



intricatenonnection between the patterns of their own lives and the course of world history, ordinary men do not usually know what this connection *means* for the *kinds* of men they are becoming and for the kinds of history-making in which they might take part. They do not possess the quality of mind essential to *grasp* the interplay of man and society, of biography and history, of self and world. They cannot cope with their personal troubles in such ways as to control the structural transformations that usually lie behind them.

Surely it is no wonder. In what period have so many men been so totally exposed at so fast a pace to such earthquakes of change? That Americans have not known such catastrophic changes as have the men and women of other societies is due to historical facts that are now quickly becoming 'merely history.' The history that now affects every man is world history. Within this scene and this period, in the course of a single generation, one sixth of mankind is transformed from all that is feudal and backward into all that is modern, advanced, and fearful. Political colonies are freed; new and less visible forms of imperialism installed. Revolutions occur; men feel the intimate grip of new kinds of authority. Totalitarian societies rise, and are smashed to bits—or succeed fabulously. After two centuries of ascendancy, capitalism is shown up as only one way to make society into an industrial apparatus. After two centuries of hope, even formal democracy is restricted to a quite small portion of mankind. Everywhere in the underdeveloped world, ancient ways of life are broken up and vague expectations become urgent demands. Everywhere in the overdeveloped world, the means of authority and of violence become total in scope and bureaucratic in form. Humanity itself now lies before us, the super-nation at either pole concentrating its most co-ordinated and massive efforts upon the preparation of World War Three.

The very shaping of history now outpaces the ability of men to orient themselves in accordance with cherished values. And which values? Even when they do not panic, men often sense that older ways of feeling and thinking have collapsed and that newer beginnings are ambiguous to the point of moral stasis. Is it any wonder that ordinary men feel they cannot cope with the larger

worlds with which they are so suddenly confronted? That they cannot understand the meaning of their epoch for their own lives? The -in defense of selfhood—they become morally! insensible: . dying to remain altogether private men? Is it any Wonder that they come to be possessed by a sense of the trap?

• It is not only information that they need—in this Age of Fact, information often dominates their attention and overwhelms their capacities to assimilate it. It is not only the skills of reason

1:•) that they need—although their struggles to acquire these often exhaust their limited moral energy. What they need, and what they feel they need, is a quality of *! mind* that will help them to use information and to develop reason, in order to achieve lucid summations of what is going on in the World and of what may. be happening within themselves. It is this . quality, I am going to contend, that journalists and scholars, artists and publics, scientists and editors are coming to expect of

• what may be called the sociological imagination.

0, sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand a larger historical scene in *terms* of its meaning for the *inner* life and the external career of a variety of individuals. It enables him to take into account how individuals, in the welter of their experience, often become falsely conscious of their social positions. Within that welter, the framework of modern society is sought; and within that framework the psychologies of a variety of 'Oen sad women it's formulated. By such means the personal uneasiness of individuals is focused *upon* explicit troubles and the indifference of publics is transformed into involvement with public issues..

The first fruit of this imagination—and the first lesson of the social science that embodies it—is the idea that the individual can understand his own experience and gauge his own fate only by locating himself within his period, that he can know his own chances in life only by becoming aware of those of all individuals in *his* circumstances. In many ways it is a terrible lesson; in many ways a magnificent one. We do not know the limits of man's