claim to continue the principles of the liberal constitutional state only as long as they seriously try to live up to the mandate of a public sphere that fulfills political functions» (Habermas 1992: 441). In the same way, Mills deals with the leading question how the original ideal of democracy can be maintained also under the changed societal conditions and how publics can influence the decision-making process and hereby produce structural consequences. Otherwise, he considers the assertion of the original ideal as a fairy tale. It became a fairy tale which does not even approximately describe the present situation because the ideals of classic liberalism were based on conditions that are not given anymore (Mills 1963e). «The liberal ideals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were anchored in several basic assumptions about the condition of modern society that are no longer simple and clear [...]» The «classic liberalism» relied on a «world of small entrepreneurs» and «small-scale community». Such a world, however, does not exist anymore. For Mills, the liberal ideals have been achieved only then, when they have corresponded with the social realities. «Liberty is not an a-priori individual fact, and it has been a social

10 The German term for this, «Begriff der politisch fungierenden Öffentlichkeit», is catchier (Habermas 1990: 48).

achievement only when liberal ideals have fortunately coincided with social realities» (Mills 1963e: 191f.).

This, however, is not the case anymore because of the structural transformation of the public sphere. Hereby, Mills is working with the ideal types in the sense of Max Weber: «Often you get the best insights by considering extremes [...]» (Mills 2000a: 213). These extreme types are «stimulating the sociological imagination» (Mills 2000a: 212). Correspondingly, Mills is using his idealtypes of «public» and «mass» and of «community of publics» and «mass society»: «The United States today is not altogether a mass society, and it has never been altogether a community of publics. These phrases are names for extreme types; they point to certain features of reality, but they are themselves constructions; social reality is always some sort of mixture of the two. Yet we cannot readily understand just how much of which is mixed into our situation if we do not first understand, in terms of explicit dimensions, the clear-cut and extreme types [...]» (Mills 2000b: 302). These two extreme types are differentiated by their dominant mode of communication, face-to-face-communication (discussion) versus mass communication (media communication): «The public and the mass may be most readily distinguished by their dominant modes of communication: in a community of publics, discussion is the ascendant means of communication, and the mass media, if they exist, simply enlarge and animate discussion, linking one *primary public* with the discussions of another. In a mass society, the dominant type of communication is the formal media, and the publics become mere *media markets*: all those exposed to the contents of given mass media» (Mills 2000b: 304). In mass societies, the former «publics» turn into mere media markets.

Approximately, the two extreme types represent the starting point and the ending point of a historical change: «the transformation of the public into mass». Mills, however, like Dewey earlier

and Habermas later, does not capture this process based on an arena-concept or field-concept of the public sphere. Rather, this transformation represents a decline. Accordingly, Mills diagnoses «the eclipse of the classic bourgeois public» (Mills 2000b: 303) or «the decline of a set of publics» (Mills 2000b: 324).

Mills can only call it a decline of the public, because he, like Dewey earlier and Habermas later, assumes that the classic liberal ideals have once approximately been realized. What Mills presents on a theoretical level as an ideal type, turns empirically into a real type. This reference to and existence of a golden era, however, lacks of empirical evidence so far and is therefore counter the fact. Even if his empirical assumptions are not substantiated, Mills is, on a theoretical level, aware of the fact that he is dealing with ideal types. This is also the case for his ideal of democracy: «I do not know of any society which is altogether democratic – that remains an ideal.» Empirically however, he diagnoses a decline of democracy: «The United States today I should say is generally democratic mainly in form and in the rhetoric of expectation. In substance and in practice it is very often non-democratic, and in many institutional areas it is quite clearly so» (Mills 2000c: 188). Against a term of democracy which raises claims only rhetorically or for the purpose of legitimation, but does not even approximately realize these claims, Mills defends a term of democracy in its plain meaning: «You may now be saying to yourself, «Well, here it comes. He is going to set up an ideal so high that in terms of it everything must seem low.» That I might be thought to be doing so testifies to the lack of seriousness with which the word democracy is now taken, and to the indifference of many observers to the drift away from any plain meaning of the word. Democracy is, of course, a complicated idea about which there is much legitimate disagreement. But surely it is not so complicated or ambiguous that it may no longer be used by people who wish to reason together.» Democracy as reasoning together – hereby,

Mills formulates nothing less than the idea of deliberative democracy. Under «democracy as an ideal» Mills understands the following: «In essence, democracy implies that those vitally affected by any decision men make have an effective voice in that decision. This, in turn, means that all power to make such decisions be publicly legitimated and that the makers of such decisions be held publicly accountable. None of these three points prevail, it seems to me, unless there are dominant within a society the kinds of publics and the kinds of individuals I have described» (Mills 2000c: 188). Therefore, also Mills, like Dewey before him and Habermas after him, is dealing with the question how the original ideals can be approximately achieved under the new conditions of large-scale democracy. In this sense, Mills builds his criticism of classic liberalism (Mills 1963e, b).

Key Dimension of Social Change and Framework for Communications Research

Mills presents the structural transformation of the public sphere, like Habermas later, as a key dimension of social change. Mills sees this process as one of the major developments in modern societies: «In a word, the transformation of public into mass – and all that this implies – has been at once one of the major trends of modern societies [...]» (Mills 2000b: 301). Hereby, Mills puts the structural transformation of the public sphere in the center of sociology.

Methodologically, Mills assumes, like Habermas later, an «intimate relation of history and sociology» (Mills 2000c: 146). Contemporary society is an «historical structure that we cannot hope to understand unless we are guided by the sociological principle of historical specificity» (Mills 2000c: 157). The sociological principle of historical specificity corresponds with what Habermas

later called the «necessity of having to proceed at once sociologically and historically». Moreover, the «complexity» of the object, the public sphere, «precludes exclusive reliance on the specialized methods of a single discipline. [...] When considered within the boundaries of a particular social-scientific discipline, this object disintegrates» (Habermas 1991: xvii).

As Habermas, Mills overtakes this historical-sociological approach from Max Weber (Gerth/Mills 1958a: 55ff., esp. 61). He considers the «Grand Theory» by Talcott Parsons (a.o.) (Mills 2000c: 25-49) and the «Abstracted Empiricism» by Paul Lazarsfeld (a. o.) and his mass communication research (Mills 2000c: 50-75) as false alternatives and takes a stance for a combined historical and sociological method (Mills 2000c: 143-164). In a certain way, Mills aims at middle-range theories in Robert K. Merton's sense, however without his functionalism.

In this context, it becomes once more clear why Mills' writings have to be seen as a classical work on the subject of the structural transformation of the public sphere. It is well known what kind of research design for communication studies Mills rejected, but the alternative he suggested is almost unknown. Namely, what Mills suggests as an alternative research design, opposed to Lazarsfeld's mass communication research and to the (later) so-called Lasswell-formula, is nothing less than the framework of the structural transformation of the public sphere. «The framework of such studies has been the simple classification of questions: who says what to whom in which media and with what results?» (Mills 2000c: 51). According to Mills, this framework is too simplistic. It cannot reveal the significance of the «public opinion» and of the most important problems in this area. The historical and structural constraints of this kind of research make this impossible. «In short, in this area the problems of social science cannot be stated within the scope and terms of abstracted empiricism as now practiced.» This type of mass communication research

«is not an adequate basis for the development of a theory of the social meaning of the mass media.»

Rather, the fruitful framework for studying the public, public opinion and mass communications is the structural transformation of the public sphere in historical-sociological perspective. «What were called <publics> in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are being transformed into a society of <masses>. Moreover, the structural relevance of public is declining, as men at large become <mass men>, each trapped in quite powerless milieux. *That, or something like it*, may suggest the framework that is required for the selection and the design of studies of publics, public opinion, and mass communications» (Mills 2000c: 52, emphasis added). What Mills is suggesting here is nothing less than the framework and identity which holds the (later and lately) compartmentalized discipline of communications together. To be more precise, Mills does not consider communications as a separate discipline in the first place, but as part of sociology. Moreover, as a key part of sociology, not just as one sub-discipline (like media sociology) among others. By designing the field of communications research in terms of the structural transformation of the public sphere, Mills' anticipation of Habermas' formulation becomes apparent in even one more respect.

The Intellectual and the (Re-) Activation of a Deliberative Public Sphere

Even when it comes to the question how to confront the effects of the structural transformation of the public sphere, the commonalities between Mills and Habermas are eminent. For both, intermediary organizations play a key role in the (re)activation of a genuine public.¹¹ Early Habermas

11 Given the lack of empirical evidence for a <golden era>, of course, it has to be called an activation or

aimed at the internal reform of the political parties in form of the creation of internal public spheres, while later Habermas' hopes lied in the civil society in form of social movements. Also Mills deemed political parties and social movements as the basis for the reactivation of a genuine public. However, since, in his estimation, such organizations did not exist anymore, he sought for another source. According to Mills, it is the intellectual, especially the social scientist, who could foster such organizations and therefore, indirectly, a genuine public.

Mills lays out his account how to intervene in the structural transformation of the public sphere and the alleged eclipse of reason in the first chapter and the last two chapters of his book «The Sociological Imagination», namely «The Promise» of social science, «On Reason and Freedom» and «On Politics» (Mills 2000c: 3-24, 165-176, 177-194). Influenced by the account of John Dewey, the reasoning of the intellectual, especially the social scientist, plays a key role. It is the sociological imagination of the intellectuals which should reactivate the public and therefore the structural condition for reason and freedom of all members of society.

According to Mills, the ideas of freedom and reason are the two main values inherited by the social sciences from the philosophers of the Enlightenment (Mills 2000c: 167). Being *free* to act with *historical consequence* and being *reasonable* enough to *see those consequences* (Mills 2000c: 193), by every citizen, not just by a small elite, are the core elements of democracy. However, «after two centuries of hope, even formal democracy is restricted to a quite small portion of mankind» (Mills 2000c: 4). Following Mills, the «crises of reason and freedom [...] are structural problems» (Mills 2000c: 173). It is the structural transformation of the public sphere or the alleged decline of the public which is the relevant factor. Because of the lack of a genuine public,

the ordinary members of society are gripped by personal troubles which they are not able to understand as problems of social structure.

It is exactly the sociological imagination which is able to make that link, also without the existence of a genuine public. Therefore, it is this sociological imagination which is Mills' glimmer of hope for the reactivation of a genuine public. «The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society. That is its task and its promise» (Mills 2000c: 6).

According to Mills, the sociological imagination is «*the quality*» of mind which allows human reason to play a greater role in human affairs (Mills 2000c: 18). The social sciences are the most common denominator of the contemporary period and the sociological imagination the most needed quality of mind. The dissemination of sociological imagination through the intellectuals, especially the social scientist, and through the re-emerging genuine public would make it possible that not only a small power elite is history-making, but each and every citizen becomes part of defining the destiny of society. Only this enables, to use other terms, democratic self-organization, self-government or self-rule.

What the social scientist «ought to do for the society is to combat all those forces which are destroying genuine publics and creating a mass society – or put as a positive goal, his aim is to help build and strengthen self-cultivating publics. Only then might society be reasonable and free» (Mills 2000c: 186). Hereby, the social scientist also stands at the forefront of any liberating education. «The end product of any liberating education is simply the self-educating, self-cultivating man and woman; in short, the free and rational individual. A society in which such individuals are ascendant, is, by one major meaning of the word, democratic. Such a society may also be defined as one in which genuine publics rather than masses prevail. By this I mean the following:

Whether or not they are aware of them, men in a mass society are gripped by personal troubles which they are not able to turn into social issues. They do not understand the interplay of these personal troubles of their milieu with problems of social structure. The knowledgeable man in a genuine public, on the other hand, is able to do just that» (Mills 2000c: 187).

As already shown above, Mills defends himself decidedly against the possible accusation of being a utopian thinker. Given the current political and societal structure, Mills deems the chances of success pessimistic. Within this structure, it is not very likely that social scientist emerge as effective carriers of reason. Mills sees the gap between idea and reality very clearly. However, giving up reasoning and freedom as the core elements of democracy would mean to give up the very idea of democracy at all. Mills is not ready to surrender to a merely formal democracy. He is bridging the gap between idea and reality in a surprising move, anticipating in a certain way later Habermas' assumption that idealizing presuppositions have factual consequences.

Mills neither bridges the gap between idea and reality in terms of Marx' ideology- and power-criticism as early Habermas (Habermas 1962; Habermas 1991: 122ff.) nor perceives it, as later Habermas, explicitly «as potentials for a self-transformation» (Habermas 1992: 430). According to later Habermas, the universalistic self-understanding of the bourgeois public sphere already contained the potential of its subsequent fundamental factual reconstruction. The «dynamic of historical development» is shaped by the very «tension between idea and reality» (Habermas 1992: 442). However, Mills comes very close to that by stating the force of idealizing presuppositions as later Habermas did in his more theoretical work. By acting «as if we were in a fully democratic society [...], we are attempting to remove the <as if>» (Mills 2000c: 189). Through the idealizing presuppositions of these actions, parts of these very ideas enter reality, become social

facts. Acting «as if», based on the sociological imagination, is Mills' key element and hope for change.

Mills is pessimistic, however, because this is only a detour in absence of a direct connection. Necessary for the change of the current power structure were in fact genuine publics or in other words, a civil society in which genuine deliberation takes place and is able to influence the decision-making process, leading to structural consequences. «What are required are parties and movements and publics having two characteristics: (1) within them ideas and alternatives of social life are truly debated, and (2) they have a chance really to influence decisions of structural consequence. Only if such organizations existed, could we become realistic and hopeful about the role of reason in human affairs which I have been trying to outline. Such a situation, by the way, I should consider one major requirement for any fully democratic society» (Mills 2000c: 190). Without such democratic parties, movements and publics, democracy in the U.S. is largely only a formal democracy.

In absence of the direct way for change, it is the task of social science, as inheritor of the values of freedom and reasoning, to work for that. «The absence of democratic parties and movements and publics does not mean that social scientists as educators ought not to try to make their educational institutions a framework within which such a liberating public of individuals might exist, at least in its beginnings» (Mills 2000c: 191). In fact, Mills perceives social science as the only chance for change. «What I am suggesting is that by addressing ourselves to issues and to troubles, and formulating them as problems of social science, we stand the best chance, I believe the only chance, to make reason democratically relevant to human affairs in a free society, and so realize the classic values that underlie the promise of our studies» (Mills 2000c: 194). Acting «as if», based on the sociological imagination, is the only chance for the reactivation of genuine pub-

lics and hereby for an increased importance of reasoning as a history-making force. «If we as intellectuals, scientists, ministers do not make available, in such organs of opinion as we command, criticisms and alternatives, clearly we have little right to complain about the decline of genuine debate and about the demise of publics themselves. Given your own continued default, we cannot know what effect upon either publics or elites such public work as we might well perform and refuse to perform might have. Nobody will ever know unless we try it» (Mills 1958: 137).

To be sure, in comparison with Habermas' detailed book, Mills, like Dewey, delivers <only> a sketch of the structural transformation of the public sphere. Still, he presents it in nuce already years before Habermas. Like Dewey before him and Habermas after him, Mills' leading question is how the democratic ideal of the enlightenment can be realized under the conditions of large-scale societies. In particular, the societal conditions under which the ideal of democracy was formulated are not given anymore. By seeking an answer to this leading question, he aims to maintain the ideal of democracy in its original full sense, that is, a <radical> democracy, not just a formal democracy. He links the realization of this ideal of democracy to the structure of the public sphere. Being free to act with historical consequence and being reasonable enough to see those consequences, by each and every citizen, not just by a small elite, depends on the structure of the public sphere. The eclipse of reason, as Mills perceives it, is therefore a result of the transformation of the public. Like Dewey and Habermas, Mills assumes a decline of the public. Hereby, he makes the empirical assumption of a <golden era> in which the ideal of democracy has allegedly been approximately realized. Also like Dewey and Habermas, he understands the structural transformation of the public sphere as a key dimension of social change within modern society. In a certain way, Mills is even anticipating later Habermas' idealizing presuppositions of reasoning and communicative action. The way he captures the gap between idea and reality is not in terms of Marx' ideology- and power-criticism as early Habermas. Although he does not perceive it explicitly as potentials for a self-transformation like

later Habermas, Mills also sees the forceless force of idealizing presuppositions. As Mills puts it, by acting *as if* we were acting in a fully democratic society, we are attempting to remove the <as if>. All these elements demonstrate Mills' anticipation of Habermas' structural transformation of the public sphere and its relationship to democracy.

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