

howard s. becker
franck leibovici

exercises

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the uses of exercises

We have collected descriptions of a lot of exercises from sociology (letting that stand for the larger collection of social sciences) and the arts (some of them from situations of teaching the practice of various arts, mainly photography, music and performance but ranging wider than that). We intuit some more general ideas from this collection of specific exercises, and from our own practice of these fields. Although I (Howie Becker) am a sociologist by trade and Franck Leibovici says he is a poet (I think what he does merits a more inclusive title), both of us have done our collecting across a wide range of fields in both areas.

I'm going to make my intuitions as explicit as I can, and push them as far as I can, at the risk of crossing some border that may exist between imagination and foolishness.

Freeing our imaginations. Teachers across a wide range of activities use exercises, specifically tailored to the field they teach, to open students' imaginations and prevent them from imitating what they imagine to be what successful practitioners of their trades do.

Students imitate these models because they want to do work their teachers and fellow students will recognize as good, that will have the features of competent professionalism, and that will (usually in some way they can't explain because they haven't had the experience yet) show off their distinctive gifts of observation, analysis and making work that embodies their talents.

These exercises direct them to do things they think are foolish and counterproductive, but the power of the teacher overrides those judgments based in common sense. If they are lucky and pay attention, the exercises show them possibilities they didn't know existed.

My own experiences learning photography at an advanced age (42) taught me the wisdom of such exercises. Beginning photographers feel overwhelmed by the "great works" they have encountered in their reading, looking in galleries, in the work of more advanced students doing projects

they would never have dreamed of. Naturally, they imitate, as best they can, these works that they admire. They choose similar subjects, hoping that they can find the same qualities in the world around them that these more gifted and experienced photographers have found. Edward Weston photographed nude women? I'll photograph nude women. Ansel Adams photographed majestic mountains? I'll go to similar mountains and hope to "capture" similar majesty. Robert Frank traveled across the United States and made what were apparently (but not really) random snapshots that somehow magically "captured" the nature of that vast country. Etc.

The clue to the mistake this point of view embodies lies in the word "captured." Which suggests that the quality the photographer wants to exhibit on paper already exists in the object we see. Our job is to catch it the way we might catch a wild animal or a bird. Why is that a mistake? Because the quality isn't there in the object. It's in the relation between us and the object. All the qualities I attributed to the things Adams and Weston and Frank photographed aren't inherent features of the object or person that can only be "caught" by an alert and sensitive photographer, feelings and judgments those things awaken in viewers only if we photograph them so as to imitate perfectly what those photographers did. But we can't do that successfully because those qualities aren't there in those objects or people, they are there because the photographers felt those things and carefully constructed the picture to convey what they felt to you and other viewers. If you do just as they did, you will be making an imitation of what someone else did. And it will not produce results "just like" what those artists did.

Or that's what students think and these thoughts make teachers invent exercises that will disabuse them of these mistaken ideas.

It's hard to convince students of photography that any other way of making a picture will get results like those masters got. But their teachers know that that's not how good or great pictures are made. We make good pictures by looking with a fresh and unprejudiced eye at something—anything—and making a picture of what you then see. The trick is to learn how to give up all your ideas about great art, then get truly interested in something, and then make a picture of what interested you. Many

exercises given to beginning photo students are designed so that students cannot use any conventional idea to help find something that will let them make a "good picture."

So Aaron Siskind directed students to engage in random actions that would take them to a nearby spot they would ordinarily ignore and make pictures there. And Henry Holmes Smith told students to photograph every house on both sides of an "ordinary street." And Philip Perkis told students that every time they made an exposure, they should turn 180° and make a picture of what was behind them when they made their original choice. When they followed these instructions, students made pictures they would never otherwise have made, pictures that they and others found merit in. And, in the process, learned how to avoid clichés.

All these devices force people to not do what their own desires and common sense tell them to do, and thus learn that by so doing they will create something they would never have found by any conscious exercise of their taste and will.

Two more examples of how this works. One of my best photographs ever is an image of the leaves of a tree made with the camera pointing up through its branches. I was walking down a street near where I lived, on the sidewalk outside the San Francisco Art Institute, where I was taking courses in photography. As I walked under this particular tree, I had a sudden impulse to point the camera up through the leafy branches, not even looking through the viewfinder to "choose" the perfect framing, etc. and make an exposure, and did it. When I saw the image on the proof sheet I knew in some way I could never explain rationally that this was a good one, that following that impulse had produced a good result and that I should incorporate this procedure into my way of making photographs (and, but this came later, of making sociology). This method of working became part of my working repertoire.

It often takes a more painful experience than mine to bring this lesson home. When I taught sociology students to do fieldwork I forced (and I use this word deliberately, because it came close to having to use physical force at times) students, who I had not warned in advance that they would

have to do this, to pick a place where people were “doing something [anything, really] together” and spend the next ten weeks hanging around that place, recording what went on in “field notes” which they would give me every class session. They all said that they couldn’t choose, weren’t ready to choose, didn’t want to choose. But eventually—I was the teacher, after all—they did it. And after a few weeks they began to see “interesting” events and meet “interesting” people. And, with the help of comments from their colleagues and from me (in conversations I made sure never to give orders but merely made suggestions), to develop researchable problems and ways if investigating them well-suited to the situations they were studying.

Halfway through the class one year, a young woman suddenly burst out, in a quiet moment, with a heartfelt complaint: “It’s not fair!” And then looked puzzled, as though she didn’t understand her own remark. I asked what wasn’t fair, and she put it into words: “It’s no fair. The boys in the class all get to study interesting things like the fire department or the police department and the girls have to study things like nursery schools and . . .” and her voice trailed off as she heard what she had allowed herself to say.

I was cool. I didn’t argue or try to justify whatever I might have done to provoke that feeling, and just said, “Did I tell you that you had to do that?” Another long silence and then she said “No, you didn’t.” And everyone there understood what had happened, that she and most of the other women in the class had accepted what apparently was a common idea, that for one reason or another (the reasons were not specified) potential topics for their research projects were seen by practically everyone as gender specific, some suitable for males, other for females. The authority figure in the class (me!) hadn’t said so but, it seemed, might as well have. The discussion that followed was fascinating—I leave it to you to imagine—and I think that everyone there felt, as I did, that we’d learned something worth knowing. Discussing it openly had made clear that the girls could study anything the boys could study.

I take credit for one thing that produced this wonderful outcome. I did create the situation (taking advantage of the really incredible license people

give to teachers) in which she felt comfortable talking that way in front of the audience they all feared most: their fellow students. My restraint in exercising professorial control helped too. But mainly they all had gone ahead and used the freedom of the class to explore and share their results and learn a lesson I hope stayed with them as long as it has with me.

That is perhaps an extreme case of the utility of breaking the rules we impose on ourselves in the name of common sense and professional wisdom.

The kinds of exercises we have in mind here all share this characteristic: they get us out of the rut of conventional thinking, the worst enemy of good science and good art.

Another example illustrates the commonplace considerations that shape our artistic and scientific choices without us being aware of it. In a photography class I was taking, another student pinned up on the wall a picture he had made of a Hare Krishna member, in the characteristic robes that group wore, shaking his fist at a policeman riding a large horse. The photographer was standing behind the mounted cop, in order (I think he would have told himself) to get a frontal view of the colorful Hare Krishna member (conventionally an unusual object and therefore of great interest). Phil Perkis, the teacher, asked him why he was standing behind the policeman instead of alongside the Hare Krishna (thus facing the cop who would then have become the dominant figure in the image, calling for a viewer’s attention). The student apparently thought his reason was obvious, but once the question was raised we all saw how that would have changed the image from that of a colorful freak to one of the exercise of authority against a colorful freak, quite a different content and feeling. And how making the cop the center of attention would have made him aware of how he was becoming the central figure in the picture and the kinds of interpretations various audiences might have made of that. A picture of a colorful freak might become a symbol of police repression of cultural difference, not a neutral topic in San Francisco in 1970. So making the colorful figure of the religious adept the center of the image not only made the picture more “interesting,” it also made its existence less potentially threatening to the police officer, which in turn lessened

the danger that he would have started paying attention to the now not so unobtrusive art student with the camera.

The class members grasped this the minute Perkis said it and “saw” what they had known all along but never confronted: that they habitually looked for socially “safe” positions when they made their exposures. And now had to think about this: when they next made their mundane choices of where to stand to photograph something they were deciding a lot more, for instance, than what sort of light would be available from this or that place. They might well be deciding what sort of political position they were taking in a situation they in fact might know very little about.

I was watching all this from the double position of someone learning the rudiments of photographic technique and practice and of someone whose professional practice as a social scientist involved making similar choices of what to observe and from what vantage point to do that.

Howard Becker, February 2018

why publish a book like this?

in 2010, when i started (*forms of life*)¹, a project investigating contemporary artistic practices, howard becker, robert faulkner and dianne hagaman responded to the letter inviting participants to describe the ecological support necessary for the development and maintenance of their artistic practice, by reformulating the question; what would be, in sociology, the *form of life* supporting a sociological research project? their answer to that question took the form of a work published soon after, *thinking together*², which contained the complete e-mail correspondence between becker and faulkner between 2003 and 2007, in which they elaborated the ideas which resulted in their 2007 book *do you know?*³ it was clear, reading this epistolary exchange, that an idea in sociology was not a collection of short rational logical statements, hooked together like the cars in a railroad train, but rather a heterogeneous composition made up of descriptions, analogical reasoning, anecdotes, plays on words, theoretical models, historical examples, situational drifts in meaning, out of which emerged, in the course of these exchanges, an idea to test in experience.

what *thinking together* also showed, this time during the process of publication, that no publishing house in the social sciences was ready to publish this kind of epistolary exchange between two scholars, so common in modern europe of the xvii-xix centuries. all forms of writing were not considered equal, certain ones being more accepted than others. the protocols of writing, imposed more and more rigidly, by the important scientific journals are only the most obvious manifestation of this phenomenon.

nevertheless, in “scientific writing” the important term is “writing,” “scientific” is only an adjective. in thus making the operation of writing invisible, and thus letting it appear as though scientific statements came

1. (*des formes de vie*)—*une écologie des pratiques artistiques*, ed. questions théoriques / les laboratoires d’aubervilliers, paris: 2012
2. howard s. becker, robert r. faulkner, *thinking together*, éd. dianne hagaman, preface franck leibovici, annenberg press / questions théoriques, paris: 2013
3. howard s. becker, *do you know? the jazz repertoire in action*, university of chicago press, chicago: 2009

into being without any human intervention, like *data* falling from the sky rather than laboriously composed *facta*, the academic world amputates its hands, because it is exactly the operations of writing which turn “raw” facts into data. the repertoire of such operations is never completed, it can be added to, and if certain forms are no longer accepted, new ones can, on the other hand, emerge.

certain currents of xxth century poetry have popularized the republication of verbatim statements made in ordinary communication, used as “material.” thus, the “factographic” approach of the russians or the american “objectivist” approach, to cite just two examples. the main contribution of these poetic practices to other disciplines, then, is to put the accent on the process of fabrication of our realities rather than on their stabilized end state. slowing down these interactions, which the transcription of a conversation permits, in fact gives us something that simple access to the final result of the exchange can’t replace. it lets us take account of reality, in william james’ expression, *in the making*.

bogoro is a book composed of transcripts of the first trial of the international criminal court (created in 2002), dealing with the mass crimes then developing in ituri, in the east of the democratic republic of the congo (drc). when the book was published, the first thing lawyers and judges said about it was that such a small amount of space was given to the final judgments that came from this long trial (2007–14); only one of the book’s 350 pages reported on the verdict, while the other 349 were devoted to the exchanges between the court and the witnesses. jurists habitually base their decisions on previous judicial judgments, and not on the verbal exchanges which take place during the court sessions. but reading the transcripts slowly brings out their richness, as much from the juridical point of view as the anthropological, ethnological, historical and psychological. that’s why the book has sometimes been recommended as reading for seminars in international law.

reading *thinking together* can produce the same effect: you see that certain practices in sociological research overlap with practices in the worlds of art or poetry. reading the exchanges in *thinking together* produces the same effect: some modes of inquiry truncated in the world of sociology are expanded in the worlds of art or poetry.

with that to go on, we decided to try a thought experiment: what would happen if we made a scientific article follow the same circuit works of art make? reciprocally, what properties would have to change if we made an artistic artifact circulate the way a scientific object does? what kind of publics and what kinds of uses would the two routes produce? what distinguishes a scientific artifact from an artistic artifact? but, above all, what do they share? these were the questions which our texts, “exchanged at birth,” posed. we concluded that to permit a maximal commensurability between the two practices, the works of art and the scientific articles could (or should) be translated into a series of instructions or scripts, which could be repeated any time, thus decoupling their transportability from their other qualities.

we decided to take up the question of the accessibility of art works first. almost anyone can download a scientific article at any time, but a work of art can only be experienced when it is being exhibited (at best a few weeks) and to do it you have to go to a precise spot on the globe. not only its character but its “debatability,” that is, its shareability, is limited. although perhaps not, if we agree that a work can continue to exercise its effect beyond its physical presence, through its images, the emotions it calls forth, the issues it raises, the conversations it provokes.

this provokes the idea that every art work can be translated as a score—on the condition that you understand the art work not as a single finished object but equally as the process that produced it. and also on the condition that you don’t think that the score could replace the object (an art work can know several modes of existence). symmetrically, a scientific article is “re-performed” mentally by each reader, thus adapting itself to new terrains. an illuminating comparison then emerges: wouldn’t the social sciences and the arts use the same format of instructions?

howie often told me about the exercises he gave his students to do. i was suddenly struck by the labile character of some of them, labile in the sense that in a different context, they would look less like training exercises for budding sociologists and more like instructions of artistic performances in the great tradition of the sixties and seventies. so we decided that howie would assemble as many exercises as possible. we did it quickly and finally stopped, arbitrarily, when we had sixty-one.

there are many ways of understanding the practices common to researchers and to artists. observing members of both groups as they used them in their daily activity would be an obvious one. but in this case the pedagogical format of the exercise has the interesting feature of already having been formalized, for the social sciences, in textbooks. and, for the arts, in anthologies of performances. the exercise format is like a door (among others) that opens on to the field of practices. although we haven't systematically observed the practices we describe in use, we know that they go through many changes: born in an experience of teaching "the field," the way it is written, its instructional format, creates a degree of generality which lets it circulate across disciplines. you can translate it easily, reformulate to adapt to different contexts. it's standardizable.

a puzzle (or the multiplicity of publics)

howie sent me his exercises in written form: the context of some, the reaction of the students to others, what he had learned from it for all of them. but we didn't want to publish an autobiographical work, the writing had to be in style of a book of instructions. also, a little embarrassed, i kept asking him to rewrite the exercises in a different format, that of instruction.

this didn't stop him from continuing to ask me questions, and to show reluctance or lack of comprehension: these exercises made no sense to him unless they were situated. readers had to know their context to be able to take something useful from them. the instructional format purified the statements and removed them from any reality. if they were no longer addressed to their natural audience—students—they risked being addressed to no one.

the solution to this seeming impasse was eminently practical, taking the form of a graphic layout: *recto*, a short text would describe the instructions; *verso*, a commentary by howie would describe in detail the circumstances of the exercise and its aims; it would be followed by a second commentary, like a mirror, from me, this time embodying the point of view of art, seen

in the situation of performance⁴.

isolating the instruction statement was aiming to decontextualize it temporarily, in order to make it *generic*, adaptable to a multiplicity of situations. it floated, in a few lines, at the top of the page, turning the white space that followed it into a space of suspense, which would let the reader daydream about the implementations of such a script. in the *verso*, we would then describe many possible ways of activating such a script: historical, circumstantial, and future possibilities, in social science as well as in art. the boundaries became fluid: sometimes howie even seemed to be describing a performance that came from the field of art. the space between the *recto* and the *verso* became an open space where readers could elaborate their own interpretations freely, eventually completing the *verso* by mentally adding their own paragraphs.

this blank space between the *recto* and the *verso*—this moment—didn't function as a mere lapse of time, a slowing down, a delay. it became almost a methodological affirmation of *what was*—and *what was not*—an instruction: it wasn't an algorithm to be executed automatically. instead, unforeseen contingent elements would interfere, and the results would be diverse and varied, unexpected. you would "learn by doing." this conception of an exercise could be, i thought, reconciled with the suspicion found in certain currents in sociology, inspiring such instruction studies with ideas like "plan," "program," or "structure," which would get rid of the contingencies of ordinary life. "instruction" wouldn't mean that we would know the result in advance.

howie's reluctance to accept my earlier ideas had a beneficial effect. it forced us to make certain issues explicit, beginning with the question of what publics we intended these exercises for, and what might be the relevant contexts of application.

if those exercises are relevant to both art and sociology, the resulting audiences will nevertheless differ. the same statement can produce

4. i was helped, for theater and dance, by good-hearted friends: nicolas couturier, cécile tonizzo, frédéric danos.

different publics. because the statements are flexible and plastic, different audiences can emerge in different worlds of activity. but, rather than looking for predefined categories—“students,” “artists,” “sociologists”—the way marketing studies search for “target audiences”—it may be more interesting to ask a different question: not “what already existing audience will this exercise interest” but “how can we, starting with these exercises, create different audiences?” that is, what stylistic or theoretical formulas would help us create heterogeneous audiences? the question then becomes a question of writing, and the format, the look of the statement, becomes the place where these questions must be settled. so, brief formulations, imperative verb forms, non-referential terms, or non specified subjects can suffice to execute these instructions.

the exercises howie gave students learning to do fieldwork required them to produce descriptions of what they observed. they wouldn't necessarily share their notes with classmates, although howie always said he would read what they wrote (and he did !). the important thing was that if these notes get written, in the first place, to be used only by the people who write them, then the exercise is only an exercise in sociology, or creative writing, aiming only to improve the writer's competence and ability. if, on the other hand, we make the notes *public* by, for instance, reading them aloud to an audience of fellow students, for instance, the material becomes “shared,” and this public moment becomes something else, with its own richness. art is often reduced to this public moment, ignoring all the daily preparatory routines and practices that underlie it. if, on the other hand, we isolate the exercises in interior moments, private for each person. by making this public moment as an integral part of the exercise, the two poles connect to one another. so it becomes important to make this “exercise” continue right up to the moment of sharing, adding at the end of the instruction, “read your notes aloud,” thus combining a pedagogical instruction and an artistic function.

for our target readership, the divided page design lets us enlarge the first circle of students and teachers. following the formula of the poet lautréamont: “poetry should be made by all and not just by one,” we have to make the point of these exercises less specific, so that anybody can do them. we have to address these exercises to more people, to anyone. but

why? why would it be interesting that anybody could do them?

the exercises' inventors initially created these exercises for teaching purposes. far from any attempt to entertain, they aimed to sharpen the observational capacities of future researchers by removing the prejudices that would prevent them from “really seeing.” it was an attempt to “un-train” students' habits of looking, increasing their ability to see and understand, which had been made rigid by years of socialized training and practice. it seemed evident that what would be good for these researchers could not be bad for us and, beyond artists developing the specific practices of investigation, anyone and everyone could potentially profit from them.

i had made howie read an anthology of the events, happenings and performances of the well-known art group *fluxus*⁵. certain descriptions of actions to be performed were supposed to last for an entire lifetime and, spatially, were to be applied anywhere on earth. others seemed simply idiotic or absurd. the connection to the teaching exercises in social science doesn't, at first, seem obvious. these texts, nevertheless, embody in themselves a philosophy or attitude toward art distilled over a long time, which offers a freedom from the constraints whose arbitrary character gradually becomes evident. that's how the works of john cage, of lamonte young, of georges brecht, nam jun paik, yoko ono, ben and many others had a real and consequential effect on the composers, artists, and poets of their time as well as on following generations.

the exercises howie gave to his students had the same aim: to *decondition* them, to observe the world in a non-pavlovian way. but the instructions of *fluxus* had above all the merit of showing that their context of application is always in the future, and never predetermined: the context always comes later, and you never know in advance when, where, or how the instructions will find a relevant use.

we always find, behind the instructions, a *form of life*. when fluxus advocates an abolition of the separation between art and life, behind it lies first this idea that the practices of art can transform life. far from being

5. *fluxus dixit, une anthologie*, vol. 1, les presses du réel, dijón: 2002.

reduced to a series of music-hall sketches, the *events* carry in themselves transformative moments. to recontextualize them in the world of social science carries the same idea: these exercises can perhaps modify the way we do science.

this shared zone of the recto is thus not uniquely formal, it does not reduce to a simple writing exercise, forcing the social sciences to adopt a format created for art, ending up looking like a script for an artistic performance. it shows that, in certain ways of doing sociology or art, the practices overlap. as much as possible the disciplines of social science and art not as accomplished facts but rather as collections of practices to invent and tinker with, we are led to rethink this approach, moving the frontiers between them. in this sense, our work can perhaps lead historians of performance and historians of science to create new bridges between sociology and performance—as howard becker and dwight conquergood did in the workshop on “performance studies” they led at northwestern university in the late 1980s.

having reached this point, becker posed an unexpected question: “why?” why do we say this? why do we want to “de-invisibilize” certain parts of reality? why do we want to affirm the importance of certain aspects of our lives? howie doesn’t answer explicitly, he just asks the question. when i asked him if the word “political” would not be an important part of the answer, he just responded, smiling, “i wish my peers would give us more complete descriptions of reality.” i added, smiling too : “nearer to the truth?”

franck leibovici, february 2018

exercises

24 hours

choose a small area of the city you live in, but not the area you actually live in, and spend twenty-four consecutive hours there. note everything that happens. pay particular attention to who—what kinds of people, how many of each kind, etc.—comes there and when, and who leaves and when. keep a written record of everything you see, hear, smell.

read it aloud to your audience.

circumstances

hsb : When I entered the sociology graduate program at the University of Chicago in 1946, the first course I took was Everett Hughes' introductory class in field methods. There were maybe thirty or so students in the class. We worked in teams of two, choosing our own partners (none of us knew each other), and he assigned each team to a "census tract," a small area of several blocks in an area near the university. Since the university was adjacent to the black ghetto most of us (who were almost entirely white) had areas whose inhabitants were entirely black, in which we were supposed to do some "exercises" in data gathering, including spending some time there "observing." But we didn't know and weren't told what we were supposed to observe.

The exercises had two aspects. One was that you had to go do it, whatever "it" was. People interpreted the assignments differently. One guy spent twenty-four consecutive hours in "his" tract, which was in a middle-class white area. When he told about what he had seen it was a revelation to us. He described the way black maids came to the area in the morning and then left at night; how the men left in the morning for work and came back in the evening; how the children went to school and then came home; etc. In other words, he could see what you could call the "metabolism" of this little piece of Chicago. Then you had to see how selective your attention was, how you "noticed" and recorded this item or that one but not everything, and had to realize that you were choosing what to pay attention to and what to ignore, and that made you realize that this actually was a choice, it wasn't "natural" or "obvious" to pay attention to this and not that. You learned also to write "everything down," as you started to realize that you didn't know what things were "important" to have a record of and what things you could ignore. And you also realized that you didn't know what was, and was going to be, "important" and that the job was, in some serious way, not doable.

fl : this kind of writing practice is typically found in the work of people like georges perec. for instance, his *tentative d'épuisement d'un lieu parisien* (*an attempt to describe a place in paris exhaustively*) is interesting because it is, as much an exercise in writing, an exercise in observation. not only

because it is necessary to organize all this material, but also and above all because to see, as you say, is first of all to select, to classify, to organize. to observe a situation systematically, you have to be able to divide it into sequences, and constitute it as a collection of categories and activities. that is, you have to be able to *name* its elements and activities. perception and language aren't two distinct activities. we don't have, on the one hand, raw visual perceptions which can then be interpreted, the perceptual categories themselves are informed by the language. the practice of writing lets us improve our capacities of observation.

some artists have engaged in experiments which intersect with this sort of assignment. for instance, students' observations might be improved by mobilizing other senses in addition to sight. in his experiment with "blank walks," the artist mathias poisson made the people who walked in his experiments, in places which may or may not have been familiar to them, wear glasses that blurred their sight. their hearing, senses of smell and touch then collaborated to make them more aware and take account of other features of the spaces they moved through.

there's also the opposite exercise: in a work called *soliloquy*, kenneth goldsmith, a poet (greatly inspired by andy warhol), "recorded" himself for a week and transcribed the result. even though the content of that recording is mostly banal and ordinary, goldsmith confesses that when he read this textual mass twenty years later, he remembered, in an incredibly fresh way, all these events and all the interactions linked to these ordinary words, which played the role of "crystallizers" which helped him reawaken a non-verbal environment of actions and contexts which had not been recorded by goldsmith's recording device. these recorded words are thus a place or moment where a good part of the actions described by perec are verbalized externally.

a public moment (fieldwork exercise)

attend a public meeting of some kind. collect a genealogy. interview several people about some subject.

alternative version:

attend a public event of some kind (for instance, a meeting of an organization or a portion of the service at a religious institution). record the names and a full description of everyone who was there for however short a time and what they said and did, who they spoke to. be the first person to arrive on the scene and the last person to leave. after the event is over, and the people have left for other locations, find them and ask them to tell you who was there and what happened. keep a written record of everything.

circumstances

hsb : A genealogy is a record of family members, this is a standard anthropological form of data and some of the students were beginning students in that field.

That exercise is a way into things that weren't public. My partner and I chose the church service as our "public event" to observe. Neither of us had any experience with black churches and, nice Jewish boy that I was, I had never been inside a Christian church of any kind, and not inside a Jewish temple very often. So Harold took the lead in the negotiations with the church folks, who were very pleasant and welcoming (I have no idea what they thought was happening). A crisis arose when we went to observe the Sunday School, which took place before the church service, and the teacher asked the "white brethren" to say a few words to the children. I had no idea what to say but Harold managed to say something about how nice it was to see the children being so attentive and learning their lessons.

The service included a sermon by a visiting preacher, who gave a very passionate sermon in the style of all the black preachers you have ever seen in the movies or on TV, shouting, emoting, etc. After the service was over, he asked us if we had a car and could drive him to the El (the aerial metro of Chicago). We took him there and on the way he talked a lot, expressing his satisfaction with the performance he had given. And that was the way he talked about it, as a performance, "I sure got them worked up, didn't I?"

No two pairs of "researchers" had the same experience, but we all learned how to conduct ourselves as "researchers," how to explain (more or less) to people what we were doing and what we wanted from them—in other words, to act like some version of a "researcher."

fl : here, the situation is given: a religious office, a political meeting. in the field of performance, it happens all the time these days that a situation is set up, artificially, so that people can engage in certain kinds of interactions which will make genealogies visible without having to fill out a questionnaire. for example, the event titled *quiproquo* (paris, 2017) aimed to be a place and a moment of exchange of self-published books.

as in any rudimentary market, people who wanted to exchange what they had made had to establish the terms of the barter and, to do that, make visible the genealogies linked to the production of the object. the self-published book which was going to be exchanged served as a way to make visible networks of professional cooperation (a form of quasi- kinship) that linked the actors in this situation, and the circulation of the objects they exchanged. but this was an indirect effect, knowledge acquired in passing. the primary goal remained to leave with a book (rather than with a sermon or a reinforcement of a militant ideal).

the optional alternative version of the exercise seems to me more complex, since it works on two more temporalities: the moment of being observed by an apprentice sociologist whose job will be to appear assured, giving many signs of objectivity, followed by a moment of collection, well after the event observed, of stories told by different witnesses, implicitly thought of as subjective, partial, a posteriori, and not necessarily in agreement. it's a little as though a scientific report of an event was followed a statement similar to that of *rashomon*. the "objective" value of the scientific report is relativized in view of the multiple possible accounts. evidently, the "objective/subjective" distinction doesn't really hold, because the observation of the features the observer considers pertinent are as subject to debate as the fallible memories of the actors queried *a posteriori*. the difference would perhaps be more between a "professional" vision, structured by "professional" categories of attention, and visions which don't have such a formal protocol ready at hand.

(visual version)

pick a block in the city where you are living. photograph every house or building on both sides of that street.

circumstances

hsb : Jerry Uelsmann, a photographer famous for photomontages made by using multiple enlargers, described this exercise to me. He encountered it in a class he took with Henry Holmes Smith, who taught photography at Indiana University and, though it had nothing at all to do with the kind of work Uelsmann eventually did, he never forget its impact. It was designed to prevent students from using categories of “good” they already knew and believed in to choose what they photographed.

f1 : the assignment puts in place a systematic protocol (“all the houses”) which pushes any spontaneous aesthetic judgment out of the door while later, through a technicality, letting aesthetic criteria back in through the window.

consider ed ruscha’s artist’s book, *every building on sunset strip* (1966), in which he systematically photographed both sides of the famous boulevard. but i think also of richard howe’s work, which you recommended to me, *new york in plain sight* (www.newyorkinplainsight.com). howe photographed the four corners of each intersection on the grid of manhattan and the result is as artistic as it is sociological, historical, architectural. the framing of the images collects the maximum of data in a way that makes the maximum number of readings possible. the most striking characteristic of this way of working is the *time* this time-consuming project required—eight months to photograph everything and four years to print and edit all the images. because he wanted to collect the maximum amount of detail, howe insisted on absolute clarity and so used a very small aperture (*f/11*), so he needed sunny days to have enough light and so was dependent on the weather. he had to find the best corner of the intersection, install his equipment, and then wait for the traffic lights to change so that he could cross the other three or more corners, etc. he also had to develop techniques for labeling and recording the work done each day (an excel spreadsheet to set up the next sessions of photographing, a notebook for recording contextual observations or conversations which arose while he was photographing); techniques for verifying that the images were correctly labeled (using *google street view*), a system for classifying and storing on an external hard drive the images by dates and intersections of the streets and avenues; tricks for

organizing the shooting sessions so as to use the available time efficiently (using a monopod rather than a tripod; walking north and south on the avenues rather than east-west on the streets; and to photograph as much as possible of the block from the same sidewalk location, and then go back the same number of blocks on the other side of the street, so as to minimize the number of times he had to cross the street).

these tricks (or techniques) helped him satisfy the maximum number of requirements of his self-imposed task correctly and simultaneously, both on an artistic and a scientific level.

nevertheless, these questions will arise for anybody who would like to do the same kind of work.

but the subject in itself will not be responding to any pre-existing criteria for a “good photograph,” but rather to the constraints howe had to deal with. we can nevertheless say that any given photograph “worked” (or didn’t).

behind each exercise proposed here lie methods of adapting to the moment and inventing (or recovering) them for use in other exercises, other performances, other disciplines. but these tricks are not neutral, they determine a specific approach to a project, its “form of life.” so the systematic grid of manhattan howe used is very different from the car google uses for its street views, and different again from the formula howe imagined (but never used) in which 3000 people would photograph, simultaneously, all the intersections of streets and avenues of manhattan with their own cameras—which could almost become a script written by john cage or fluxus.. so i have the impression that it’s in using these methods (and what you call “tricks of the trade”) in the thousand and one ways of doing these “exercises” that we can understand the links which unite scientific and artistic approaches.

(version micro)
descriptions of repeated events

stand at a street corner and observe and describe how people cross the street and avoid bumping into each other (e.g., do they communicate in words or gestures?).

circumstances

fl : isn't there a famous article in ethnomethodology on the way people cross the street without bumping into each other? and isn't there a famous warm-up exercise of anna halprin, who asked her dancers to use their "blurred vision" (looking through the peripheral zone of the retina rather than the fovea of the macula) while trying not to bump into each other?...

if this exercise is more micro and local than the two that preceded it, for me it evokes a distinction methods of collecting data. the exercises described so far place an observer on the stage whose acuteness and cleverness alert him to the data that are "seen but not noticed." but, at least in art, another, much more controversial, approach to collecting data exists: forcing people to react to an unexpected situation so that we can see what their "instinctive" response would be, a kind of forced confession. in this exercise, this would probably mean joining the situation, in other words, no longer being just an "observer," but an "actor" as well. a lot can be said for doing things this way—and i imagine that something like this exists in the social sciences as well, but here i would just like to point out that actions of such an observer aren't the only way to make social routines observable. i think here of the movie by harmony korine, "fight harms", where he bumps, on purpose, into people in order to get his ass kicked (and he shoots the kicking), or i think of the books of the poet christopher hanna, who provokes his readers in order to force them to react, to give him data they would otherwise keep to themselves, preferring to give a more official account, as when they have to deal with pre-established questionnaires.

enlist others in your project

join in some kind of collective activity that is unfamiliar to you. when you don't understand something—what other people are doing, why they are doing that thing at that moment,—ask someone explain what you don't understand. if they don't know either, enlist them as assistants and teach them to look for what you are looking for (if you know what that is).

circumstances

f1 : the formulation of this exercise might evoke the first pages of the introduction to bruno latour's *laboratory life*: a sociologist finds himself in a biology laboratory (a discipline he knows nothing about) and decides to observe its inhabitants like an ethnologist observing a primitive people regarding what is close and familiar as though from a distance. this resembles a little a basic principle of the "anthropology of the nearby," right? but we find this kind of protocol in a form of experimental theater which tries to make the latent structures of the functioning of the theatrical piece visible in order to make them available as tools of the fictional production.

for instance, "*the encyclopedia of the word*" created a game called "the game of hum-hum": a recording is played for an audience, which has no other information about it. by asking the mc questions, and listening to the recording several more times, the audience is supposed to discover what the original recording is of. the idea behind this collective performance is that "we are all experts in speaking": we all have an expertise far greater than we imagine, we always have more tools and resources than we think we do. this game also poses questions about the nature of expertise and the line of demarcation between ordinary and professional expertise. the big difference between a scientific practice and an artistic practice might lie in the methods of verification established in each social milieu. because if we could get rid of the master of ceremonies who has the answers, with the spectators left to themselves (as in your exercise), there would no longer be anything left to point them in the right direction. in your exercise, is it the scientific apparatus itself that would take the place of the m.c.?

record whenever people count things

record whenever people count things (e.g., the time it will take to do a task, how long until they can leave for the day, how much they will make if they do this instead of that, etc.)

everyday epistemology

when people you are observing make factual statements about something that happened—for instance, saying that this thing caused that thing, ask them how they know that and what they would say if someone contested their statement as false or incorrect.

or, wait until someone in the group raises that same question (which will happen often enough).

circumstances

fl : i think that this exercise tends to highlight the criteria we use to settle, for instance, a question that arises when participants in a bar discussion disagree. people used to settle these discussions by looking in an encyclopedia, or in a newspaper, or in a book. now, we "google it" to settle the argument. google becomes our epistemic criterion of truth (almost omniscient and almost always available, except when no network is available). if the idea of the exercise was only to test the participants' knowledge, it would be like to a tv game show, but here we want to test their reaction to our questioning of their knowledge. so wouldn't we then be dealing with a *breaching experiment*, à la harold garfinkel?

hsb : Garfinkel designed these experiments as teaching devices, to make students see what kinds of constraints people imposed on themselves in this or that kind of situation.

To generalize this tactic, learn how the participants in a scene you are observing organize their acting-together, what rules they follow and require everyone else to follow, all of which give the situation and the events that happen in it their characteristic form. If you are doing social science, you "test" whether your understanding of these rules is correct—if the participants really do what you imagine they are doing for the reasons you imagine they give themselves—repeated and prolonged observation will show whether your conclusions are "correct." Probably they won't be 100% correct, and you'll have to make the same observations many times before you can be sure that they're doing what you "hypothesize" (that is, guess) they are doing for the reasons you think.

(I should add that Garfinkel also used the breaching experiment to make a point in the "professional politics" of sociology. He sometimes said that he wanted to demonstrate to all sociologists that they had to stop whatever they were doing (conventional studies of things like population, criminology, the family, urban society, etc.) and concentrate on establishing the basic structure of any and all kinds of social relations. He rejected any suggestions that what he was doing and recommending had any relation to anything ever done before. (There isn't much of this in print, but he made

many speeches at sociology meetings where he said things like this and made whole audiences furious. I was present for at least one such event.)

fl : but, if you want to test how much people stick to their system of beliefs, why wait for somebody from the group raise an objection?

arrangements

when you visit someone's home, observe how they arrange their collection of books, clothing, shoes (size? color? subject matter?).

tell them your conclusion.

circumstances

fl : if perec's *species of spaces* is the first book that comes to mind, artists like christian boltanski or sophie calle were there too, developing a practice of inventories. boltanski, for example, revealed childhood memories evoked by photographs he bought at flea markets showing familial scenes or images of children of different ages. in the nineties, other artists (claude closky for example) focused on systems of classification and organization—his *my catalog* classifies every object in a mail order catalog on a scale of increasing price. the intellectual technology for classifying things thus becomes the object of an investigation and an illustrated exemplification.

hsb : Some social scientists have used this sort of inventory of household furnishings as an index of social class, with middling success (these indices are seldom checked against any more proximate observations of class so it's hard to judge their value). We would have to isolate the chain of reasoning that connects a painting on the wall of the salon to anything serious. I know that Pierre Bourdieu made much of this kind of index, which he measured with a questionnaire. But David Halle went to people's houses and counted all the pictures on the walls and mantels, etc. and the differences between classes in artistic tastes are actually quite small¹. I think what makes these kinds of counts interesting isn't what people say about their possessions, but whether they even remember that they have this picture or that picture on the wall. Still, they have this stuff—these pictures, these clothes, etc.—they did choose them and we really ought to come to terms with that, figure out what it “means.”

It would be good to do what you suggest, Franck, and ask people directly to talk about their possessions. I did some preliminary interviews and observations with people about their clothing and they really do think about that a lot and feel that their clothes speak about them to others.

life is a play

describe a situation involving more than one person as if it were a play to be performed by actors on a stage, leaving nothing out even though it may seem “unimportant.”

list the names of the characters who appear in the play's action.

describe what these characters do: what they say and what they do.

assign the characters in the script to the available actors.

tell the actors to perform the script.

1. Halle, David. *Inside Culture: Art and Class in the American Home*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993

circumstances

fl : we have here a writing exercise, which raises above all the question of format. to respond to the task the exercise suggests, it's necessary to translate the description of a situation into the categories appropriate to theater: the list of characters and the distribution of these roles among the actors, the script and dialogue, the stage set. the material will be treated through this operation of translation. generating data through this writing device is quite common in art.

jean eustache's film *a dirty story* (1977) has two parts: in the first part a man recounts a voyeuristic adventure he had. in the second part, another man tells the same story. the text is identical, but the background music is different, as is the film used (35mm in one, 16 mm in the other). the second part is, in reality, documentary, while the first part is a fictional reconstruction based on the original film. eustache simply reversed the chronological order of the two films.

the *natural theater of oklahoma* does not exhibit the original material. having asked someone to tell their entire life over the telephone and then, having recorded it for many hours, the actors performed it, on the stage. to hold the attention of the audience, they used classic dramaturgic strategies close to the tricks of Broadway theater or vaudeville. the author's words were distributed among many characters, the set changed regularly, as did the actions, the exits and entrances occurred often—but the words spoken are never modified. is this change what you had in mind?

the *verbatim plays* or tribunal plays produced by nicolas kent also had some success. when, as a director of london's tricycle theatre, he didn't want to stage and direct plays, but rather to put on stage trials he considered to be important though not covered by the media enough. actors would perform the court sessions of the current week, and the real protagonists from the trial would come, as spectators, to see themselves performed on stage... i.

finally, a large part of what calls itself "non-dance" puts ordinary gestures on stage, not in stylized form but because, these dancers say,

the choreographic approach allows them to bring a very special kind of attention to everyday gestures. tino sehgal had a work of felix-gonzales-torres mounted and taken down repeatedly, for the duration of the exhibition. in noé soulie's "performing art," the managers and "art handlers" repeatedly, onstage, put up and took down paintings, sculptures, and multimedia works. since the museum would allow only one special category of employee to handle the works of art, no dancers and actors would be allowed to perform those moves. the "native" personnel of the museum thus found themselves onstage to do what they did every day. you could thus replace the actors (in the sociological sense) with actors (in the theatrical sense), but you could also move the situation from its original setting to the stage of a theater, while keeping the original actors. this recontextualization provokes, by itself, a singular kind of attention.

the exercise you propose takes its place among those which raise the question, "what to choose? what to select?" when the artists or choreographers decide to work with readymade situations, they transport to the stage or platform not just an isolated action, purified and diagrammed, but rather a total environment, an "ecological niche," a place overfilled with actors, objects, and actions. when the museum of popular arts and traditions reconstructed scenes of traditional "france profonde," they extracted them from their original context in order to rebuild their "ecological niches", such as a traditional forge, a sheepfold, a peasant cuisine . . . starting from this same exercise, you can turn the material into a story, or present it as an ecosystem to observe or contemplate.

hsb : Many of these exercises—this is a perfect example—have the effect—on me, anyway—of creating an intense desire to talk about why we want to accomplish the immediate effects that occur. In this case, we accomplish the very worthy thing (I don't argue with that) of making these phenomena visible. Which they usually are not. So now we see them. Why is that worth doing? I think we have strong feelings and ideas about that but we aren't articulating them here. Is that true? Or am I imagining it?

To answer my own question, it's certainly true that people have strong feelings about such things, but almost never have to articulate them, say them out loud, because these ideas and feelings and so on seem so obvious

to everyone involved that the questions such remarks would elicit would seem silly: “Why are you asking me that? You know as well as I do what the answer is.”

f1 : when you ask “why?,” do you aim at something more than answers other than “because”? because, in the “because,” you could consider that only what is considered “accountable” will enter into the calculations, or become a debatable subject, *i.e.*, something public? in making certain things visible, we contribute to making them be taken into account. that is, when a researcher or artist makes something visible does that imply a political agenda?

can i take this out?

pick up a piece of writing.

read the first sentence aloud. hold a pen up and ask yourself or other people, “can i cross the first word out? it will be crossed out unless there’s a good reason to leave it in.” listen attentively, take it out if no good reason.

repeat this procedure for the second and third words and eventually for whole sentences. continue to the end of the writing.

ask whether the writing has been improved.

circumstances

fl : here is a writing exercise, that is just the ordinary activity of an artist or poet. to eliminate, to trim, to lighten—some poets have even tried lightening the work of other poets. ronald johnson, for instance, has (in *radi os*) erased the greater part of milton's *paradise lost*, while keeping the typographical design of the original. thus, the words johnson kept can be found in exactly the same place as on milton's page

in your exercise, the improvement is collective. it isn't the author who corrects his own text, nor another, competing author, but a group, which has the function of an editor.

also, i think you would enjoy this essay: pierre bayard, *le hors-sujet*, les editions de minuit, 1996. here is the press release: "proust is too long. drawing the consequences of this finding which discourages many potential readers, this book proposes to reduce the length of the text by removing digressions."

such a project implies, as a preliminary, reflection on the meaning of digression, unjustly unrecognized by rhetoric. a whole series of questions then arise, relating to the very essence of literature. when, for example, can one say of a text that it is too long? are there unnecessary passages? how do we go from one idea to another? and, at the point where literature and psychoanalysis meet, for each one the notion of the subject has a different meaning. what does it mean to be off-topic?"

hsb : This really is a deep question, *comme on dit*. It always seems to me like The Real Question, which is something like "Why am I doing this?" Which usually has no simple answer, but rather a mixture of answers, some of them trivial or petty or stupid but deeply felt and no less important. etc. , etc. But giving reasons for what you do is a very political act, in the sense that it is deeply embedded in whatever differences in power—of any kind—exist, and has real results, so that no author wants to admit all the reasons. Threatening to remove a word or expression has results and gives information about your motives to others and you might be ashamed of those motives.

fl : so, you mean that the exercise really has nothing to do with questions of style, but is really a way of making people talk, making them give reasons, a way of eliciting responses. this is how the poet christopher hanna works. he puts in place things which force people to say things they wouldn't say spontaneously (for example, their relation to money and what values they believe in). is the antique *catharsis* a model for these exercises?

what's a nice girl like you doing in a place like this?

you hear someone's behavior described as "crazy" or "irrational." replace this word with the description of a sequence of events that led up to the behavior so described, a story that makes the behavior that seemed "crazy" understandable as "ordinary," something a normal person might have done.

circumstances

hsb : Much of ordinary language (this is an ordinary observation but true even so) is obviously false and obviously ignoring large amounts of the reality it is talking about. Calling actions “crazy,” for instance, diverts our attention from the reality of what we are describing. And this diversion is wanted because people don’t want to talk about the “good reasons” for acting these ways. The result is that in describing the observable and audible evidence that shows the “good reasons” for the “crazy behavior” we are breaking many informal rules and understanding about what it is permissible to talk about.

Like many of the actions we promote with these exercises, there is a reformist plan behind the recommendations: look for the whole truth, but especially the truth no one wants anyone to tell. (Except us, because as artists and sociologists our self- assigned job (our duty) is to tell the truth. About something.

This “whole truth” is usually much more complicated than the short version summarized in a statement like “he did it because he was crazy.” For instance, a researcher who wanted to know “why men had a sex change operation” found out that that wasn’t the way that event occurred. Instead, the surgery was the end product of a long story. First the man thought he might find it interesting to wear women’s clothes. Then, finding he liked that, he decided he might try kissing a man. And so on, through a long series of steps, none of which seemed especially “serious” or “committing,” until the final step of the operation no longer seemed like the Big Step it might have seemed when he first put on women’s clothes.

Other people don’t find these stories interesting for reasons that would be interesting to know but not of the expected kind. The stories would differ from each other in many ways, and would create puzzles that probably couldn’t be easily solved.

fl: it’s interesting. for the last two or three exercises, things have taken a specific turn. you start to insist on the reformist political foundations of the exercises. we stop talking about the methodological training for

research and finally start considering the agenda of the trainer. or do i have that wrong?

hsb: There is a reformist element in this, but not of the conventional kind. That is, I don’t seek to make it easier (or harder) for people to have sex change operations. I want to make it more difficult for “my people,” that is social scientists, to accept simple answers to questions, when those simple answers will be bad because they are factually incorrect. If someone answers a question with a simple answer that can easily be shown wrong, I think “my people” (social scientists) should improve the science so that those wrong answers are no longer acceptable.

the wittgenstein trick

consider an event or object and take something away from it.
observe what's left.

circumstances

[Wittgenstein's original example is: say to yourself "lift your arm" and then observe that your arm goes up. Now remove the fact that your arm goes up and see what remains. This is a method for making visible things that are hidden in the simple language of everyday life.]

hsb : Here's an example I came across when I was writing about the sociology of art. If I take away from the statement "Jones is an art collector," the fact that Jones has a collection of contemporary art, would Jones still be a collector? The question isn't frivolous because, if you went to Jones' house and asked to see his collection, you might not be able to see it. Why? Because many collectors of contemporary art routinely loan large parts of their collections to museums and so do not have them at home to show to curious scholars.

fl : the method of "composition in real time" of the portuguese choreographer joão fiadeiro consists in decomposing a gesture or action into a series of gestures or actions. this method, called "foliation," to slow down maximally the reproduction, on stage, of a gesture, and so restoring the maximum of its richness. the paradox is that the more the gesture is saturated with its original properties, the less recognizable everything on the same plane becomes to the spectator. using wittgenstein's trick, it becomes, by subtraction, easy to remove one of its properties, and thus to observe what remains.

hsb : With this bold question, Wittgenstein uncovered and made unavoidably visible what so many customs and practices try to avoid, the reality of what our eyes tell us. Why do we want to do that? Artists and social scientists know that reality is *easy enough to see but very hard to keep visible*. Hmm. That sounds interesting.

fl : this is really interesting as a formula, the difficulty is not so much to see but to stabilize the process of making certain things visible. that is, to modify our frameworks of perception in the long term, in fact, you put the emphasis less on the *eruption*, the revelation of things unseen and as a result not considered, than on the problems of maintenance. basically,

in a specific case, you would have the event itself (that which produces a sensation but has no long-term effect, disappearing without leaving a trace). on the other hand, you modify the relations of background and foreground. isn't this again a question of political action? but, in a very cageian or zen way, aren't you the one saying: "when you try to change things, you only make them worse." ?

hsb : I don't think I'm so Cageian or so involved in zen that I would go that far. But I do think that if you don't know what you're doing—which is the situation when you don't know the full story of how something happened—you may very well have this kind of thing happen to you.

“nothing’s happening”
(the hierarchy of credible statements)

when someone says (about a scene you are both watching) that it’s not worth the trouble because nothing is happening, look more closely.

[optional: when someone speaks of a subject or situation as “trivial” or “unimportant,” give it maximal attention. similarly, if a group or situation is described as “unimportant,” give it priority.]

circumstances

hsb : This happens frequently, in fact it is almost inevitable. After all, people will say, everything isn't equally important and worth paying attention to, we have to exercise some judgment and allocate our time and attention (which are necessary components of research and analysis) wisely. But how do we do that? What criteria do we use to decide which items or observations deserve our attention and which can be safely ignored?

This phenomenon is so common that we are hardly aware of it. After all, the premise is true: we do have limited time and energy and can't pay attention to or investigate everything. This exercise gives us a way to become aware of what we are ignoring or hiding from our own attention: the injunctions of others to ignore some things because they are "not important."

fl : ahah! you mean that you use this expression as a signal that reveals something important? that reminds me of something julian assange, the founder of *wikileaks*, said: right now, there are millions and millions of documents, and it's impossible for us to read them. moreover, these pdfs are such a "grey" literature that we don't even know how or why to be interested in them. fortunately, governments have "censorship," which tells us that this document is "confidential" or "top secret" or forbidden to be published, which sends us the signal we need: this is where it happens, this where we should look...

the banal, the ordinary, the unremarkable, should perhaps be one of the great artistic and literary themes of the xxth century. beyond the "poetry of the ordinary" where, in simple prose, the theme of the quotidian is developed (the simple pleasures of life, "the first sip of beer," a romantic breakup), we can see, more profoundly, the move from an interest in the extraordinary—of which surrealism would be one of the last embodiments after occultism at the end of the 19th century—to the mystery and opacity of the ordinary. after being interested in limiting states of consciousness and the experimental schizophrenia induced by mescaline and lsd, henri michaux turned his attention, at the beginning of the 1960s, to the "marvelous normal," much more difficult to study. at almost the same

time, the ethnomethodologist harold garfinkel taught his students to use "breaching" techniques, exercises aiming to "de-naturalize" our daily experience by making visible the mechanisms which made it so transparent. warhol, whose agenda was resolutely different from garfinkel's, made films where nothing seemed to happen: a man sleeps for five hours ("sleep") and the empire state building is filmed from sunset to total darkness (this film lasted 8 hours and five minutes). even in *tarzan and jane regained—sort of*, jane is shown, in long and endless sequence-shots, doing laps of breast stroke in a swimming pool.

here too, the recording techniques (audio, video or textual) allow us to slow the action down. if current methods of conversational analysis use video to analyze interactions between individuals, a poet like kenneth goldsmith uses a similar strategy when he published *weather, traffic* or *sports*: each of these three books consists of a strict transcription of a year (four seasons) of meteorological bulletins, 24 hours of traffic reports, or of the longest baseball game. it's in transcribing ordinary speech broadcast daily on the radio that the mechanisms of ordinary speech become visible. statements like "nothing is happening" or "boring" seem to be good detectors of material that poets and artists since the sixties find interesting to work with.

sorting

ask someone to sort a box of photographs into two piles. what criterion should be used to decide which photographs go into which box, say that it's up to person asking the question to figure that out.

circumstances

hsb : This exercise originated, like so many exercises, in a teaching situation. In teaching photography, a big difficulty comes from students wanting very much to make a “good picture,” that is, a picture that their teachers or fellow-students will admire. But they really have no idea how to tell if a picture is good or not. This exercise presents them with that puzzle openly, so that they can’t avoid it. And makes it their responsibility to find the criterion that distinguishes between two pictures, identifying one as “good” and another one as less good.

fl : the aim here is make a criterion of classification visible. clearly, this criterion is not given a priori, and can vary between people doing the sorting, according to the “aspectual” or “professional” vision of the sorters. to do this sorting in a particular order, in a certain way, externalizes the photographer’s vision, makes it visible to anyone, and thus shareable. asking someone to sort the images into two piles asks him a question he wouldn’t have posed of his own accord. compared to a traditional interview, it would be the most open-ended questionnaire possible,, meaning that the inquirer doesn’t give any special meaning to physically separating one group from another. This action, physically distinguishing one image from another, replaces words. you make someone do something, and so you are no longer just an observer. there’s a latent abruptness, imposed to obtain the data.

siskind’s photo assignment

in the morning, after you’ve eaten breakfast, take your camera and leave the house. once outside, unfold the paper received the day before, which will have a letter—l or r—on it and a number. turn to the left or right, according to the letter, and walk as many steps in that direction as the number indicates. once you are there, make several (or more) pictures.

circumstances

hsb : Aaron Siskind came to teach a summer course in photography at the San Francisco Art Institute and gave this assignment to his class.

The purpose of Siskind's exercise was to teach students that what made a good photograph was not hunting around for a "good subject," but rather to look at what was in front of you and see how to make a good subject out of what was there.

Students (this reveals the deeply hierarchical nature of the teacher-student relationship!) always want the teacher to tell them what to do, so that they will be sure to do the right thing and so be able to blame the teacher if they don't get a positive result.

More generally, students usually think that if you follow a procedure you have been told you should use it's not your fault if the result isn't what you (or someone else) wanted. What makes this trick work is that, almost always, this kind of randomizing procedure produces something you are glad to have made. If you pay attention, it might even suggest a new procedure to incorporate in to your "bag of tricks." Better yet, it will suggest to use such "randomizing procedures" all the time

The well known "street photographer" Gary Winogrand notoriously worked this way all the time, walking down the sidewalk and making exposures almost continuously, often without looking through the viewfinder. When he died, someone told me, he left hundreds of rolls of exposed film undeveloped. (We have to remember that photographs were once made on film, rather than digitally, and that the conventional roll of film contained enough film for 36 exposures, from each of which an individual print could be made.)

intention

for every photograph you make, immediately turn around 180° and take another one.

circumstances

hsb : Many, if not most, people (perhaps especially students) believe that art starts with a plan, an intention you then try to realize. . . . Let's go a different way. I decide on a certain set of materials (camera, lens, film) and i take myself somewhere at a certain time. It could be my backyard or living room; it doesn't have to be Outer Mongolia. Then see what happens. I become an active responder to what is happening both inside and outside of myself. I do my best not to consider content or meaning at this time.

Then, putting myself in that position physically, emotionally and mentally, I can have an "open" attitude toward what I am doing so that with a bit of luck my intention can arise simultaneously with the act of photographing.

Alfred Hitchcock said that he never considered content when making a film. He just concentrated on moving the story along.

fl : have you heard of douglas huebler? you may like his work.

("documenting every living person before his death" from variable piece #70—<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/96221>)

lock yourself in

lock yourself, with your camera, in a large studio with many other people with cameras for three hours. photograph whatever seems like a good idea to photograph. after an hour, stop doing whatever you have been doing, do something different.

circumstances

hsb : I took a summer class with Phil Perkis at the SF Art Institute. The class went from 9 to 12. One day he locked the door and said that we could only leave to go to the bathroom. When we asked what to do, he said, “Well, it’s a photography class and you all have your cameras, so you figure it out.” We started to chase each other around, trying to catch people unaware so that we could make a “candid” picture of them. After we did that for an hour, he whistled loudly and said, “I have a suggestion. Whatever you’ve been doing for the last hour . . . do something different.” We’d all been doing the only thing we could think of and this made us realize how we had limited our possibilities.

fl : this emphasizes the exhaustion of possibilities when you’re aiming at originality. so the alternative is simple: whether you want to avoid repetition and redundancy, then you have to stop. you have said what you had to say. an artist stops his work because continuing would weaken it. or, you stop looking for difference and innovation at any price, but rather to simply give an account of the situation. what usually results is a duration, a length.

hsb : Like many of these exercises, this one is meant to put the student in a situation which forces them to do something when they don’t know what that should be. This reminds us of something we should keep in mind all the time: that most exercises are invented in situations of coercion, in which the teacher is telling the students that, if they want to learn how to be inventive, they have to do something they feel is silly or stupid or counter-productive. The larger lesson, beyond the specific thing the exercise is aimed at, is that it is better to try a silly thing (which very often leads to “silly results”. This larger lesson is very often not explained.

fl : have you heard of the class the poet kenneth goldsmith was giving at the university of pennsylvania? it was a class of “uncreative writing”: any student who tried to be “creative” would get the worst grade. students had to try to find ways to be really uncreative (copying, sorting out, duplicating, transcribing, etc.). kenneth speaks of this activity in terms of “dumb”, but he makes a difference between a “dumb-dumb” and a “dumb-

smart” activity. of course, one should avoid trying to be a “dumb-smart” guy (being smart while pretending to act dumb). dumb-dumb is the most difficult... (read his explanation at <https://www.theawl.com/2013/07/being-dumb/>)

make 36 pictures on one subject: a person, place, thing, group of things.

circumstances

hsb : It is commonplace to think that photographing involves finding something interesting, taking a picture of it, putting the camera away until you notice something else interesting, taking a picture of that, and so on. This may not be the most profound use of the medium. . . .in art, it's not so much the object depicted, but rather what happens when it's transformed through a medium by a particular artist's sensibility.

Many of these exercises that originated in photography classes have the same aim: to make the students give up their belief that there is a "right way" to make photographs and if they learn that trick they will be able to make good pictures all the time. And to achieve this goal by using the authority of the teacher's role to force them to do what they would otherwise never do and realize that the results of doing that have made them happier.

When I was a photo student I proved this to myself without meaning to. I was walking down the street on a sunny day and walked under a tree in full leaf. Without thinking, it was just a whim, I pointed my camera up (without looking through the viewfinder) toward the mass of leaves above me and made an exposure. When I developed the film and made a contact sheet, this frame leaped out at me. I felt it was Just Right. And it was.

watch the light change

choose a room where the sun only shines in at the end of the day. sit in a comfortable chair, facing the light, stay there until it gets dark. content yourself with watching the light change.

circumstances

hsb : This is a quote from Phil Perki's book: "When I was a student at the San Francisco Art Institute, we had a senior seminar class with Fred Martin. It took place in a large room with a skylight. There were people who worked in every medium and we would discuss our work. We met from four to seven in the afternoon and Fred Martin would not let us turn on the lights. Everything changed with the light during those three hours: the work, the people, the space, the tone of voice, our relationships with one another—everything. It was revelatory. Thank you, Fred Martin."

fl : we have talked earlier about warhol shooting the empire state building from dusk till dawn (*empire* lasts for 8 hours and 5 minutes !). temporal experimentation was also valued by many of the fluxus artists, who defined it as a regime of attention almost constitutive of the artistic experience and, *thus*, of life. yoko ono or ben developed a number of protocols similar to this exercise. what was important for them was that interactions among people would change because of those instructions. nearer to us, the artist ann veronica jenssens translated *spatially* this passage of time marked by the changing of the light. she constructed a plexiglass pavilion in a garden, each of whose walls was a different color. the result produced a decomposition of the spectrum of colors and to walk through the pavilion was to traverse the spectrum materially.

in 2000, pascal rambert built, for the festival of avignon, a *gilgamesh* which began at sunset and lasted through the night. the choreographer anna teresa de keersmæker performed her piece *cesena* at the festival d'avignon at 5 am in order to integrate, like pascal rambert, the experience spectators would have of her piece into the variations of light and the sunrise which became dramaturgical components of the work itself. kris verdonck and alix eynaudi have, in *exit*, similarly used the light, which decreased during the piece, as one of its principal actors

(but we have to admit that any amateur of the *free party* of the "panorama bar" in berlin, or any carioca celebrating new year's eve on the beach of arpoador or copacabana knows this experience by heart)

to "just watch," others have added "just paint." which gave us the series of *haystacks*, or the series of cathedrals of rouen of monet the exercises drawn from the photography classes you took at the san francisco art institute show very well that sociological skills of observation and writing are developed in a framework which has a lot in common with those developed by painters, writers, choreographers, artists in general. the articulation of perception and description is a pair that comes before disciplinary divisions.

take 50 pictures so that if someone viewing the resulting prints were to be asked, "what is the subject?" they would reply, "light".

looking

stare at a photograph which interests you for five minutes without ever looking away.

circumstances

hsb : People, including many photographers and especially photography students, don't really look at photographs. They glance at them, see what the picture is about, perhaps note any unusual handling of space or tonality, and then look no further. I remember that when he gave the class this exercise he added that it would be hard to do, and we should do it by *naming* everything in the image to ourselves explicitly: "this is a cardboard box. This is the box's shadow." etc.

One consequence of doing this exercise is that you remember the entire picture and all the contents that you have named to yourself. So you can see it again any time, as long as you remember.

fl : to stare at one object for a long time is an uncommon experience. if the approach is not necessarily analytic it can quickly become psychedelic, with or without chemical help. just because our eyes naturally move continually. to concentrate on a fixed point contains a potentially hypnotic dimension and many artists have surrendered to this exercise.

in an analytic perspective, hoping to improve their observational abilities, police schools frequently use this memory exercise: after observing for some minutes a collection of objects on a table (but it could be a photograph, to go back to your example) the student officer has to make a written list, from memory, of those objects. these memory/writing exercises are cited in the *revue de littérature générale (rlg)*, n°2, 1996, by pierre alferi and olivier cadot as an exercise which could improve the descriptive competence of poets. Here is an opposite example: after a kurt schwitters exhibition at pompidou center, in paris, gil wolman required that wall labels remain on the walls during his own exhibition. the place of the schwitters paintings remain empty. he called his exhibition "seeing from memory"...

hsb : Many years ago I experienced a rare psychological event called "total global amnesia." I wrote to the well-known psychologist Oliver Sacks and told him about it. I had not experienced it as frightening or worrying, just thought he would be interested. He wrote back that it was

in no way dangerous but that I should see one of his colleagues in San Francisco, which I did.

This doctor, among other things, tested my memory by showing me a random collection of objects he had on his desk top for one minute, and then asking me, five minutes later, to list as many of these objects as I could remember. I remembered everything, as he had expected I would. In fact, he said I had a remarkable memory and had nothing to worry about. If I lost some memory ability I would still have plenty left.

fl : that exercise can be performed when you're by yourself. on the other hand, when you're interacting with someone, the attempt to produce an ever more precise description could be perceived as a kind of garfinkelian breaching experiment: most of the time, we don't need to be so precise, and to repeat over and over "that is?" and "more precisely?" would probably quickly trigger some interactional unease. and you would probably be taken for a neurotic if you lost yourself in the details of an endless description. there are probably literary experiments (the "new novel") in which every plot dissolves into a collection of descriptions or lists created from contiguity. imperceptibly, you pass from one theme to another, exactly as i just did in these last lines.

pushpins

stick two pushpins into the wall, six inches apart. sit down 15 feet away and relax your eyes for a minute or two. look at the pushpin on the right closely, then look at the one on the left, trying just as hard.

circumstances

hsb : I have to confess that I don't understand the point of this exercise. I recognize that it is surely a good thing to do and have done it, but can't say why it's good.

enlarging the visual field

sit and relax your eye muscles in order to enlarge your field of vision as much as possible. so that your eyes jump a little less from one object to another.

to produce new ideas, and poems

“simply dump out disconnected folders, mixing up their contents, and then re- sort them. try to do it in a more or less relaxed way. how often and how extensively you re-arrange the files will of course vary with different problems and with how well they are developing. of course, you will have in mind the several problems on which you are actively working, but you will also try to be passively receptive to unforeseen and unplanned linkages.”

[from c. wright mills, *the sociological imagination*]

circumstances

hsb : This practice of Mills is very well known to sociologists. They all recognize that it is worth doing (though I think very few actually do it, it makes a big mess!) but can't say why beyond making some trite remarks about how it's good to "shake things up."

One good result of this that I can see is that it makes you rethink your categories, makes you aware that you had categories you had never explained to yourself. But I don't cut things out of newspapers and magazines as Mills did, I don't file them away. I think I have other tricks to do the same thing, when something unexpected pops into my mind, I never dismiss it immediately, I always try to think of it as a positive, often as a "message from somewhere."

fl : do you know this poem from tristan tzara?

to make a dadaist poem

take a newspaper.

take a pair of scissors.

choose an article as long as you are planning to make your poem.

cut out the article.

then cut out each of the words that make up this article and put them in a bag.

shake it gently.

then take out the scraps one after the other in the order in which they left the bag.

copy conscientiously.

the poem will be like you.

and here are you a writer, infinitely original and endowed with a sensibility that is charming though beyond the understanding of the vulgar.

hsb : This is a wonderful encounter between Mills and Tzara. I should think about this more. It might be the place to have an extended meditation on the way artists and social scientists converge on these methods of solving certain problems.

fl : yes, in a way, that's what I tried to do with the posters "on displays", to see how "exhibition displays" (we could say, "instructions", or "exercises") could be used for other goals (processing big amount of documents, sorting out material, etc.). that would be nice, indeed, to take this exercise by mills and tzara as a test case, and compare "les tenants et les aboutissants" whether it originates from social sciences or from poetry.

to establish a pedigree

[after hans haacke]

choose a work of art which has had many owners private or public.

investigate how the different owners came in to possession of the work.

for each owner, select a fact which seems to justify possession of the work.

make a chronology which shows the evolution of these facts according to the successive owners.

circumstances

hsb : In the case Hans Haacke used to demonstrate this method, the original artist (or perhaps the first owner) was Jewish. as the work continued to be inherited, sold, bought, etc. the owners' social characteristics, *i.e.*, political position (left, right, center, fascist, etc.) changed and, at one point, the owners were german gentiles who were nazis. And, finally, the work joined the collection of a well-thought-of- museum in a major city. Investigating the personnel of the museum reveals that its director was clearly affiliated with the Nazi party.

news

[by hans haacke
(san francisco museum of art, 2008)]

print all the dispatches from the major news services as they come from the telex machine and let them spill on to the floor the museum goers are standing on.

[optional: on the third day, the sheets of paper can be labeled and dated and placed in plexiglass containers.]

circumstances

hsb : (This piece has been shown in many variations in many places. This is from the announcement of the piece by the dusseldorf kunsthalle.) “For the ‘prospect 69’ exhibition in the kunsthalle, düsseldorf, Hans Haacke drew up a concept he elucidated as follows: ‘a telex machine installed in the Düsseldorf Kunsthalle prints all the news communicated by the german press agency dpa. the printouts will be put on display for further reading one day after being communicated, and on the third day the rolls of paper will be labelled and dated, then stored in plexiglass containers.’”

fl : kenneth goldsmith did something similar, even though with a little different purpose. his project, print the internet, aimed to convert back to paper all the information produced in the digital world of the internet. goldsmith had, indeed, launched a call for his show, through social networks, for people to print as many pages as possible from internet and send them to him through snail-mail. of course, this was impossible. someone calculated that the complete destruction of all the world’s forests would not produce enough paper. impassioned appeals were sent to goldsmith, who remained insensitive. these calls for mercy sent to him were, i imagine, also printed on paper. this device made the mass of data produced visible. but, no more than in the installation of hans haacke displayed under plexiglass it was not a question of proposing an organization or treatment of this mass.

this reminds me of a failed project i tried some years ago with an engineer/musician of ircam, diemo schwartz. the idea was to turn all the news dispatches of agence france presse about all the conflicts of the world into sonic events in real time, thus trying to represent in a soundscape the perpetual flux of events (this was called “the sonification of mapping”). in this process of conversion it was necessary that, at the same time, the result should be musically interesting while preserving the data so that it could be heard and recognized. but what was heard, above all, was the data base which compiled and structured these dispatches. for example, if the first column of the data base was the date of the dispatch’s publication, then the events which followed on the same day all began in the same way. then you heard another sound which represented the place where

the event occurred, then another sound for the kind of event (military encounter, civil protest, etc.) all this was sung by a choir of non-musicians who repeated what they heard through earphones. this singing was itself reconverted into text, in the format of the agency’s dispatches. since what was repeated was slightly different from what had come through the earphones. the dispatches placed the events to other countries, on other dates, with slightly modified stories...

the major premise

when, in a conversation, you hear someone state conclusions in the form of recommendations for action, make clear the (unstated) major premise which underlies the (implied) syllogism.

circumstances (and logics)

hsb : Everett Hughes once pointed out that, in many arguments offered as proof of some statement, the major premises that justify the conclusions offered rely on attitudes that are not openly discriminatory but which are widespread in the general population and in fact are generally taken for granted: “black people should not be permitted to mix socially with white people because they smell bad”, or, “Jews should not be admitted to medical schools in large numbers because they are too aggressive.” “Black people smell bad” is the minor premise of an argument whose unstated major premise is “people who smell bad should not be allowed to mix socially with other people.” “Jews are too aggressive” is the minor premise of an argument whose major premise is “people who are too aggressive should not be admitted to medical school.”

The argument for excluding black people rests on the unstated premise that smelling bad is a sufficient cause for not associating with people who do. and, Hughes liked to point out, America was a country in which soap had been advertised soap by saying that it would get rid of that “little something that even your best friend won’t tell you about.” That is, that you smell bad.

The argument some people used to make for excluding Jews from medical school because they are too aggressive rests on the unstated major premise that people who are aggressive beyond a certain (unstated) degree should not be allowed to study medicine. but, he would say, America is a country in which people are encouraged to be aggressive but only up to a certain (but never openly stated) point. and in which, therefore, people worry about just how aggressive they can be.

That is, the major premise is one the speakers are ambivalent about and therefore try to avoid bringing into the open.

fl : Hughes’ example of the architect and “somebody has to do the dirty job” could be also an example ?

hsb : Yes. Our model for these casual exercises came from Everett

Hughes’ remarkable elaboration of a casual conversation with two Germans after World War II, “Good People and Dirty Work.” in Everett C. Hughes, *The Sociological Eye*, 87–97. New Brunswick: Transaction Inc., 1984. This case furnished the empirical seed for his later investigations, theoretical and empirical, of what he called “dirty work”:

The architect: “I am ashamed for my people whenever I think of it [the Holocaust]. But we didn’t know about it. We only learned about all that later. You just remember the pressure we were under; we had to join the party. We had to keep our mouths shut and do as we were told. It was a terrible pressure. Still, I am ashamed. But you see, we had lost our values and our national honor was hurt. And these Nazis exploited that feeling. And the Jews, they were a problem. They came from the east. You should see them in Poland; the lowest class of people, full of lice, dirty and poor, running about in their Ghettoes in filthy caftans. They came here, and got rich by unbelievable methods after the first war. They occupied all the good places. Why, they were in the proportion of ten to one in medicine and law and government posts!” He then fell silent and forgot what he had been talking about.

I [Hughes] said firmly, “You were talking about loss of national honor and how the Jews had got hold of everything.”

The architect: “Oh yes! That was it! Well, of course that was no way to settle the Jewish problem. But there was a problem and it had to be settled somehow.” (Hughes 1971, 90–1)

Hughes made an analytic gem from this conversation and says that what he made of it was later verified by formal studies and other conversations he had. The important point for him was not the particular details about Germany, as important as they were, but the general phenomenon this case alerted him to, what he later called “the moral division of labor,” a phenomenon he thought common to all societies. Societies, he said, defined some kinds of work as “dirty,” soiling the person who did it, physically (like collecting garbage), morally (like being cruel to innocent people), or both. People whose own work their society defined as clean wanted the dirty work done (like the German architect wanted the “Jewish problem taken care of”), but didn’t want to do it themselves. Other people, who

had less choice of how to make a living, did the dirty work and the people who wanted it done could benefit from its doing while they themselves stayed clean.

turn into a score

choose a scientific controversy.

translate it into a series of instructions which can be performed choreographically, musically, or discursively.

circumstances

fl : i was once invited by the *haus der kulturen der welt (hkw)* in berlin to work with the “anthropocene working group,” a group of researchers which brought together geologists, soil specialists, air and ocean experts, and archeologists, who had to decide, “yes or no,” if we were in a new geological era or not: “the anthropocene,” in which man was identified as the principal cause of geological change. beyond the technical questions of which markers to use to identify the geological traces of this period, this also raises the question of the “collision” of time scales: geological periods are counted in millions of years, while the anthropocene, if its existence were validated, would have at best (or worst) a few hundred years. this difference in scale would prevent any graphic representation of the anthropocene on any scale of geologic time produced by the international commission on stratigraphy. a member of this group, the archeologist matt edgeworth, thought that only *performance* could get us through this trial of temporal collisions. an adept of yogi practices of introspection, he wrote a script made up of a series of movements and postures to give us a way to grasp these variations of scale. i proposed that, rather than reading the script aloud, he perform the score on stage, with the help of volunteers. the performance was gripping, the audience was attentive in the extreme. but after that, the head of the group, jan zalasiewicz broke in to modify the archeologist’s proposition. in his view, edgeworth’s proposal was biased: in his view, it did not sufficiently highlight this aspect or forget this other aspect. other people joined the argument, a scientific controversy unfolded on the stage, in the style of an american telereality show or better, through the protocol of a performance. what surprised me was that no one ever questioned the legitimacy of the format itself

hsb : This is the first case where our interest in changing the way of displaying some information or idea has caused someone to complain! Which I think must be very unusual. I would have guessed that most people are more like the director of the group, thinking and insisting that the language they have always used maximized or minimized what they wanted displayed as they wanted it to be, and should not be changed. This is a fruitful direction to pursue. And, in fact, it makes visible an important feature of all sorts of activities, which is that the language used to discuss

and display the ideas and data are quasi-sacred. And some exercises we have discussed are aimed exactly at disrupting these more or less sacred ways of doing things.

the women in my life

write some feminine first names on blank cards. distribute these cards to an audience. explain that these are the names of women who have been important in your life and say that you will answer any questions the audience has about them.

respond to the first questions with “inoffensive” answers. for example, “sarah jones was the name of my first grade teacher.” “helen brown was the first girl i ever kissed.”

to the third question, answer “she is my aunt, she’s married to my father’s brother, and she has been having an affair with my father for the past two years.” if anyone in the audience asks you if that’s true, refuse to answer.

if the audience accepts this answer, which they almost surely won’t do, answer the next question with something even more bizarre.

circumstances

hsb : This is a great use of that story.. In fact, the original performance of this was, to be truthful, an art work, the work of a student in drama or performance which he intended, precisely, to raise the question of the "importance" of truth in art. What parts of an art work have to be "true" and what sense of the word "true" would be important in an art context? Similarly, what meaning of "true" is important in various other contexts: science, news, etc.

performing sociology

choose an article in a sociological journal.

read the text aloud to an audience, but read it "with emotion," like a bad actor "emoting," intending by doing this to make whatever opinions (political, cultural, etc.) lie behind the seemingly neutral, "scientific" prose appear obvious to the audience.

circumstances

hsb : We could say that every context of communication has a characteristic way of being performed, not because it's the only way or the best way but because it's the way everyone does it so it's the most convenient way, because all the physical props are easily available (as for most music) but more importantly because all the social props are equally easily available. People know the conventions of what you're doing, know how to perform their part so that what they do "fits" with what others are doing either as part of your performance or in some other way. Reading a scientific paper "with emotion" violates everyone's expectations, even though it is sometimes very accurate about the underlying sentiment of the author of the paper. In fact, many (probably most) sociological papers on gender or racial discrimination are written by people who surely abhor these practices, and have done the research they are reporting in order to help get rid of them. But the prose in these papers usually project an emotion-less attitude, since any personal involvement in the subject would cause readers to doubt the "impartiality" of the researcher and thus of the research.

fl : this operation aims to make a buried feature of the text become visible. it's a way, in a certain sense, of translating the text into its own language. if i had to suggest analogous examples,—beyond the now famous and numerous cases of "performed phd dissertations"—i would cite the artist tal haddad, who organizes recitals of classical music, which he has played on pianos whose keyboards have only two or three notes, repeated over eight octaves. when the pianists play mozart (the keys are much larger than normal), beethoven or debussy, the theme disappears totally. nevertheless, the listener immediately recognizes the composer's identity: beethoven's attacks or mozart's trills are immediately recognizable. this means one thing: the identity of a piece is not situated only in its melody, rhythmic structure, the type of playing the score makes the player use, all of which are part of the musical identity of the piece. this technique of translation in order to bring the structural identity of an object to the foreground can be found in techniques of edition. for instance, massin creates a specific lay-out for the text of ionesco's "the bald soprano." in an even more literal way, when stéphane bérard translated into french the

french of charles de gaulle's *memoires*, his translation (which was called "modernizing") made apparent all the (implicit) heaviness of meaning, all the prejudices of the categories in use when de gaulle wrote the book, all this through the reformulations we might call "foregrounding."

hsb : Voilà bien une chose merveilleuse.

stepping back!

circumstances

hsb : This exercise can be thought of as “stepping back.” Or it can be generalized as “When you identify a standard tactic, systematically do its opposite.” It can be used whenever you feel that the tricks you know how to use are interfering with a more complete understanding of what you’re observing (either as an artist or a social scientific observer).

Dianne Hagaman worked for years as a photojournalist for daily news papers in large and small cities. She quickly learned some standard ways of simplifying shooting common assignments—“routine” events the paper needed an illustration—funerals or the handing over of a check from a donor to the representative of some charity. And some more dramatic events, like fires.

When she began a “personal project,” one she did on her own time rather than for the paper—a long term investigation of the connections between such common local problems as public drunkenness and reputable social organizations and institutions—it involved more complicated ideas and analyses of the social relations involved than a standard newspaper story. And the tricks she had learned doing them no longer produced the results she wanted.

One of the most important and well-known tricks she had learned was the one recommended by the famous war photographer Robert Capa, whose dramatic pictures made in the midst of battles, showing (among other things) soldiers being wounded. Capa famously said, “If you don’t like your pictures, get closer.” And generations of newspaper photographers had absorbed and practiced that trick until their bodies did it automatically, knowing that it would produce dramatic pictures their editors would love. It was a common professional reflex.

But over time Hagaman learned more about the complex relations between alcoholics (many of them Native American), the rehabilitative facilities for them, and the religious personnel (priests and ministers) who managed them. And she came to understand that there was no way of communicating that complexity in a single dramatic close-up, the kind

that “getting closer” produced.

And so she adopted the opposite tactic, which this exercise teaches, systematically stepping back to get more of the surrounding places, people and events into the image. It became her standard tactic.

how to write a book

1. assemble all your notes linked to the subject of your book project, however large, and without defining your subject too strictly (for fear of elements that might prove useful later).
2. arrange all your material in a file.
3. divide everything into sub-groups and put them in folders.
4. write a short summary of the contents of the themes you've assembled.
5. if step 4 shows that certain materials are in the wrong folder, move them to a more appropriate one or make a new folder.
6. read the documents in the first folder and write a summary. then do the same with the other folders.
7. develop the summaries in such a way that each folder tells a complete story.
8. assemble the summaries into one document.
9. develop the summaries to the point that you have a complete exposition.
10. every time a gap between two elements, fill it.
11. find a connecting line of thought between all these smaller documents. then rewrite everything in a way that shows the link that connects all the chief ideas of each chapter.
12. clean up the entire manuscript and send it to a publisher.

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