Editor's Introduction

> *"Content analysis is a systematic and rigorous way of doing what humanistic students of ideas and behavior have always done, namely, to look at what symbols are used in a body of text. Such observations of the flows of symbols become content analysis or social science if some attention is paid to the procedures of observation."[1]*
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> —Ithiel Pool [pp. 21–22, below]

> *"In its contribution to man's life in society, content analysis is at one with all the social sciences. In general it may be said that the social sciences are the humanities of our era. In previous times scholars considered it part of their role to be teachers of princes. They saw themselves as taming the violence of man's untutored nature by instilling in their young charges the quality of reason and the humane heritage of the liberal arts.*
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> *Today the social sciences are our best tools for understanding each other's human passions, motives, and plans. They are our most effective instrument for handling man's greatest problem, organized violence. . . . It is the social sciences that best help us understand the conditions by which a group may achieve consensus, the basis of psychopathological disturbances, the needs of minorities for respect. . . "*
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> —Ithiel Pool [pp. 19–20, below]

The scientific analysis of political communications arose as the new technologies of mass communications (newspapers, radio, motion pictures) were used by governments for propaganda, by revolutionary

leaders to organize mass followings, and by democracies for daily politics and policy discussion. Content analysis, as it is called, was an evolving set of methods to observe and understand the public political process, including the spread of emotion-charged ideas and words ("symbols") across national boundaries.

Content analysis also promises deeper and more powerful insights than merely observing the surface of what is being said. Ithiel Pool, Harold Lasswell, Nathan Leites, Alexander George, Irving Janis, and many other social science pioneers who were Pool's contemporaries were fascinated by psychoanalysis and underwent personal psycho-analysis. They were never persuaded to promote Sigmund Freud's particular clinical hypotheses, but they were hooked on the possibility of making inferences, from streams of talk, about the deeper organiz-ing principles, images, and emotions that lay behind it. They hoped, someday, to both listen—and understand—individuals, group behav-ior, and even the logic of other cultures more powerfully by new methods that could be made explicit and steadily improved.

In the beginning, Ithiel Pool counted words (e.g., emotionally-charged political symbols like "democracy.") And in the so-called RADIR Project he and his associates recorded 105,000 occurrences of 415 symbols in 20,000 editorials from five countries across a sixty-year period. The work (conducted from 1948–1953) was done by hand: eventually, they set aside further research because the available tech-nology was too laborious and expensive, and computers lacked the power and memory to analyze such large datasets with sophistication. Today, improvements in scanning technology, and the growing power and memory of desktop computers, make it feasible to convert thou-sands (and even millions) of words to electronic form at affordable cost. Content analysis is a method whose time has come. But the unprecedented quantity of data available raised then—and especially raises today—the question of what should be counted, and how infer-ences should be made? [2]

"Symbols, Meaning, and Social Science"

The first selection explores the problem of inference. As Ithiel de-scribes, it can be useful to count words, obtain frequency distributions, and know that the word "democracy" began to capture imaginations in a certain historical period, and that it become so highly esteemed that

almost everybody began to claim their political loyalties as "democratic" and to describe their revolutions as "democratic" or a "people's" revolution. But this initial statistical analysis only begins to understand what is being said, and what is being heard, when we observe that the term is used. The analysis of co-occurrences, that Pool recommends to his audience, is one of the tasks that is becoming feasible on a large scale.

"Content Analysis and the Intelligence Function"

Harold Lasswell, an early leader in the development of content analysis, was Ithiel Pool's teacher at the University of Chicago. During World War II, Ithiel Pool worked as Lasswell's research assistant in Washington, DC to study Nazi propaganda. They continued a lifelong friendship. This second selection is drawn from a volume honoring Harold Lasswell's work: It provides a good historical overview of the development of content analysis and a discussion of the vision, that they shared, of producing a more thoughtful and well-informed basis for democratic decision making, and a humane politics, than the domestic and world politics, aswirl with demagoguery, impassioned rhetoric, and the threat of violence that they had inherited.

"Scratches on Our Minds: Beliefs, Stereotypes, and Images"

In applied settings (e.g., advertising) marketing researchers pay keen attention to the properties, flow, and change of images. The early social sciences, however, favored the concept of "attitude" as a more central explanation in social psychology. Thus many attitudes are measured [e.g., the extent of agreeing or disagreeing with a statement, on a 7–point scale.] but the types and properties of imagery (e.g., that ideologues have of government) still remain relatively *terra incognito*. This third selection honors the work of several theorists, including the former journalist Harold Isaacs whose interviewing methods, emphasis upon images, and (resulting) astute psychological observations Ithiel Pool admired.

Especially, Ithiel Pool felt that attention to images (going deeper than words alone) could enrich the explanatory power of social science by including—in a readily accessible way—some of the dynamics investigated by psychoanalysts.[3] Isaacs' observations about unrec-

ognized splitting of national stereotypes (e.g., fond images of India and Indians might co-occur with suspicion of China and the Chinese) alerted Pool's clinical sensibility. [4]

Notes

1. For a related discussion see Robert E. Lane, *The liberties of wit: Humanism, criticism, and the civic mind.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961).
2. The interested reader should consult, for more extensive discussions, Ithiel de Sola Pool (ed.), *Trends in content analysis* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1959), and especially Pool's summary essay, partly reproduced in Lloyd S. Etheredge (ed.), *Politics in wired nations: Selected writings of Ithiel de Sola Pool.* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1998), pp. 119—158 and the useful overviews by Ole Holsti, especially "Content analysis," in G. Lindzey and E. Aronson (eds.) *Handbook of social psychology* (Reading, MA: Addison—Wesley, 1968), vol. 2, pp. 596–692 and his *Content analysis for the social sciences and humanities.* (New York: Random House, 1969).
3. See also Lloyd S. Etheredge (ed.), *op. cit.,* pp. 10–11 and Ithiel de Sola Pool and Irwin Shulman, "Newsman's fantasies, audiences, and newswriting," reprinted in *ibid.,* pp. 29–45.
4. It would be straightforward to suggest that similar rules of "splitting" hero v. villain properties may exist in ideological images in domestic politics. For example, liberal activists imagining a benevolent government paired with the evil image of selfish businessmen; conservatives holding the heroic image of businessmen entrepreneurs paired with the evil image of a restrictive do-nothing government bureaucracy.