

The Un-TV and the 10 MPH Car

Experiments in
Personal Freedom
and Everyday Life

Bernard McGrane



Copyright © 1994 by Bernard McGrane
All rights reserved
The Small Press
18603 Highway 1, Suite 15
Fort Bragg, CA 95437
(707) 937-3044

Credits

Cover photograph by Ivan Hunter

Portions of Chapters 2 and 3 have appeared in the American Sociological Association's journal, *Teaching Sociology*, and in The Media Foundation's journal, *Adbusters Quarterly*.

I want to thank these publishers for permission to quote from material they published:

1. Shambala Publications, Inc., for permission to quote from Natalie Goldberg's *Writing Down the Bones*
2. Burning Deck, and Wesleyan University Press, for permission to quote from Russell Edison's "With Sincerest Regret," in *The Wounded Breakfast*
3. Beacon Press, for permission to quote from Philip Slater's *The Pursuit of Loneliness*
4. Random House, Inc. for permission to quote from *The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*
5. McGraw Hill, for permission to quote from Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire*
6. The Philosophical Library, for permission to quote from Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*
7. Simon and Schuster, and Tolec Artists, for permission to quote from Carlos Castaneda's *Journey to Ixtlan*
8. William Morrow and Co., for permission to quote from Jerry Mander's *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*
9. Warner Books, Inc., for permission to quote from Jean Liedloff's *The Continuum Concept*
10. Bantam Books, for permission to quote from Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*
11. Grove Press, for permission to quote from Andre Gregory and Wallace Shawn's *My Dinner With Andre*

Cataloging in Publications Data

McGrane, Bernard

The un-rv and the 10 mph car:

experiments in personal freedom and everyday life / Bernard McGrane
p. cm.

Bibliography p. 360

Index p. 369

ISBN 1-878020-05-6

1. Sociology—experiments
 2. Anthropology—philosophy—sociology
 3. Difference (philosophy)
 4. Ethnocentrism
 5. Social perception (social psychology)
 6. Zen Buddhism
- I. Title
HM45.M47 1994

301.072

193-22203

CIP

Library of Congress No. 93-087106
Manufactured in the United States of America
First edition

To my teacher, Chögyam Trungpa, Rinpoche and his vast
vision of Buddhism in America.

To all my students who have been my teachers and whose
book this is.

And, with love, to Lorraine and Melanie.

PROLOGUE

FIND A RELATIVELY BUSY PLACE, stand still and *do nothing* for ten minutes. Do this with beginner's mind. Observe what goes on within you and without you. See what you can see....

- Watch TV for one half hour *without turning it on*. Do this with beginner's mind. Observe what goes on within you and without you. See what you can see....

- Observe your ordinary reflection in a mirror for fifteen minutes.... Take your clothes off and observe your body in the mirror, for five minutes see it *as naked*, then for five minutes see it *as nude*. See what you can see....

- For the next week every time you ride an elevator step in and *remain facing rear*.... For the next week every time you answer your telephone *refrain* from saying "Hello" and when you finish your conversation refrain from saying "Good-bye." Do this with beginner's mind. See what you can see....

- Drive your car at *ten miles per hour* for ten minutes. Observe what goes on within you and without you. See what you can see....

- Sit still in your house or apartment with all the power off for fifteen minutes; then sit still with every appliance in there turned on for fifteen minutes. See what you can see....

- Walk for one hour—not in this city, not in this state, not in this country. Walk, rather, for one hour *on the earth* without knowing in advance where you are going. Use beginner's mind. See what you can see....

- Before you eat your dinner observe what's on your plate for three minutes with beginner's mind and then proceed to eat it without any utensils. Observe what goes on within you and without you. See what you can see....

- Observe your toilet bowl for fifteen minutes. Use beginner's mind. See what you can see....

- Go out into the world, find another living being, an ant, a beetle, a fish, a cat, what have you, observe it closely with beginner's mind for ten minutes

and then *contemplate* killing it. After this, when the occasion arises, observe a pedestrian while you are behind the wheel of your car and again, *contemplate* killing him or her. Observe what goes on within you and without you. See what you can see....

- For the next week every time you go and come from work or school take a different route. See what you can see....
- For the next week every night as you are falling asleep observe the stages your body/mind goes through and as you fall asleep, then, while you are dreaming, in the midst of your dream, look down at your dream hands. See what you can see....
- For the next week, whenever the thought of the exercise occurs to you, glance past your left shoulder, using your peripheral, unfocused vision, and see your own death-as-an-advisor. See what you can see....

INTRODUCTION

THIS IS THE PRACTICE SCHOOL of sociology. Zen-inspired sociology: applied meditation. It is also a manual, hands-on, somewhat athletic approach to examining the astonishing relation between society and self. It approaches social theory on the level of the kitchen sink. As such, this book is intended to be practiced, not merely read. It is an exercise in "liberation sociology." It is more guide book and manual than text, more inspirational than explanatory. Sociology, like science in general, is safe to learn and to teach. It is dangerous to *do*.

Studying sociology, or rather, *doing* sociology, as we will engage in it will take a certain amount of "going against the grain" of how our thought patterns habitually work. It will necessitate an "initial derailment of the mind from the tracks of common sense." (*Collins 1985:1*) In this course, this book, this journey of ours together, we will try to de-familiarize ourselves with what we already know, *un-learning* fundamental assumptions of what society is, how it works, and who we are. We will be examining practices in everyday life as well as the practice of everyday life. (*de Certeau 1984*) We will be working with a sociological koan: WHERE DOES SOCIETY END AND MY SELF BEGIN? In Collins' words, "Our cultural environment—the everyday world—has to be turned into a strange place if we are to see that its perceived orderliness is a remarkable and mysterious human accomplishment." (*Collins 1985:4*) It's rather hard to do but if we get intrigued by it and actually engage in *doing* it there is a possibility that we will learn something—learn something real rather than merely academic. We might perhaps discover a new dimension of our own being, a dimension long ago forgotten, layered over.

Discovery is not the seeing of a new thing—but rather a new way of seeing things. We will, hopefully, see old, familiar things in a new way, and this can effect a change in us—a peculiar and profound sort of change. One of the most powerful, disturbing, vertigo inducing changes of mind that has ever occurred in Western history was the Copernican revolution of the sixteenth century when the earth ceased being the unmovable center of the universe around which the sun, stars and planets revolved. In *The Copernican Revolution*, Thomas Kuhn talks of a "paradigm shift:" after Copernicus nothing changes—the everyday sun still rises and still sets—and yet *everything*

Universal teaching is
individual, not societal.
-Darcione

INTRODUCTION

changed, because he presented a new way of looking at (and therefore living in) old, familiar things. Hopefully, we can engage in ourselves a "paradigm shift" regarding our society and our self and also to some modest degree feel the thrill and the fear of falling off the edge of the known world.

In order to help achieve this, we will be doing a number of experiments which will be closely related to various sociological topics and investigations. The experiments or "ventures in de-socialization"—derived from a synthesis of the traditions of Ethnomethodology, Critical Sociology, and Tibetan and Zen Buddhism—are designed to put you on the spot. They are based on the ancient premise that nothing is so remarkable as that which happens to oneself, however commonplace it may be to others. They are exercises in social de-conditioning and involved with the theory and practice of de-socialization. They transform you, so to speak, into your own laboratory, so that you can do sociology on your own.

These experiments require a certain amount of courage, societal courage, as it were, especially regarding public behavior and ordinary social norms and restraint. Scientific courage and daring are ancient and venerable qualities in our Western heritage. As Pirsig says in *Lila*, "Once the intellect has been let out of the bottle of social restraint, it is almost impossible to put it back in again." (1992:268) Finally, these experiments will serve as an aid in provoking you to personally experience sociological ideas rather than merely thinking about them. In sociology, as in other disciplines, some texts (and some teachers) teach the subject matter and some texts (and teachers) teach the student. This approach tries to weave and cross-fertilize these approaches.

DE-SCHOOLING SELF, DE-SCHOOLING SCHOOL

Eric

A teacher who does not teach, teaches best.

This book is intended to be two things: firstly it is an account of how I have used sociological experiments in my classes and secondly, it is an invitation to the reader to become a student of these experiments and to begin the journey of de-socialization.

One of the things that teaching has taught me is that there is no such thing as teaching. Learning seems to be real, natural and genuine, but teaching as it currently exists in our so called educational institutions is highly suspicious, and in a large sense very artificial. What I tried to do in my sociology classes was to create an environment in which learning could, as it were, spontaneously happen. In a sense, this is no easy task because of the very structure of

the institutionalized classroom situation. Inge Bell (1991) addresses this quite pointedly and with disturbing honesty in her book, *This Book Is Not Required*, especially in the chapter on "Grades." From her point of view "grades" are subtly and powerfully the first institutional obedience (after the family) we are subject to. First and foremost, grades teach us *not* to question grades, not to question the system of evaluation and the value of these values. Grades are not a topic of inquiry and learning, they are a taken for granted structure, a frame of reference, *for* learning.

HOW INSTITUTIONS THINK

I never did allow school to interfere too much with my education.

Mark Twain

Following Bell's lead, our first sociological topic for reflection should, I think, really be our all too familiar experience of society called "school." That is, I suggest we begin to cultivate a critical sociological view, first, towards our own educational situation as we have experienced it so far. Today schooling is confused with education. *Schooling is not education; it's conformity. School is no longer an environment in which people can think freely and feel deeply.* After the intensive *institutionalization of education* by the state in the 19th century, we are today in a situation where there is a deep theory and deep structure of socialization already firmly and invisibly in place in the gestures of the school and of the academy. Subtly, unconsciously, we become prisoners of society's school and its curriculum. Bell analyzes the traumatizing effect of our formal school systems. Like Alice Miller's *Prisoners of Childhood*, she addresses the ordinary cruelty of our established, routine practices. When we, as a collective whole, have all been traumatized, we fail to recognize it as such and see this training and treatment as normal.

We spend our entire academic careers confined within a subtle displacement of attention: trying to get "A's" rather than trying to learn. The original love of knowledge is turned into the desire for good grades. Going to school, from this perspective, teaches us how to be good at... going to school. How to read the teachers, how to work the system. *We become good students of school, not necessarily of life.* Learning in and of itself gets pushed aside and de-valued in the pursuit of external *rewards*, i.e., grades. We are taught to obey more than encouraged to learn. Above all, we are programmed to do all of our learning work (our school work) *for* some type of grade or reward, i.e., we are programmed *to need to be rewarded*. We sacrifice the meaning of the way by our fixation on the goal and this *reward-system* becomes a part of us, so much

so that we don't even realize it is there, and a chain of unhappiness begins. One student put it thus:

Laura

I remember sitting in my eighth grade class one day and our teacher said it was career day and we all had to choose a career. She passed out sheets of paper to all of us with different careers on them. We were supposed to circle the career we wanted. She then explained that the students with high grades would receive a different list of careers than the people with average grades. I had average grades and I was shocked when I saw the list I was supposed to choose from. It consisted of hairstylist, secretary, fashion designer, cashier, retail sales, and the list went on. The people with A's received lists that said doctor, lawyer, psychologist, teacher, etc. This proves that a student is labeled by grades at a very young age. When you're barely even old enough to read you're already being labeled by red stars or gold stars on pictures you've colored. If you don't make that gold star your peers will make fun of you, and teachers will ignore you.

Fear is instilled in you the day you enter kindergarten and it never goes away. When you are in high school you spend most of your time worrying about what college will accept you. When you finally make it to college you worry about whether or not you'll graduate on time or even at all, and the constant fear about what you're going to do after college never leaves you. Society and the media have brainwashed us into thinking that we have to be rich in order for us to be happy. Just being successful doesn't really matter anymore. Because you can be successful at your craft and still not make much money.

Not only do we worry about grades we worry about our identity. No one grows up saying they want to be a truck driver some day. Even though truck drivers make more money than some businessmen. A lot of people fear that their job will become them and in turn their job will be their identity. In Bell's book, *This Book is Not Required*, the first chapter is about grades. I believe she chose grades as her lead off for a reason. Grades are only the beginning of all the fear and worries we carry with us for the rest of our lives.

Just look at the architecture and choreography of our educational space, the proxemics of bodies in a physical, social and symbolic space: the CLASS-room. For twelve years or so we've been coming into large rectangular boxes, sitting in almost militarily precise straight rows, facing forward and remaining silent—listening to some authority figure in the front of the room tell us what “knowledge” is. Is the structure of this situation and the values implicitly built into it really conducive to learning? “Everything the educator does only succeeds in becoming, for the student, part of the educational package. The highest role of the educator is the maleduc role of Socrates: to help the student

INTRODUCTION

come to himself *not as a consumer* of experience but as a sovereign individual.” (Perry 1975:63, *emphasis mine*)

Politically speaking, on the level of conscious and unconscious intention, the lecture hall and the lecture itself, is designed to enhance the authority of the instructor while limiting the power of the student, and, to slightly alter W.I. Thomas's sociological principle, *if teachers define situations as real they are real in their consequences*. Is the choreographed space of the school classroom really designed to encourage and reinforce inquiry and inquisitiveness, to celebrate the dance and joy of robust learning—or rather is it designed to breed and reinforce a kind of programming, an oblique yet habitual obedience to authority, a view of students as consumers of education, and a commercialized view of education as a commodity? “Education for sale.” The school/self relationship becomes one of inter-destruction.

Look at *pre-schoolers* from this point of view and what you immediately see are walking scientists, fresh minds not yet covered over by the mold of established society. They have an incredible curiosity and an inexhaustible inquisitiveness—a real ‘questioning mind’; so much so that parents find they have to literally child-proof their domestic environments (which are “educational” environments) to prevent the pre-schoolers from hurting or even killing themselves because of their primordial inquisitiveness. Take that same walking scientist and put her in school. Observe her after a year or two: dull-eyed, listless, *bored*. Is our modern school, as it is designed and experienced, set up to educate us, or rather, as Ivan Illich (1970) contends in *Deschooling Society* and Paulo Freire (1970) in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, to dis-educate us? Is it set up to dis-connect us from our own intrinsic inquisitiveness, to instill obedience and to further establish this industrial, high-tech age of educated ignorance, programmed optimism, and designer consciousness? To put it bluntly, mandatory school is a place where children are taught to be ignorant. Freire has put it most succinctly:

Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students. This solution is not (nor can it be) found in the banking concept. On the contrary, banking education maintains and even stimulates the contradiction through the following attitudes and practices, which mirror oppressive society as a whole:

- (a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught
- (b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing
- (c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
- (d) the teacher talks and the students listen—meekly;

- (e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
- (f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
- (g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;
- (h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;
- (i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his own professional authority, which he sets in opposition to the students;
- (j) the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects. (Freire 1970:59)

In the world of school an aggressively enforced dualism and passivity (sometimes, as with TV, entertaining) seems to rule the day, rather than a creative involvement where everybody is the teacher, everybody the student. In many of my classes I have undergraduate students who have already taken the course and felt a connection with it voluntarily come back the next semester in order to, themselves, teach small seminar groups of the new students. These student/teachers are called "P.C.s" (Participation Coordinators). They experience this structural dualism quite vividly:

Melissa

It seems as if we all live within a world of walls. We're brought up to believe that we have to stay within these walls in order to fit into society... One of the most profound walls I've ever encountered has been that surrounding education. We are roped into a role as "student" or "teacher," both of which are mutually exclusive, and never allowed to venture beyond them for fear of crumbling the entire educational system.... Becoming a "P.C." I, a student in my own right, became a teacher, and at the same time learned more than I ever have in any classroom as a student. It's almost as if I was playing an *un-role* as a P.C., because it was my responsibility to *undo* traditional roles of 'teacher' and 'student'. In any case, what eventually happened was that I learned how to learn from the world at large, not just from the entity behind the desk.

It is my personal conviction that, existentially and practically speaking, the *best* way you can begin your college education after graduating from high school is by *not* going to college... at least not immediately. One needs to get off the numbing conveyor belt of structured, step-and-lock education before going to college. If possible, at least a year or more should be spent working... and wandering, prior to going to college. It will deepen and improve the quality of your college experience... as well as your studentship.

CHAPTER 1

WARNING: STUDYING SOCIOLOGY CAN BE HARMFUL TO YOUR EGO

SOCIOLOGY AND ITS DANGERS

Kenneth

Am I me or am I society?



THE SURGEON GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES has required that a warning label be placed on every pack of cigarettes, "Caution: this is harmful to your health." So too, we could require a warning label on every sociology course: "Warning: studying sociology can be harmful to your ego and to your illusions."¹

The great twentieth century philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, once concluded, "We see the world the way we do not because that's the way it is, but because we have these ways of seeing." Sociology, as I have presented and practiced it, is a way of seeing. For the school of sociology called ethnomethodology most conventional sociology is itself a reflection of society rather than an analysis of society.

In a sense society does not exist. It is a modern myth. And sociology is both an expression of that myth and simultaneously the study of that myth, its mythology. Furthermore, sociology is also the study of the consequences of *believing* in that myth and believing in that mythology. It is, I believe, a ruthlessly critical enterprise and one not to be entered into lightly. It will cost the student quite a bit, actually, and if one happens to be at a very insecure and uncertain stage of one's personal development it's probably best to refrain from practicing sociology. Peter Berger put a warning sign in front of his

enormously popular *Invitation to Sociology*: "People who like to avoid shocking discoveries, who prefer to believe that society is just what they were taught in Sunday School, who like the safety of the rules and maxims of what Alfred Schütz has called the 'world-taken-for-granted,' *should stay away from sociology*." (Berger 1963:24, *emphasis mine*) I would also like to add another "warning" sign, this one from Carlos Castaneda's teacher, don Juan: "To believe that the world is only as you think it is, is stupid.... The world is a mysterious place." (Castaneda 1972:64)

It will take, as I said, a certain kind of courage, a certain warrior or samurai quality, to *do* sociology, for sociology is both dangerous and liberating in reference to our own socialization process. The point is not that you learn a little or even a lot about sociology. The point is that you *become* more sociological. In studying "society" in the context of a formal educational institution we often unconsciously assume that we are studying "them." We are not. We are studying "us." We are studying ourselves. The experiments we will be engaging in challenge the historic premise of the innate stability of the individual. (Nisbet 1966:9) They explore, and therefore, also tear at, the very tissue of society, self and identity as we conventionally experience them. When we live in society we are often unaware of society because we live inside society.

It may be said that the first teaching of ethnomethodological sociology is "things are not what they appear to be.... nor are they otherwise." We will be cutting through our ideologies and illusions about how society works and, more importantly, who we think we are. (For many schools of sociology, who we think we are is both a function and result of how society works.) Unlike conventional "radical sociology" this approach to society and self is not about criticizing institutions but about awakening from illusions. Our principle *method* or *practice* of investigation will be de-socialization. We will strive to become an extra-environmental.

"If a man wishes to escape from prison, the first thing he must do is *realize that he is in prison*—without that realization no escape is possible." (Gurdjieff) In general, this book is about relieving us of the anxiety of our social programming by doing experiments that paradoxically appear at first to greatly heighten that anxiety. As a manual of practices it intends to show us the illusions we live by in contrast to the realities we live in, especially in regards to our vanity-individualism and freedom: we are conditioned to think of ourselves as unconditioned. We are today imprisoned in our freedom. This is almost a reflex with us; it is not examined. We are deeply programmed to believe that we, as free individuals, are the source of all our actions and that, further, we are in control of all our actions. We are programmed to be con-

vinced that we are free of all programming; it is *un-thinkable* that we are programmed. The experiments in this book are designed to burst this comfortable yet confining cocoon, this strangely transparent bubble of unconsciousness and to enable us, perhaps for the first time, to consciously question our conditioning and literally feel in-depth our ideological programming. As Judith Williamson has said in *Decoding Advertisements* regarding the toxic power of our ad-virionment and the besmearing quality of our ad-mosphere, "Ideology is always precisely that of which we are not aware. It is only ideology in as far as we do not perceive it as such. And how does it become 'invisible,' what keeps it hidden from us?... We are *trapped in the illusion of choice*. 'Freedom' is *in fact part of the most basic ideology*..." (Williamson 1978:42, *emphasis mine*)

Obviously we are situated in the cultural ideology of "individualism" or "irrational individualism" as the German sociologist Habermas calls it. This particular experimental, educational approach to society takes full advantage of this cultural situation and uses it as path and stepping stone. We will be examining the social chains that we don't even notice are binding us. As one student put it:

Amy

Before this class, I was under the mistaken impression that I was a unique individual who did the things I did and behaved the way I did because that is how I consciously wanted to. I did not see myself as governed by societal rules, and in fact I prided myself in the thought that I was very anti-society and was not just a social ant. I was definitely not a creature of habit, nor did society rule me. I did not see myself as an active participant in maintaining social structure and order.

How wrong I was. By doing the elevator experiment, phone experiment, and conversational analysis, I realized just how much I am a product of societal rules and how easily I follow these rules without a second thought. This is somewhat scary to me because I feel like I've taken a glimpse at the awesome power that society can have when all its members follow complex and intricate rules of everyday life that they're not even aware of.

In the actual process of directly and immediately experiencing society as an ongoing accomplishment, one also experiences one's self as a busy, almost hyperactive construction worker in that accomplishment. Further, one begins to be haunted by the suspicion that one's own "self" is a social institution. One begins to feel the enmeshment of self into society and of society into self. Further down the line it begins to become disturbingly clear that not only "external" society but also one's intimate "self" is an ongoing accomplishment.

With this approach to sociology and society the apparent solidity of oneself is dissolved, as it is in the Buddhist realization and teaching of no-self. When one actually *experiences* the shifting threshold of the very ground and foundation of the society/self dualism, society becomes more real as the self becomes less real... and *vice versa*. In some sense doing this creates, initially, an unsettling hole in one's life, somewhat like when one first discerned that there really was no Santa Claus.

One final "caution." This approach treats sociology and de-socialization not as a project, *another* project, but as an unfolding way of being. It has often struck me that the process of de-socialization, once begun, is, in its own peculiar way, irreversible. To try to completely revert back to collective unconsciousness is a little like trying to put toothpaste back into the tube. It is perhaps best never to have begun the process of de-socialization, but, once begun, better to go all the way. (Though, lest we take ourselves too seriously, this is, of-course, just another college course you happen to be taking. We need to keep our sense of humor.)

WORKING

Studs Terkel, more an American institution now than an author, has composed a marvelous book called *Working, People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do* (1972). As are his other books on race, the American Dream, the Depression, it is a book structured around a widely diverse collection of in depth interviews with people in a wide, heterogeneous spectrum of occupations: steelworkers, firemen, ad executives, millionaire entrepreneurs, prostitutes, policemen, professional athletes. It's a deeply honest book which deglamorizes many of our myths and preconceptions about occupations and professions in contemporary American society. It does this by offering a firsthand account of the everyday disillusionment and daily despair that the great majority of today's work force lives through. In our sociology course we used Terkel to gain access to, or to bring us into the presence of, a number of classical sociological problems: the relationship of working to the nature and complexity of the social structure and to the nature and complexity of personal life (*Karl Marx's field of concern and analysis*). As an introductory text it has rich resonances with a number of key sociological concepts and preoccupations: the distinctive nature of human labor and alienation (*Marx*), the division of labor, social solidarity and anomie (*Adam Smith and Emile Durkheim*), the moral value and meaning of work and the Protestant ethic (*Max Weber*), capitalism and socialism, exploitation and social justice, the social distribution of wealth, social status and class, the role of

money and social security, the social construction and accomplishment of human identity, coherence and social order (*George Herbert Mead, Erving Goffman, Peter Berger and Harold Garfinkel*).²

UN-OCCUPIED, UN-EMPLOYED: OUR FIRST EXPERIMENT

There's a difficulty in teaching: when you tell people something, you keep them from ever knowing it. If they find out on their own, they'll know it in a way they never will if you tell them. (*Thomkins 1990:48*)

In order to examine this constellation of rather abstract concepts directly and personally, we engaged in our first experiment: un-occupied, un-employed. The experiment was to *do nothing, to be un-occupied and un-employed for ten minutes*, and see what you can see. I explained that I preferred that the students did this experiment in a relatively busy place and that I meant what I was saying to be taken *quite literally*. They were to stand there in an ordinary social setting and *do nothing* for ten minutes. They were to stand still in a relaxed standing at attention, eyes not wandering about. They weren't allowed to pretend they were waiting for someone as that would be "doing waiting," to use Goffmanesque terminology, with all the activity entailed by that particular behavioral pattern: glancing nervously at one's watch, looking around periodically and repeatedly so as to appear to be looking *for* someone, and so on. They weren't allowed to "do sight-seeing," that is, self-consciously to act the way we think people do when they're sight-seeing: scrutinizing and admiring architecture, landscape, and the like. They weren't to sit down and "do relaxing" or "time out" or "people watching." They were, quite simply, to *do nothing*. I showed them physically in class what I had in mind. I stood perfectly still, arms and face dropped into deep relaxation. After a time all aspects of interactional attention vanished. The "aura" of interactional readiness that invisibly surrounds our social, physical presence dropped away. I guess I looked to them a little like a cross between a meditator and a zombie.

They were to do nothing *for ten minutes*, I emphasized. The ten minute time requirement was strict.

In *The Republic*, Plato describes human ignorance as conventional knowledge and as common sense. He draws his famous cave analogy: our human situation is as if we were all sitting inside a deep, very dark cave facing the wall, chained to our environment, with a fire at our backs. As objects pass by the fire, they cast shadows on the cave wall; we come to know these shadows and to take them as real. Because they are all we ever see, we assume that they are the reality rather than the shadow of the reality. If we somehow break the

chains of our ignorance and turn to the fire, we will be temporarily dazed by its brightness because we have become accustomed to seeing in the dark. If we take courage and venture outside the cave altogether, initially we will be blinded by the brightness of the sun, by the brightness of genuine reality. In short, it will take time for our eyes to adjust.

I told the students that they were in a similar situation with regard to this experiment: it would take courage and time for their minds to adjust. If they gave up too soon, they would not have seen anything because they didn't allow enough time for their eyes, or mind to adjust. Thoreau addresses this aspect of time-needed-to-see in his essay "Walking." He talks of often realizing that though he has been walking in the woods a whole hour he hasn't yet *really been there* in the woods:

Of course it is of no use to direct our steps to the woods, if they do not carry us thither. I am alarmed when it happens that I have walked a mile into the woods bodily, without getting there in spirit. In my afternoon walk I would feign forget all my morning occupations and my obligations to society. But it sometimes happens that I cannot easily shake off the village. The thought of some work will run in my head and I am not where my body is—I am out of my senses. In my walks I would feign return to my senses. What business have I in the woods, if I am thinking of something out of the woods?... Above all, we cannot afford not to live in the present. (*Thoreau 1849: 602-630*)

In our experiment we must walk, or, rather, stand, in the woods called "society" for a block of time in order to actually come into its presence in the present.

A further strict requirement for this experiment was regarding the students' minds: they were not to occupy their minds with daydreaming of any kind (un-occupied). They were not to engage-themselves-in-remembering-their-past-nor-in-planning-their-future. They were not to surrender this present moment to the past or the future; they were to "be present" and to do this experiment with "beginner's mind."

"Beginner's mind" is, in a sense, the opposite of "expert's mind." The expert is so full of knowledge, facts, judgments and theories that she can't see anything new or fresh.³ It's a mind that indulges itself in explanations. "Beginner's mind," in contrast, doesn't know in advance what it's going to see and experience. It's open, hollow, flexible, receptive and tuned in to what is happening in the present moment. I said that I wanted them to use "beginner's mind" rather than "society's mind," and to allow their mind to unknot itself. For the "beginner's mind" everything becomes interesting for no reason at all.

In *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, Suzuki Roshi says, "If your mind is empty, it is always ready for anything; it is open to everything. In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities; in the expert's mind there are few." (1970: 21) "Beginner's mind," as the founder of Western phenomenology Edmund Husserl states, is "a return to the things themselves" rather than the prefabricated perceptions, the Platonic shadows, that we habitually tend to put in their place. (*Barrett 1958: 213*) As one of Husserl's students, Merleau-Ponty, put it in *The Phenomenology of Perception*, "The first philosophical act would appear to be to return to the world of actual experience which is prior to the objective world... To return to the things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge..." (1962: 57) "Beginner's mind" also enables us to exercise what Krishnamurti has called *Freedom from the Known* (1969).

Finally, I concluded, the students were, simply and directly, to observe what goes on within them and without them and to type up their observations for next week's class.

RESISTANCE

This was our first experiment and this was all I told them: definitive, minimal instructions, simple, straightforward and concise.⁵ Instructions which also seem to challenge the deep model of "legal learning" in the academy. I remember after giving these instructions and after a few silent moments of stunned and bewildered faces the questions and the resistance started to arise. "What are we supposed to see?" My response, "See what you can see." "What if someone approaches you?" Response, "You're on your own." "What's the purpose of doing this experiment?" Response, "Just do it. Actually do it. See what you can see. See what you see.... It's an experiment for goodness sake!... Anyway, look on the bright side: when's the last time anyone assigned you nothing to do for homework?" In short, I practiced the art of *with-holding teaching*.

But by assigning them, planning nothing there is a teaching occurring.

EXPERIMENTING WITH EXPERIMENTING

Precisely speaking, this is an experiment without beliefs or concepts. It's an experiment free from the security of a hypothesis or research agenda. It's an exploration, an "exploriment." It encourages concept-free observation. One puts one's experience under the microscope of a sort of meditative practice and awareness. The instructions are to watch: to watch without watching for something. In *Crazy Wisdom*, the Tibetan teacher Chögyam Trungpa says, "It seems that if you are purely looking for answers, then you don't per-

ceive anything. In the proper use of intellect, you don't look for answers, you just see..." (1991:165) This assignment then is part scientific experiment, part challenge to the established pedagogy of science, and part challenge to the ruling model of science itself. It has the qualities of "rebel without a cause," "scientist without a hypothesis," and "cultural revolution" all compressed into one.

I remember once getting to the point in describing this experiment where I physically demonstrate how it might look to "stand still and do nothing" and one student moaned out very loudly "OOHHHHY!! Everyone is going to think you're completely weird! Do we have to do this?!! IIEEYEE!!" I said, "Knowing in advance what you are going to experience is 'expert's mind,' not 'beginner's mind.' This is an EXPERIMENT."

This student instantly had a hypothesis, "If I stand still like that and literally do nothing people will think I'm weird." We have here a classic "if...then" logical structure and a classic "if...then" experimental hypothesis. I think this student's version of science, acquired in school, is deeply at odds with the approach to experimentation I'm here presenting.

In *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (1974), Robert Pirsig has some wonderful things to say about the way science is mistaught by giving out pre-known "hypotheses" to be "empirically tested" by students. Thomas Kuhn, in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1970), also addressed this misguided pedagogy that relies on embalmed experiments with dotted lines for correct dissection. None of our science curriculum has anything to say about where you get hypotheses from, just that they are somehow "created" by highly intelligent people. The only advice you get regarding hypotheses within this version of science and teaching science is that you are to somehow come up with one.

This student thought and felt, "If I stand still like that and do nothing, people will think I'm weird." From the perspective I'm presenting here, to have this hypothesis is already to have "experts mind." To repeat, "beginner's mind" doesn't know in advance what its going to see. "Expert's mind" has a hypothesis. It then looks at the situation to see if the hypothesis is confirmed or denied. "Beginner's mind" looks at the situation, period. To experiment like this is more to become an experiment than to conduct and observe an experiment. As the Vietnamese monk, Thich Nat Hanh, has said, "...our life is the instrument with which we experiment with truth."

See what you can see, rather than look for x to see if your theory is confirmed or denied. Hence this experiment is radical in reference to the very tradition of scientific experimentation.⁷

I added a clarification regarding *doing* sociology, *doing* science: if they chickened out and only *imagined* what it would be like to be un-occupied and to do nothing for ten minutes, all they would get would be the reports of their own socialized imagination. This is an Outward Bound approach, though to ordinary society rather than to the wilderness. It is necessary to actually *do* the "experiment." As I said earlier, sociology is safe to learn and to teach but dangerous to do. Also, if you don't actually do these "experiment/exercises" you won't begin to develop your sociological muscles, nor your sociological imagination and you won't be able to keep them in good shape.

This way of teaching about society teaches that you have to change not what you think about society, but *the way* you think about society, and *you can't change the way you think about society by thinking about it* because you'll just be doing more of the way you think.⁸ This way of sociological knowledge is *experiential and experimental*. It is *empirical but not positivistic*. You don't get it by first understanding it and then doing it. Only by doing it do you understand it. In fact I encouraged them to go even further and instead of just doing the experiment, I encouraged them to *become* the experiment, to become the investigation itself. Imagination, speculation, gedanken-experiments, common sense, etc., won't help us here in our study of society. Whatever you think it is, it isn't. We have to actually *do* the experiments and have the experience. In this approach we *experiment our way to awareness*.

For centuries during the Middle Ages people *imagined* that if you dropped a boulder and a marble off the leaning tower of Pisa, *of course* the big boulder would fall faster. Then one day a young gentleman named Galileo was foolish enough to actually climb up the tower and *do* it.⁹ It turned out that they fell at the same rate, with the same gravitational acceleration, and modern science was born. In some sense we, too, must dare to be foolish. We must be willing to be uncomfortable. This attitude of being profoundly suspicious of what our common sense imagination tells us about the nature and structure of "society" and "self" is also at the heart of Durkheim's *Rules of Sociological Method* as well as of its later manifestation in Garfinkel's *Studies in Ethnomethodology*.

The impulses of common sense are so deeply ingrained in us that it is difficult to eradicate them from sociological discussion. When we consciously free our thoughts of them, they still mold our unconscious judgements.... The reader must bear in mind that the ways of thinking to which he is most inclined are adverse, rather than favorable, to the scientific study of social phenomena; and he must consequently be on guard against his first impressions.... To treat the [social] facts of a certain order as things is...to assume a certain mental attitude toward them on the principle that when approaching their study we are abso-

lurely ignorant of their nature.... What it demands is that the sociologist put himself in the same state of mind as the physicist, chemist, or physiologist when he probes into a still unexplored region of the scientific domain. When he penetrates the social world, he must be aware that he is penetrating the unknown. (*Durkheim 1895:xxxiii-xxv*)

In doing sociology...every reference to the "real world", even where the reference is to physical or biological events, is a reference to the organized activities of everyday life. ...the objective reality of social facts as an ongoing accomplishment of the concerted activities of daily life, with the ordinary...ways of that accomplishment... taken for granted, is, for ...sociology, a fundamental phenomenon.... Ethnomethodological studies analyze everyday activities.... (*Garfinkel 1967: vii*)

ADVICE ON HOW NOT TO READ

In 1762, in his revolutionary treatise on modern education, *Emile*, Rousseau wrote:

It will never be clear to me why everything that men are obliged to know should be enclosed in books, and why anyone who doesn't have access to those books, or to the people who understand them, should be punished for his involuntary ignorance. Always books! What an obsession! Because Europe is full of books, Europeans regard them as indispensable, without considering that the inhabitants of three-quarters of the earth's surface have never even seen one. (*1762:280*)

In the 1840's, Schopenhauer echoed Rousseau's position in an essay called "On Thinking for Oneself,"

The surest way of having no thoughts of one's own is to take up a book every moment one has nothing else to do. It is this practice which explains why erudition makes most people more stupid and silly than they are by nature. (*1960:23*)

As I said, I would like to invite you, the reader, to *use* this book rather than merely "read" it. Some former students have put it succinctly,

Michelle

I didn't understand the significance of the experiment until I actually did it.

Eric

The material was not learned but experienced.

Rick

I always thought that I was understanding it by reading it.

Books are no substitute for direct experience.¹⁰ To just conventionally read this manual on de-socialization, self and society would be like just reading a manual on swimming without ever actually going near the water, or just reading a menu without ever actually tasting the food. It won't do much good. Hence I would like to urge you, challenge you, dare you, (whatever it takes!) to simply and personally *do the ten minute experiment we have just discussed before going on...* *Who knows, it may be the most unexciting ten minutes in your life.*